"No place is home – it is as it should be": Exile in the Writing of Maeve Brennan

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In the essay "A Daydream" (1976), set during a stifling hot summer day in New York City, Maeve Brennan describes surfacing from a dream of East Hampton—only to find herself in one of the urban rooms she then called home. She writes: "So much for my daydream of sand and sea and roses. The daydream was, after all, only a mild attack of homesickness. The reason it was a mild attack instead of a fierce one is that there are a number of places I am homesick for. East Hampton is only one of them" (265). She evokes a similar scene in "Faraway Places Near Here," a republished sketch in *The Long-Winded Lady: Notes from The New Yorker*: "When the summer weather in New York begins to reach its height, I am subject to powerful gusts of memory from other summers and other rooms in the different places in the city where I used to live" (112). In this instance, the diagnosis of "homesickness" is inflected with particular meaning for the Irish writer far from home.

This essay explores the importance of Brennan's engagement with the theme of exile in her short stories and "Long-Winded Lady" essays for *The New Yorker*. Exile carries significant ballast in writing by and about the Irish and particularly preoccupies the country's writers; Brennan's work evidences a self-reflexive engagement with such a cultural inheritance—as well as signs of an interest in fashioning it anew. The work speaks in revealing ways to her own distinctive position as both a woman writer and as a self-consciously transatlantic one, an author for whom "gusts of memory" imaginatively tether her work as much to New York as to Dublin. The essay turns to her "Long-Winded Lady" sketches, as offering the most revealing exploration of these questions, but will first provide an overview of Brennan's wider engagement with exile.

Brennan's focus on exile finds two different modes of expression. On the one hand, the writing displays a politically aware concern with the history of the Irish migrant—

particularly in her short stories about Irish domestic servants in America that were published together in *The Rose Garden* and in her returnee narrative *The Visitor*. Although maintaining a clear sympathy for the suffering endured by Irish women migrants at various periods in history, Brennan also demonstrates a nuanced interest in the productive capabilities of rootlessness and separation from home, thus renegotiating the terms of the more established and publicly visible image of the modern artist, and particularly the Irish artist, as an exile. Andrew Gurr, for example, insists "Deracination, exile and alienation in varying forms are the conditions of existence for the modern writer the world over. The basic response to such conditions is a search for identity, the quest for a home, through self-discovery or self-realisation" (14); not surprisingly, Gurr make a special case study of Joyce as the archetypal example of such "creative exile" (7). In the Irish context, a preoccupation with exile is especially pervasive: Seamus Deane describes it as a "fetish" (58) of the Irish literary tradition, whereas R.F. Foster characterises it as a "reflex action" (288).

The experience of Irish immigration to America is marked not just by the large numbers that left Ireland for America, particularly in the nineteenth century, but also by the proportion of migrants who made the active choice to remain in their new host country. Examining the case of the Irish in the United States, R. F. Foster challenges the high profile image of the Irish migrant as a beleaguered exile: "It is tempting to ask – certainly in terms of Irish American experience – a more robust question: if the emigrant Irish were so trapped in a state of permanent yearning nostalgia, why did they do so well? Is there a case for seeing the emigrant laments as a kind of therapy, and the extremely low numbers of those who returned as representing a deliberate option, not evidence of imprisonment abroad?" (288). Kerby Miller additionally notes that

> there seems no reason inherent in either the actual circumstances of most emigrants' departures or the material conditions of Irish-American life which automatically

> translated a homesickness perhaps common to all emigrants into a morbid perception of themselves as involuntary exiles, passive victims of English oppression. (7)

In his account of new developments in the analysis of the history of Irish migration, Kevin Kenny intervenes helpfully in on-going conversations about Irish "exile" by emphasizing the need to incorporate questions of gender and class (3).

As an Irish woman writer in mid-twentieth-century New York, Brennan speaks to such complexities in especially revealing ways; her careful reconstruction of the cityscape of New York and her emergence as a New York writer, a reputation secured by a career-long association with *The New Yorker* magazine, become the means by which she evades the traditional focus on the Irish burden of exile. Her Joycean commitment to writing the city also establishes a self-protective distance between the Irish woman writer and the national "fetish" of exile. The oeuvre includes both stories of Dublin and New York, but whereas her stories collected in *The Springs of Affection* are interested largely in domestic interiors and the intimacies of family life in a suburban Dublin household, an equally significant strand of the writing is deeply concerned with mapping the city of New York. Here, New York comes to rival Dublin as the crucible of Brennan's imagination.

In the short story "The Joker" (1952) Brennan critiques the myth of the male Irish artist as exile; in the story an Irish poet exploits the Joycean model of exile, transforming it into a self-serving truism to compensate for his own failure as a writer. And as a transatlantic author, one for whom New York matters as much as Dublin, Brennan refuses to be bound to any potentially fetishist totalizing narrative of home, a refusal that finds vivid expression in a series of letters to her friend and confidante, Howard Moss, poetry editor at *The New Yorker*. Revealing a close friendship (they sometimes address each other as Maeve and Howard, at other times as Maybelle/Maybelline and Howie), these letters are full of confidences, news of mutual acquaintances in *The New Yorker* circle, reports of encounters at the Algonquin, and

thoughts about their creative processes. In one undated letter that given its proximity to other correspondence was probably sent from Ireland in the early 1970s, Brennan writes

> It is hot here – an Irish Indian summer. My electric kettle will boil in a minute, I am going to have tea. I wish terribly that you were here. I would give you tea & a biscuit, or tea & a sausage, or tea & something. Dublin is a spectacle to me now, not home, not anything. No place is home – it is as it should be, & I am getting – it is really what I want – perspective. More interesting news later, Love Maeve
>
> (Item 8, Brennan Folder, Howard Moss Coll.)

The phrase "No place is home – it is as it should be" suggests an acceptance and even an embracing of her nomadic state; the *New Yorker* essays evince a similar relationship with the notion of rootlessness, a condition that appears to have serious and positive value for her. As will be evident in the following sections, Brennan accepts the role of "traveler in residence" (*The Long-Winded Lady* 2) as an inevitability of New York living, but also embraces that identity as a means of escaping the more familiar archetype of the Irish writer in exile, mesmerized and burdened by the idea of Ireland as home. Angela Bourke's *Maeve Brennan: Homesick at The New Yorker* has encouraged the recovery of Brennan's work and an interest in details of her life in mid-century New York; the sections of the biography devoted to the writer's adult life keenly explore how Brennan positions herself in relation to the idea of home. Bourke establishes key critical paradigms for thinking about Brennan's writing, on more than one occasion returning to the revealing tension in the writer's relationship with her homeland. At one point, Bourke notes that for Brennan, "Home is a refuge, hastily improvised, a place where one can settle down unchallenged, yet be free to leave at will" (217). With this version of "home" in mind, I am especially interested in examining Brennan's writing in relation to a recurring interest in nomadism in her work—and exploring how her preoccupation with rootlessness is reflected in a concern with

capturing urban life and with tracing the ever changing cartography of New York. I suggest, moreover, that the promise of nomadism offers her a means of evading the male-dominated trope of exile in the Irish context. Rootlessness in Brennan's work functions at the level of the immediate and personal as well as the abstract and national; her full imaginative immersion in the cityscape of New York becomes a means of resisting the potentially restrictive influence of Ireland as homeland.

Mapping the Metropolis in *The Long-Winded Lady*

For Brennan, as for so many writers after Joyce, the challenge of writing the city is both overshadowed and nourished by her renowned predecessor's spectacular account of life in Dublin—the "Heart of the Hibernian Metropolis", as it appears in *Ulysses* (112). Brennan takes up this challenge, but does so by a commitment to mapping the city of New York, thereby keeping Joyce's modernist achievement and, by association, the male-centred tradition of Irish exile, at arm's length. Moreover the pseudonym of "The Long-Winded Lady," under which Brennan wrote her "Talk of the Town" essays for *The New Yorker*—most appearing in the 1950s and 1960s—is deliberately misleading. Far from long-winded, the essays deliver precisely drawn scenes of New York as she goes about her business, rarely straying from midtown and the streets around Times Square or from Greenwich Village, another favourite haunt. To some extent, the intimate mapping of the city that is to be found in these essays is a direct consequence of their being commissioned as "Talk of the Town" sketches that issued a special appeal to the city's readers by offering a sharing of common experience. In his account of the magazine and its culture, Ben Yagoda characterizes editor Harold Ross's vision of *The New Yorker* as "somehow transcending the individuals who contributed to it" (43). Yagoda sees the "Talk of the Town" essay as one of the magazine's features that reveal a commitment to a collective New York identity:

> The institutional voice of Notes and Comment and The Talk of the Town expressed itself in the first-person plural: as *we*. The logic to this convention lay in the conceit that the section was written by "The New Yorkers," who "signed it" at the end. That tag line was dropped in 1934, but *we* stayed around until 1992, when Tina Brown arrived as editor. (italics in original, 43)

Yagoda describes how "The Talk of the Town evolved over the years from a collection of arch paragraphs to a series of short journalistic articles that consisted of, took pleasure in, and frequently wrought humour presenting many facts about a person, place, thing, or phenomenon" (50)—an account that captures the special role of this feature in the magazine's history and speaks to to the concerns and commitments of Brennan's Long-Winded Lady.

The following items appear in a folder of ideas compiled by the *New Yorker*'s editor Harold Ross for possible "Talk of the Town" features pitched between 1943 and 1951— the years preceding and encompassing the period of Brennan's arrival at the magazine in the late 1940s: a piece on the listing of the addresses of hotels with duplicate names in the New York City telephone directory; an inquiry about the longest subway ride possible to take in the city; and an article about what happens to items returned to the Lost and Found office at Radio City Music Hall ("Talk of the Town" Outlines, Ideas and Assignments 1943-1951, Box 969, *The New Yorker* Records). Brennan's essays are similarly concerned with capturing New York through careful attention to precise and quirky detail. Despite the teasing appropriation of "long-windedness," implied by her pseudonym, Brennan's own account of her work is more revealing: "Now when I read through this book I seem to be looking at snapshots. It is as though the long-winded lady were showing snapshots taken during a long, slow journey through the most cumbersome, most reckless, most ambitious, most confused, most comical, the saddest and coldest and most human of cities" (*The Long-Winded Lady* 1). We see a clear affinity here between Brennan's description of the Long-Winded Lady's project and Phillip

Lopate's account of the central appeal of New York as a literary landscape. Lopate emphasizes "Its man-made quality: the gigantic built environment and the relative unimportance of nature"; "Its offer of anonymity to the many"; "Its fabled loneliness and alienation" (xviii-xix). He also stresses the city's natural affinity with "the impressionistic urban sketch" often written by that recognizable New York native with a special vocation: "The Argus-eyed commentator satisfied readers' voyeuristic desires to peek around every neglected corner of their city, while taking advantage of the opportunity to sneak in some fairly lyrical passages" (xix). The "anonymity" Lopate implies here is of special value to Brennan's Long-Winded Lady, who relies upon her ability to move about unobserved in her project of imaginatively constructing the city.

Significantly, "They Were Both about Forty," the first piece in Brennan's collected essays, reveals a recurring dynamic in her figuring of character and place. The title of the essay conflates the guessed-at age of the characters and the fact that their walk is taking them in the direction of Fortieth Street. Such a mirroring of character and place is all the more appropriate since the Long-Winded Lady frequently attributes personality to streets, buildings, and local amenities. As she offers a running real-time commentary, the reader is ferried around the city with her and even given a full set of directions. At one point in "The Name of Minnie Smith," she explains: "I rode down to the street floor in Schrafft's majestic elevator, and I walked out onto Fifth Avenue and up Fifth to Forty-ninth and along Forty-ninth to the hotel where I live, which is very close to Seventh Avenue" (205). The specific bit of geographical information—that the hotel is very close to Seventh Avenue—appears to create an intimacy, even suggesting that the reader, too, is a "traveler in residence." Other useful hints for the visitor appear, such as a note that justifies the Long-Winded Lady's choice of hotel for coffee in "The Solitude of Their Expression": "The reason I had to make that choice between the Algonquin and the Biltmore is that Schrafft's is closed on Sundays"

(9). Some of these details are inevitably borrowed from Brennan's own day-to-day occupation of New York.

A 1974 interview with *Time* magazine reveals Brennan similarly preoccupied with such minutiae:

> She lives alone in a midtown hotel on West 44th Street – "just opposite the Algonquin" and only a few steps away from *The New Yorker* – and she has a canny survivor's eye for a bargain. "The coffee at Bickford's is only 16c," she will say, "but they *rob* you at Childs." She broods on the differences between Woolworth's and Lamston's. (italics in original, 71)

In the *New Yorker* sketches, the same care is evident when she offers a full directory of restaurants, some of which were indeed popular venues at the moment in which Brennan was writing. Street names are especially important, as are those of hotels and restaurants—including the Biltmore, the Grosvenor Hotel, the Hotel Earle, the café Le Steak de Paris, the Forty-ninth Street Schrafft's and the Adano restaurant. Le Steak de Paris, one of the Long-Winded Lady's favourite eating places, is given a good deal of air time. Significantly, it is described modestly in the 1964 edition of *Hart's Guide to New York City* as a café with a capacity for no more than 60 that "offers good cooking at a very moderate price" (1061)—whereas the Algonquin Hotel, despite being the home of New York literary celebrity, appears regularly as a landmark in Brennan's essays, but is afforded no special status.

Another of Brennan's primary concerns, one that is further attuned to Joyce's famous project of writing the city, albeit in a deliberately different context, focuses on capturing and conveying the sensory and emotional character of places and streets— a process of personification that is again presented as a kind of public service for citizens of and visitors to New York. For example, in her essay "Sixth Avenue Shows Its True Self," her judgement is particularly harsh:

> …anyone walking alone through that ugliness can see without any trouble that Sixth is not a human thoroughfare at all but only a propped-up imitation of a thoroughfare, and that its purpose is not to provide safe or pleasant or beautiful passage for the people of the city but to propitiate, even if it is only for a little while, whatever the force is that feeds on the expectation of chaos. (123-4)

In "The New Girls on West Forty-ninth Street," West Forty-ninth Street is cast in similarly morose terms, even though it is one of the routes most often frequented by the Long-Winded Lady and the home of Le Steak de Paris: "With all the hesitation, and all the slowness, there was no revelry. There never is, on West Forty-ninth Street. It is a tentative, transient, noisy street, very ill at ease and, to a stranger's eye, shifty, as though gaiety were unknown or strictly forbidden" (161). Interiors, as well as the exterior streetscapes, are credited with similarly distinctive personalities, and the Irish novelist and essayist Elizabeth Bowen is given a walk-on part in one of the Long-Winded Lady's musings. In "The View Chez Paul", the Long-Winded Lady reminds us that: "Elizabeth Bowen once described a room that was crowded although there were no people in it as looking as if somebody were holding a party for furniture" (167). Brennan's essays are full of such crowded and transient domestic mises-en-scène, as in "Howard's Apartment," when she describes a visit to Howard Moss's home:

> I am back in the Village again, spending a few days in the apartment of a friend who is in London. The apartment is small, orderly, and individual – a one-person place that has remained aloof (friendly but aloof) since I walked in here with my suitcase on Thursday. 'We have no secrets,' the two little rooms seem to say, 'but we are *his.*'" (italics in original, 206)

In the same piece Brennan notes her uneasy sense at occupying Moss's private space: "The room is waiting for something to happen" (211)—appropriately enough enough since she came to most fully articulate her own sense that "no place is home" in a letter to Moss.

Brennan's writing, much like Joyce's, becomes far more than an exercise in literary mapping and painting interiors; she expresses a particular concern for lost, poor, or abandoned souls, and for outsiders, new to the city and finding their way—or for what Frank O'Connor, in his study of short fiction, describes as the "submerged population group" of society (18). In this focus we see a political charge to Brennan's cartography, for her essays are particularly concerned with the half-lives of the marginalised and invisible citizens. She characterizes the New Yorker as like "the tenacious ailanthus, growing up, well nourished, in its scrap of earth (139), offering an array of unfolding sketches of an enduring if, at times, indecorous population, whose tenacity is often tested on the city's streets: a woman drops dead in the street in the West Village; a misunderstanding occurs between the Long-Winded Lady and a man on the subway; lovers quarrel in Washington Square; a child cries all the way home; the window of the Forty-ninth Street Schrafft's is smashed; more dramatically, a one-legged man howls in the street in front of a laughing crowd, who appear to the Long-Winded Lady "more grotesque than he" (89). These are accompanied by quieter, but nevertheless significant moments, such as a lone trombonist playing on a roof top over Broadway, a woman who slowly drops pages onto the street from a hotel window in midtown.

In her mapping of the city, Brennan carefully removes herself from any familiar perception of the Irish exile languishing in what Foster describes as "imprisonment abroad" (288). Although the short stories collected in *The Springs of Affection* look back across the Atlantic and hold up a mirror to the vicissitudes of Dublin family life, Brennan's essays claim New York as the city that looms largest in her literary imagination. The painstaking attention to urban detail in the Long-Winded Lady's journey through the streets of the city represents a response and challenge to the encyclopaedic plotting of the city of Dublin in Joyce's writing.

Rootlessness and the Last Days of New York City

Brennan's relationship with New York becomes most vital in her response to attacks on the city's streetscape; thus in "They Were Both about Forty," the skyscraper is introduced as a kind of looming architectural enemy:

> She was showing him her neighbourhood – Sixth Avenue in the Forties, where furnished rooms and cheap hotels are still to be found, in spite of the enormous amount of demolition that has taken place around there this year to make way for the new skyscrapers. […] The night view up Sixth Avenue is eerie now that the blocks on the west side of the avenue are half broken down and half gone. It is as though the area had been attacked and then left in pieces… (4-6)

In the same spirit, she observes houses on Forty-eighth Street that break up the run of high-rise buildings as having the character of a "small, stubborn survivor" (11). In "I Wish for a Little Street Music," the Astor Hotel is mourned for having been "executed" (67) and by 1967, just three years after its modest appearance in *Hart's Guide to New York City*, she grieves at hearing of the demolition of one of her favourite New York places, Le Steak de Paris:

> I heard bad news tonight at Le Steak de Paris, where I had dinner. "The building is coming down" – and the little restaurant is to be swept away, just like that, after more than twenty-six years of hardy life. Those words "The building is coming down" occur so often in New York conversation, and they have such finality, and they are so unanswerable, that once they have been said there is nothing more to say. There is no appealing the decisions of the ogre called Office Space that stalks the city and will not be appeased. (157-8)

"Office Space," which here and elsewhere appears in sinister capitals, is Brennan's natural urban enemy. The threatened demolition of Forty-eighth Street, a thoroughfare close

to the Long-Winded Lady's heart, is a cause for special concern: "But next New Year's Eve there won't be a Forty-eighth Street. A number of houses are already down, and on weekdays the street is filled with that choking white wreckers' dust. Forty-eighth Street is going, going. Office Space must be served, but somebody should write a Lament for Forty-eighth Street – a cheerful lament because Forty-eight has always been a cheerful street" (138). And indeed, collectively, the essays mourn the lost streetscapes most dear to the Long-Winded Lady. In "West Eighth Street Has Changed and Changed and Changed Again," which first appeared in *The New Yorker* in 1966, we learn how "the Whitney huddled more and more into herself, like a poor old woman pulling her shawl around her shoulders in wintertime. 'I may not be what I used to be,' the Whitney seemed to be saying, 'but I don't want to go just yet'" (193).

The essays written in the 1950s and early to mid 1960s are most anxious about the threatened destruction of New York, appearing, significantly, immediately prior to and after the publication of Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* in 1961. Jacobs begins her manifesto on urban planning with an indictment of contemporary planning policy:

> Look what we have built with the first several billions:
>
> Low-income projects that become worse centers of delinquency, vandalism and general social hopelessness than the slums they were supposed to replace. […]
>
> Cultural centers that are unable to support a good bookstore. […] Commercial centers that are lackluster imitations of standardized suburban chain-store shopping.
>
> Promenades that go from no place to nowhere and have no promenaders.
>
> Expressways that eviscerate great cities. This is not the rebuilding of cities. This is the sacking of cities. (4)

Jacobs became a key figure in the fight against plans for the building of a Lower Manhattan Expressway, a project that would have involved, among other invasions, building through Washington Square Park in the early 1960s. Part of the Long-Winded Lady's brief

involves protest against such a "sacking" of New York. In a feature suggestively entitled "The Last Days of New York City," Brennan writes: "I heard lately – it is only a rumor, I suppose – that there is talk of cutting an underpass through Washington Square. I suppose that means that part of the square, anyway, will be dug up. It will hardly look the same after that" (216).

The Long-Winded Lady's battle for the preservation of small streets of her city against the threat of "Office Space" is best comprehended within a history of political protest. Throughout her chronicling of New York she emphasizes the city as constructed out of portable, temporary parts—as though New York is a kind of toy town, made up of precarious, moveable structures. An uncanny dimension is added to the same vision in "The Farmhouse That Moved Down Town," where the movement of a two-hundred-year-old building takes the reader on a walking tour as the house is suspended in the air and travels slowly along the Village streets.

At such moments New York seems more like a shantytown than an urban metropolis. But Brennan's sense of its apparent collapsibility in no way diminishes the city, becoming rather a means of foregrounding its vulnerability and of sympathizing with the precarious lives of its citizens. The Long-Winded Lady's methods of tracking the changing face of her urban landscape resembles Jacobs's emphasis on attending to and carefully observing the ordinary and quotidian life of the city— in order to understand how such landscapes function. In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities,* Jacobs writes,

> So in this book we shall start, if only in a small way, adventuring into the real world, ourselves. The way to get at what goes on in the seemingly mysterious and perverse behaviour of cities is, I think, to look closely, and with as little previous expectation as is possible, at the most ordinary scenes and events, and attempt to see what they mean and whether any threads of principle emerge among them. (13)

Placing Brennan's writing in conversation with that of Jane Jacobs and with debates about urban renewal and the use of urban spaces in the 1950s, Ann Peters notes the role of women activists in the period. This attention to an emerging female political voice in the mid-twentieth century gives Brennan's writing about urban destruction and the threat of homelessness added significance. Peters observes how

> Brennan's essays, criticized as demure and two-dimensional, were in fact addressing some of the most significant issues affecting urban life at mid-century: the rupture of neighborhoods in the era of Moses and Jacobs, the plight of New Yorkers losing their homes to the bulldozers, and the demise of the residential hotel. (69-70)

Brennan's fearful sense of the collapsibility of the city becomes especially acute in a description of how she loses her apartment in "The Last Days of New York City": "I had white walls in the little Ninth Street apartment that was torn out from under me last year by the wreckers" (218). She wonders what her flat might look like turned inside out by demolition and worries whether it would make a "creditable corpse" (219). Of special and related concern is the erasure of the dwellings and edifices that house the lives of ordinary New Yorkers. Included are extended scenes in which she describes the city as disappearing in front of her while she watches helplessly:

> I work in a building in midtown. My office is twenty stories up in the air, and from this eminence yesterday morning I watched the demolition of a red brick building far below. I must have stared down at the roof of that building a thousand times, but now that it was gone, I found I really could not recall what it looked like. In the afternoon, when I went to lunch, I found a whole block of Sixth Avenue gone, and I hadn't any recollection at all of those vanished houses, except that I thought they might have been a reddish colour. Or maybe they were gray. It is very disconcerting to have a gap suddenly appear in a spot where you can't remember ever having seen a wall. (217-8)

The Long-Winded Lady is suspicious not only of "Office Space," but also of monuments of all kinds—those notable landmarks that dwarf the quotidian places and the people who live and work in the city. If the casting of New York as a kind of moveable toy town suggests both authorial ownership and authorial responsibility, then Brennan's street directory takes on a particular significance as it documents unwelcome changes to the streetscape – the demolition of buildings to make room for new office building or, worse still, for monuments: "But more and more the architecture of this city has nothing to do with our daily lives" (143). In "The Ailanthus, Our Back-Yard Tree" she lingers over a description of the streets razed to make way for Rockefeller Center, expressing a sense of mourning, an urgent need to memorialize the lost streets before they are forgotten, and a striking hostility to what appears as the invasion of colossal and unwelcome monuments: "Architecturally, very little that was notable has been lost in the destruction of the Broadway area. What has been lost is another strip of the common ground we share with each other and with our city – the common ground that is all that separates us from the Machine" (145-6). In a judgement that is in keeping with her recurring suspicions about the city's architectural monuments, one of midtown's most celebrated icons, then, becomes a kind of ozymandian folly. In "The Solitude of Their Expression" the Empire State Building is also described in the harshest of terms: "To the east I can see the Empire State Building for most of its ugly length. The Empire State is at least fifteen long blocks from here. It seems to be very close, but then, no matter where you stand, the Empire State always seems to have that effect of trying to be on nudging terms with every other building in the city" (12). In "A Visitor from California", a woman is irritated by a newcomer's questions about the Flatiron building. At his request, she identifies it dismissively. The exchange can be read as another moment in which a New York monument is cut down to size: "'A flat *iron*,' she said. Then she said 'Flat-i-r-o-n…' 'It's very odd' he said politely" (italics in original, 253).

In Brennan's New York, as in Joyce's Dublin, the small streets matter as much— if not more—than the great. Just as 7 Eccles Street becomes the most important location in Dublin for Joyce, the places that Brennan made home on uncelebrated midtown streets and in Greenwich Village fuel her imagination— rather than the iconic monuments that loom large in the city's skyline. Brennan's defence of New York is both a reaction to the threat faced by the city from "Office Space" and other hostile urban forces, but also a reminder of how essential New York becomes in flying by the nets of exile; this American metropolis provides her with creative escape, distancing her work from a central Irish theme. Rootlessness is both an unavoidable fact of life for the Long-Winded Lady as she risks being moved from place to place by the "the ogre called Office Space" (158), but also a condition that accrues creative value—enabling her to avoid being implicated in what Deane diagnoses as a "fetish" of Irish literary culture.

Although New York is the urban landscape that dominates in Brennan's essays, she takes occasional oblique glances at the Dublin she left behind through details and allusions that alone can seem incidental, but in accumulation create a clear line to home. In "From the Hotel Earle" we see the Long-Winded Lady buying a copy of Benedict Kiely's *Poor Scholar* (39)— a moment related to a previously mentioned one when she very self-consciously references Elizabeth Bowen, another author from home (167). However, one of the most direct links back to her Dublin origins conjures up unease. In a feature for *The New Yorker* entitled "Lessons and Lessons and Then More Lessons," she recalls her convent school education and instinctively hides a martini glass when a group of nuns enter the restaurant where she sits—an unconscious impulse that foregrounds the relative sophistication of her present life. But the moment that most clearly reveals the relationship of Brennan's New York to the Dublin of her past appears in a sketch called "A Blessing" published in 1981:

> Yesterday afternoon, as I walked along Forty-second Street directly across from Bryant Park, I saw a three-cornered shadow on the pavement in the angle where two walls meet. I didn't step on the shadow, but I stood a minute in the thin winter sunlight and looked at it. I recognized it at once. It was exactly the same shadow that used to fall on the cement part of our garden in Dublin, more than fifty-five years ago. (267)

This Proustian moment of recollection — taking her back not only to Forty-second Street and Bryant Park, the home of the New York Public Library where Brennan worked in her early years in the city, but also to her Dublin childhood—represents the imaginative coalescence of her two worlds; such a conjoining of past and present lives appears especially significant for a transatlantic writer for whom "no place is home." In the commitment to the local and distinctive sense of place so crucial to her writing about New York, she embraces a complex model of the writer as exile that avoids being limited by any one identity – Irish or Irish American, Dubliner or New Yorker. As a woman writer who came of age in the shadow of the formidable influences and controversies surrounding place associated with W.B. Yeats, Patrick Kavanagh, Samuel Beckett, and James Joyce, she asserts a positive value in the choice of not belonging. As she looks with a careful observing eye at a New York that transforms itself before her, Brennan separates herself from the burden of tradition and secures her position as the outsider looking in. Whereas the theme of the Irish woman migrant as the beleaguered outsider remains powerfully resonant in the stories about domestic servants, her Long-Winded Lady essays suggest her own status of outsider and offer a source of new creative possibilities for the Irish woman writer. Even as Brennan remains sensitive to the inheritances of her generation, particularly in relation to writing the city, she asserts herself firmly as a traveller in residence, homesick for many places, and resisting any ready categorization or totalizing narrative of the Irish or Irish-American writer.

In doing so, she reshapes the theme of the Irish writer in exile— as her own unique aesthetic demands.

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