

## General Introduction. Ireland: Spectres and Chimeras

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## General Introduction

# Ireland: Spectres and Chimeras



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**T**HIS volume aims at interrogating the persistence of ghosts, spirits, phantoms, spectres and chimeras in Irish culture, history, politics, literature and arts, down the centuries, most of which having to do with the haunting of the present by the past, which cannot be separated from the existence all along of aspirations, dreams, hopes and utopias meant to imagine and build a better future.

Ireland, with its rich mythology and folklore, has obviously a long tradition of believing in supernatural phenomena such as goblins, fairies, leprechauns, banshees, etc. One of Ireland's most famous poet and intellectual, William B. Yeats, was himself an adept of the occult and spiritualism. Reincarnation, communication with the dead, mediums, supernatural systems and Oriental mysticism fascinated Yeats through his life. In 1885, he became a founding member of the Dublin Lodge of the Hermetic Society and later joined the Theosophical Society, then the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in London, a secret society that practised ritual magic.

Apart from being the cradle of European gothic literature with such authors as Regina Maria Roche (1764-1845), Charles Maturin (1780-1824) or Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu (1814-1873) and Bram Stoker (1847-1912), who were as productive and popular, if not more, than their English counterparts, Ireland has always shown a remarkable devotion to the dead (and the Undead!), what with the tradition of the wake and keening, the promotion of martyrdom to the rank of powerful instrument of political propaganda, and the multiplication of funerals and commemorations meant to impress people's imagination and make a political statement. A famous example that comes to mind is Pádraig Pearse's oration at the funeral of Fenian and prominent Irish Republican Brotherhood member Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, in August 1915, in which he vowed to secure Ireland's freedom, in the name of the dead: "They think that they have foreseen everything,

think that they have provided against everything; but the fools, the fools, the fools! — they have left us our Fenian dead, and while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace”.

The importance granted to funeral rites in Ireland, as exemplified by the typical *caoine* or keening, as well as Irish people’s superstitious belief in fairy mounds, were mocked by Maria Edgeworth’s fictional English Editor in one of the entries of the glossary following her “Hibernian Tale” *Castle Rackrent* (1800):

The country people in Ireland had great admiration mixed with reverence, if not dread, of fairies. They believed that beneath these fairy-mounds were spacious subterraneous palaces, inhabited by the *good people*, who must not on any account be disturbed.<sup>1</sup>

One of the most beautiful pieces of prose fiction produced by an Irish writer is simply called “The Dead”. The last story in James Joyce’s collection *Dubliners* (1915) revolves around the unexpected return of the ghost of Michael Furey to disrupt the bourgeois, patriarchal order so far enjoyed by the protagonist Gabriel Conroy. In *Ulysses* (1922), Joyce also had his protagonist Leopold Bloom pay a visit to the kingdom of the dead in the “Hades” episode of the novel, in which Leopold attends the funeral of Paddy Dignam and ruminates on the afterlife, envisioning the dead speaking through a gramophone:

Besides how could you remember everybody? Eyes, walk, voice. Well, the voice, yes: gramophone. Have a gramophone in every grave or keep it in the house. After dinner on a Sunday. Put on poor old great-grandfather Kraahraark! Hellohellohello amawfullyglad kraark awfullygladaseeragain hellohello amarawf kophsth. Remind you of the voice like the photograph reminds you of the face. Otherwise you couldn’t remember the face after fifteen years, say.<sup>2</sup>

Joyce was also keenly aware of Irish people’s propensity to admire their heroes once they were dead— Charles S.Parnell, whom Simon Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* calls “my dead king”<sup>3</sup>— being a case in point; but we could also mention the Republican worshipping of Theobald Wolfe Tone or of Robert Emmett, and of course of the leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising. All of these men planned rebellions which ended up in failure, however their capacity to dream and to follow chimeras seems to have aroused more admiration in the imagination of Irish people

1. Maria Edgeworth, “Glossary”, *Castle Rackrent* (1800), London, Penguin Classics, 1992, p. 130.
2. James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922), London, Penguin Modern Classics, 1984, p. 115.
3. James Joyce, *A Portrait of the artist as a Young man* (1916), London, Penguin, 1976, p. 40.

than if they had actually succeeded, as exemplified by Yeats's famous verse in his poem "Easter 1916", written as an elegy to the heroes of the Dublin insurrection:

"We know their dream; enough  
To know they dreamed and are dead;"

But spectres and chimeras do not only belong to the past and to Irish political or literary history: ghosts and illusionary dreams continue to loom large in today's Ireland. The Celtic Tiger era for instance may well appear, with the necessary hindsight, as a mere chimera, defined as one of those "illusions or fabrications of the mind" according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Indeed the 2008 "bust" exposed in the harshest way possible what lay behind the façade of the economic boom: political corruption and irresponsibility, bankers who thought they could all become the Irish counterparts of Morgan Stanley or Lehman Brothers, speculators who were ready to transform the remotest parts of the countryside into holiday resorts, golf links, exclusive condominiums, gated communities, which for most of them ended up as "ghost estates". What's more, the intervention of the so-called "Troika" – the group formed by the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund – in November 2010, which followed the near-defaulting of the Irish state after the bank system collapsed, and more or less amounted to a surrendering of sovereignty, was a dire setback for a nation which for centuries had fought for its independence, and an unwelcome return to the dreaded past. No wonder that some novelists, such as Claire Kilroy in her satirical novel *The Devil I know* (2012), should resort to mock-gothic tropes to describe the atmosphere of corruption, decay and ruin which followed the collapse of the Irish economy, mostly entailed by the bursting of a property bubble, which gave rise to the phenomenon of the "ghost-estates" now scattered all over the country. The Irish landscape, which already bore the scars of a painful past through the remnants of the "famine walls" or of deserted emigrants' cottages, is now also scattered with those empty housing developments which were never inhabited.

As these examples show it, the ghosts of the past cannot all be faced through the smirking mask of satire, some of them being too horrific. In 2014, the discovery of a mass grave where the bodies of hundreds of children were buried anonymously in the back yard of a Mother-and-Baby Home in Tuam, Co Galway, raised to the surface decades of institutional violence at the hands of the Catholic church in Ireland. Nightmarish visions of brutal ill-treatment of innocent, vulnerable people, of incarceration, humiliation, child-trafficking, enslavement, etc., were made accessible to a wide public. From the 1950s down to the end of the 1980s, Irish women who conceived outside wedlock were treated as criminals, banned

from society, their babies taken away from them to be adopted or simply left to die of malnutrition or disease. The images of the excavation of these tiny bodies did not belong to a gruesome, unrealistic 18th century gothic tale, but to a Lacanian, unsayable, unrepresentable real which was begging to resurface in the middle of 21<sup>st</sup> century Ireland.

But perhaps in no part of the island does the return of the past loom so threateningly large as in the North, where in the aftermath of the 1998 Belfast Agreement the physical border with the Republic had as much as disappeared, until it was violently pushed back to the centre of public debate by the prospect of Brexit, reviving in its tail traumatic memories of bloody past events. To all observers' eyes, Brexit is liable to re-ignite the underlying conflict between the ethno-religious communities. The underlying violence which was never totally quenched can break out again at any time, as is suggested by Jan Carson's remarkable 2019 novel *The Fire Starters*, in which the author mixes realism and supernatural elements to suggest how the sins of the Northern Irish fathers threaten to be visited upon their children, with a vengeance.

For all these reasons, when Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren remark in their introduction to *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*, that "the figure of the ghost has haunted human culture and imagination for a long time, perhaps even forever, although more insistently in certain societies and periods than others",<sup>4</sup> we may say that Ireland ranks high among these societies where spirits, chimeras and phantoms occupy a central place in the communal imagination.

The whole point of Maria del Pilar Blanco's and Esther Peeren's *The Spectralities Reader* is to show to what extent spectrality, ghosts, phantoms, etc., have become at the end of the twentieth century, what they call a "conceptual metaphor", mostly based upon Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* published in 1993, an essay which acted as a catalyst for what some have called "the spectral turn". According to the two authors,

At the end of the twentieth century (...) certain features of ghosts and haunting- such as their liminal position between visibility and invisibility, life and death, materiality and immateriality, and their association with powerful affects like fear and obsession- quickly came to be employed across the humanities and social sciences to theorize a variety of social, ethical, and political questions. These questions include, among others, the temporal and spatial sedimentation of history and tradition, and its impact on possibilities for

4. Maria del Pilar Blanco & Esther Peeren (Eds.), *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*, London/New York, Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 2.

social change; the intricacies of memory and trauma, personal and collective ; the workings and effects of scientific processes, technologies, and media ; and the exclusionary, effacing dimensions of social norms pertaining to gender, race, ethnicity , sexuality and class.<sup>5</sup>

According to Derrida, the spectre is “the visibility of a body which is not present in flesh and blood”; it challenges foundational, presentist, and teleological modes of thinking.<sup>6</sup> In this prospect, the ghost is seen to signify precisely that which escapes full cognition or comprehension: “One does not know : not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge”, Derrida writes.<sup>7</sup> Derrida calls the intellectual confrontation with ghosts “hauntology” because it gives access to a new form of knowledge. Spectrality, the concern for the ambiguous nature of the ghost as a presence which is visible but not really there, inaugurates the possibility of new forms of knowledge, that would transcend binary oppositions and revise traditional meta-narratives. As Edyta Lorek-Jezińska and Katarzyna Więckowska put it in an article entitled “Hauntology and Cognition: Questions of Knowledge, Pasts and Futures”:

The ghost forces us to confront and deal with the burden of the past and its unacknowledged spectres. In effect, summoning ghosts makes the present itself appear as not something solid, one-dimensional, or self-sufficient, but as something that is split and unstable, based on the suppression of other presents and voices, and, ultimately, spectral.<sup>8</sup>

Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock assigns the same meaning to Derrida’s concept:

The ghost functions as the ‘shadowy third’, or trace of an absence that undermines the fixedness of (...) binary oppositions. As an entity out of place in time, as something from the past that emerges into the present, the phantom calls into question the linearity of history. Derrida’s *plus d’un* means at the same time ‘no more one’ and ‘more than one’.<sup>9</sup>

5. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

6. Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the new International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (1993), New York & London, Routledge, 1994, p. 4.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

8. Edyta Lorek-Jezińska & Katarzyna Więckowska, “Hauntology and Cognition: Questions of Knowledge, Pasts and Futures”, *Theoria et Historia Scientiarum*, XIV, 2017 (doi:10.12775/ths.2017.001), p. 12.

9. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Ed.), *Spectral America: Phantoms and the National Imagination*, Madison, Wisconsin, 2004, p. 5.

Dealing with the ghosts that haunted Ireland in the past and still do today is therefore an opportunity to acquire new knowledge about what the late Seamus Deane called “the strange country”.<sup>10</sup> We could apply to the case of Ireland what Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock aimed at doing in his *Spectral America*:

[...]while there are specific studies of particular authors and bodies of literature, what all these isolated studies of particular authors point to is the need for, and what is precisely missing, is an analysis of the general importance of phantoms and haunting to the constitution of the ‘American imagination’.<sup>11</sup>

What is the importance of ghosts and spectres in the making of the “Irish imagination”? How can history, literature and the arts give us access to hidden, forgotten, parallel narratives, as does for instance Sebastian Barry’s 2008 novel *The Secret Scripture*, about which Margot Gayle Backus and Joseph Valente write that it “exploits literature’s distinctive capacity to record truths otherwise unavailable to an ongoing communal life history through figural practices that to some degree veil or leaven those truths”<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, the confrontation with the ghosts of the past is inseparable from the psychoanalytical notion of trauma, as Jeffrey Weinstock argues:

Spectral discourse can be connected with the recent preoccupation with “trauma” in which the presence of a symptom demonstrates the subject’s failure to internalize a past event, in which something from the past emerges to disrupt the present.<sup>13</sup>

To be traumatized, as Cathy Caruth has explained, is to be “possessed by an image or event located in the past”.<sup>14</sup> Caruth describes traumatized individuals as historical subjects, in the sense that “they carry an impossible history within them or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess”.<sup>15</sup> Regarding the persistence of trauma on both individual and communal levels, Del Pilar Blanco and Peeren mention the importance of Nicolas Abraham’s and Maria Török’s groundbreaking essay *L’Écorce et le noyau*<sup>16</sup> in which the

10. Seamus Deane, *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing since 1790*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1998.

11. Weinstock, “Introduction: the Spectral Turn”, *Spectral America*, *op. cit.*

12. Margot Gayle Backus & Joseph Valente, “Psychoanalyzing the enigma of sexualized innocence” in *Routledge International Handbook of Irish Studies*, Renée Fox, Mike Cronin & Brian O Conchubhair (Eds.), London/New York, Routledge, 2021, p. 421.

13. Weinstock, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

14. Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins U.P., 1995, p. 5.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

16. Nicolas Abraham & Maria Török, *L’Écorce et le noyau*, Paris, Flammarion, 1978.

two psychoanalysts explain that the undisclosed traumas of previous generations might disturb the lives of their descendants, even and especially if they know nothing about their distant causes. What Abraham and Török call “a phantom” is the presence of a dead ancestor in the living ego, which can and should be put into words so that its noxious effects on the living should be exorcised. This is precisely the object of the quest undertaken by Seán Blake, the protagonist of Dermot Bolger’s 1994 novel *A Second Life*. Seán was one of those Irish babies born to unwed mothers and who were taken away from their biological mothers to be given out for adoption. After a car crash, strange images come to haunt him, leading him to the discovery of mysterious photographs. The role of these pictures and of photography in general is analysed by Helen Penet in a chapter in which she also discusses a photograph appearing in Hugo Hamilton’s memoir *The Sailor in the Wardrobe*. Penet quotes Marianne Hirsch, who in *Family Frames: Photography, narrative and postmemory*, discusses the link between photography and lost narratives:

Photography’s relation to loss and death is not to mediate the process of individual and collective memory but to bring the past back in the form of a ghostly revenant, emphasizing, at the same time, its immutable and irreversible pastness and irretrievability.<sup>17</sup>

In *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the sociological imagination*, Avery Gordon claims that:

The ubiquity of ghost stories is connected to the recognition that history is always fragmented, and perspectival and open to contestations for control of the meaning of history. Every society will have oversights and disavowals that reverberate below the surface.<sup>18</sup>

This fits very well the way official narratives of Irish history have been challenged and re-written to uncover hidden histories, such as that of Irish women broadly speaking, and their role in Irish history, including in the long fight for independence. In her chapter, Claire Dubois thus sheds light on the ways Constance Markievicz questioned the representation of Ireland as “a nation of fathers and sons”,<sup>19</sup> rendering visible what had previously been invisible,<sup>20</sup> i.e. women’s involvement in the struggle for Irish freedom.

17. Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, narrative and post-memory*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard U.P., 1997, p. 20.
18. Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the sociological Imagination*, Minneapolis, Minnesota U.P., 1997 (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttt4hp>).
19. Declan Kiberd, “Fathers and Sons”, in *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*, London, Vintage, 1996.
20. Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. and intro. Stephen Corcoran], London, Bloomsbury, p. 37-39.



The ghost has to do with temporality because of its tendency to put time out of joint: its haunting indicates that beneath the surface of received history, there lurks another narrative, an untold story that calls into question the veracity of the authorized version of events. For Avery Gordon, “ghosts are one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us”.<sup>21</sup> In his chapter on Liam Ó Flaithearta’s *Dúil*, Callum Bateson discusses how the spectral nature of a minority language such as the Irish language, “side-lined and overlooked for not being in sync with modernity and its demands”, is precisely for that reason liable to enable access to what has now become invisible: the non-human as it exists beyond our anthropocentric vision and knowledge.

Gordon also argues that to write stories concerning exclusions and invisibilities, to write from a perspective other than the authorized one, is to write ghost stories. Many Irish writers have been convinced of this connection between writing and the confrontation with ghosts. Martine Pelletier’s chapter thus discusses playwright Stewart Parker, for whom “Plays and ghosts have a lot in common. The energy which flows from some intense moment of conflict, in a particular time and place, seems to activate them both”.<sup>22</sup> Parker introduced ghosts in at least three of his plays, *Northern Star* (1984), *Heavenly Bodies* (1986) and *Pentecost* (1987). Pelletier compares Parker’s fascination for ghosts with Brian Friel’s “memory plays” *Faith Healer* (1979) and *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990), in which, according to Prapassaree Kramer, “Friel offers us the spectacle of Michael presenting his memories of 1936 [...] to highlight the process – familiar from so many of Friel’s dramas – by which memory, fallible but creative, serves both to haunt and fortify the fragile ego”.<sup>23</sup>

In her own chapter Virginie Roche-Tiengo also discusses the importance of ghosts in Friel’s plays, as in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, in which

Michael is [...] lost in the timelessness of his memories, haunted by the spectres of his aunts, mother, father and uncle. Michael talks to the audience in the present-present of the performance and yet he is also in the present-past of himself as a seven years old boy. (*infra*, p. 75)

She also demonstrates how Friel’s plays are haunted by the memory of Joyce’s texts, as evidenced by the playwright himself in his holographic notes on *Faith Healer* (Nov 75): “see Joyce, Stephen Dedalus. Can art restore

21. Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

22. Stewart Parker, *Three Plays for Ireland*, Birmingham, Oberon, 1989, p. 9.

23. Prapassaree Kramer, “Dancing at Lughnasa: unexcused absence”, *Modern Drama*, 43(2), Summer 2000 (doi:10.3138/md.43.2.171), p. 178.

the portrait of the artist or heal a maimed language, a distorted imagination, a divided identity, a labyrinthine psyche?”<sup>24</sup> Pascale Amiot also reminds us of the importance of ghosts in the poetry of Seamus Heaney, as corroborated by Stan Smith who equates Heaney’s “apparitions” with W. B. Yeats’s “Presences”:

[...] spirits unappeased and peregrine between two worlds, between the order of signification and that of the immanent, absent referent. For “Presences” is another way of speaking about ghosts, whether those ghostly intertexts speaking through the language of the living, at once present and absent [...]; or those family ghosts, at once intimate and strange, who haunt so many of his lines. [...] They figure those absences which invest all discourse, making the familiar strange.<sup>25</sup>

Speaking about Heaney’s famous “bog poems”, Amiot comments that “Tollund Man becomes a central ‘presence’ in the artist’s creative imagination, walking in the steps of William Wordsworth’s ‘Apt Admonisher’, or T. S. Eliot’s ‘Compound ghost’, as ‘somebody who has entered the poet’s consciousness as a dream presence, an emanation or [...] an ‘admonition’”<sup>26</sup> Amiot examines the reasons why Seamus Heaney chose to revive the Tollund Man at three key-moments in his poetic career.

As a symptom of repressed knowledge, the ghost calls into question the possibilities of a future based on avoidance of the past, and as such, remains a figure of unruliness, pointing to dispossession, disappearance, and social erasure. Perhaps no character in Irish fiction mirrors this definition of spectrality better than Melmoth, Charles Maturin’s singular protagonist in *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820). However, as Charlie Jorge shows in his chapter, to some extent Maturin used the Wanderer not only as a figure of the outcast himself but also to denounce the tyranny and the terror exerted by the Catholic church, as exemplified by the episodes of the novel involving one of its most fearful institutions, the Inquisition: as Jorge puts it,

The Inquisition’s vow of secrecy, the usage of familiars to obtain confessions, the whole system of accusation and trials with their terrible *autos-de-fé*, the power behind the throne wielded by the Tribunal of the Holy Office as well as the invulnerability of its members; all these were used by Maturin in *Melmoth the Wanderer* to create this

24. “The Brian Friel Papers”, National Library of Ireland, Dublin, MS 37,075/8.

25. Stan Smith, *Irish Poetry and the Construction of Modern Identity: Ireland between Fantasy and History*, Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 2005, p. 102-103.

26. Seamus Heaney, “Apt Admonishment: Wordsworth as an Example”, *Hudson Review*, 61(1), 2008 (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20464796>), p. 22.

oppressive atmosphere with which he cast a hard critique on oppressive, overpowering institutions. (*infra*, p. 116)

Ghost stories have always responded to the evolving social, ethnic, religious, and cultural circumstances of a precise location: as Judith Richardson puts it: "Ghosts operate as a particular, and peculiar, kind of social memory, an alternate form of history-making in which things usually forgotten discarded, or repressed become foregrounded, whether as items of fear, regret, explanation, or desire".<sup>27</sup> This may account for the specificity of the Irish Gothic, a genre or mode which was predominantly analysed as the expression of a secluded community (the Protestant middle class)'s underlying fear of retaliation by the very people they had preyed upon in the past, namely the Catholic farming classes. Such interpretation has nevertheless been nuanced since, as the Irish Gothic was also used by Catholic writers to depict their equally gruesome everyday life. Irish Gothic ranges from the "classic" authors such as Maturin, and of course Bram (Abraham)Stoker, to contemporary authors who rely on fear and terror to convey their vision of the world. According to Thierry Robin, Belfast-born Stuart Neville in his best-selling novel *The Twelve*, re-baptized *The Ghosts of Belfast* by its American publisher, thus mixes crime fiction with the tropes of the Elizabethan revenge tragedy – a genre to which *Hamlet*, which is used by Derrida as an introduction to the concept of spectrality, pertains – to show "how much the past weighs upon the present times in Northern Ireland, precisely through the trope of ghosts" (p.xxx). Robin also discusses the epigraph to the novel, extracted from a poem by John Hewitt: "The place that lacks its ghosts is a barren place", "underlining the paramount importance of enduring memory through ghosts" (p.xx). *The Twelve* is a story of guilt, revenge, extreme violence and terror, or should we rather say horror? This hesitation underlies Héloïse Lecomte's chapter in which she discusses this "syntactic wavering", and argues as well that "corpse, memory and ghost are intricately connected[...] all three notions share a comparable horrific potential, as the corpse and the ghost are staples of the Gothic".<sup>28</sup> Writing about Anne Enright's *The Gathering* and John Banville's *The Sea*, Lecomte finds that Colin Davis's saying that: "the ghosts are now inside our heads rather than roaming the outside world"<sup>29</sup> particularly applies to these novels of grief, trauma and terror. However, Lecomte also finds that in contemporary fiction, the ghosts fail to materialise: according to Joanne Watkiss: "Banville's postmodern

27. Judith Richardson, *Possessions: the History and Uses of Haunting in the Hudson Valley*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard U.P., 2003, p. 5.

28. The "Gothic" mode of writing is defined as such by Christina Morin and Niall Gillespie: "a 'gothic' text combines, among other things, supernatural figures and events with medieval Catholic Continental settings, an interest in the Burkean sublime" (Christina Morin & Niall Gillespie, *Irish Gothics: Genres, Forms, Modes, and Traditions, 1760-1890*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 3).

29. Colin Davis, *Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis and the Return of the Dead*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 9, 11.

Gothic is concerned with the idea of the ghost rather than the ghost itself; his focus is on haunting where the ghost does not appear, the haunting of ourselves by ourselves”.<sup>30</sup> Lecomte’s conclusion is that the “monstrous chimeras” who haunt these contemporary fictions “have a crucial cultural impact, as indicators of a diseased society or disquieted psyche”.<sup>31</sup>

“The haunting of ourselves by ourselves” is a phrase that could well apply to the self-reflexive intertextual network Marion Bourdeau perceives in Colum McCann’s novella *Thirteen Ways of Looking* and to the type of autofiction that Tom Hedley analyses in Mark Cousins’ film *I am Belfast*. Bourdeau reads *Thirteen Ways of Looking* as a multi-layered, haunted text, first by “subworlds”: “In literary texts, a subworld ‘embodies a change in spatio-temporal factors compared with the matrix world it is connected to’;<sup>32</sup> then by intertextuality, which Gérard Genette defines as “a relationship of copresence”<sup>33</sup> between two texts and therefore a kind of spectrality. The copresence of different kinds of realities is also what characterizes autofiction, thanks to which, according to Tom Hedley, “We recover a reality of a ‘truer’ kind than referentiality and non-fiction can access”. Tom Hedley calls *I am Belfast* “a tale of two ghosts”, one being a 10,000-year-old woman who predominantly narrates the film, and the other, the doomed *Titanic*, whose tragic fate was initially silenced but then resurfaced as a topic of public discussion: “It was like New York when it went. And then it sank. And we hardly spoke about it. Like a taboo. Like a war. And now it’s back, and we talk about it a lot. Things that are held down come up again.”<sup>34</sup>

Irish history and culture however are not only haunted by the voices of dead victims from the past claiming the right to be remembered with due attention and respect, but also by the illusionary dreams of a better future on which some were fed. Universally known for his seminal tale of terror *Dracula*, Stoker wrote only one novel situated in Ireland: *The Snake’s Pass* (1891), which Claude Fierobe here analyses as Stoker’s imaginings of what Ireland could become. He sees the romance between Arthur, the Anglo-Irish engineer, and Norah, the young Irish peasant girl, as a parallel to the chimera of building a new Ireland which would follow

30. Joanne Watkiss, “Ghosts in the Head: Mourning, Memory and Derridean ‘Trace’ in John Banville’s *The Sea*”, *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*, 2, March 2007 (<https://irishgothic horror.files.wordpress.com/2018/03/joanne-watkiss.pdf>), p. 55-71 (p. 55).

31. That is one of the main features of Enright’s “post-national” fiction, for Eve Patten: “beyond a prevalent social realism, its chief stylistic hallmark was a neo-Gothic idiom which signaled a haunted Irish society and deep-seated disturbances in the national psyche” (Eve Patten, “Contemporary Irish Fiction”, *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel*, John Wilson Foster (Ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., 2007 (doi:10.1017/CCOL0521861918), p. 259)

32. Sandrine Sorlin, *La stylistique anglaise. Théories et pratiques*, Rennes, PU de Rennes, 2014, p. 177 (my translation).

33. Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes: la littérature au second degré*, Paris, Seuil, 1982, p. 8 (my translation).

34. *I Am Belfast*, Dir. Mark Cousins, Northern Ireland, Canderblinks Film & Music and Hopscotch Films, 2016, 01:06:25 – 01:06:27.

the rational, English ideals of progress and material profit. But this dream encounters the fluid, strange, mythical power of the bog, this receptacle of Irish national identity, which makes Stoker's novel, meant first as a realist, didactic narrative, turn into an uncanny tale. The irreducible otherness embodied by the bog, but also by Norah, threatens Arthur's, and Stoker's, utopian chimera.

Was the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, created in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s a mere chimera? According to Claire Mansour,

Civil Rights activists were chasing a chimera, hoping that they could transform Northern Irish society, in spite of the stark opposition to any change to the status quo from a section of the Protestant-Unionist community. As the changes they sought to achieve kept on eluding them, their methods grew more radical, their opponents more implacable, sharpening the historical politico-religious divide and raising again the spectre of sectarian violence" (p.xxx).

There certainly were some utopian aspects to the movement, but its demands were on the whole moderate. The movement also needs to be set against the international context of popular unrest and demand for change: as Mansour puts it, "the sense of empowerment, liberation and joy that characterised the late 1960s in various countries did not elude Northern Ireland" (p. xx). This shows that chimeras, if they often bring along delusions and disillusion, are also vectors of hope and faith in a brighter future. Likewise, a "hauntology" of Ireland could hopefully create for the future what Derrida describes in the final paragraph of *Spectres of Marx*, suggesting that ghosts belong to the future as much as to the past:

If he loves justice at least, the "scholar" of the future, the "intellectual" of tomorrow should learn it and from the ghost. He should learn to live by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself: they are always there, spectres, even if they do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet.<sup>35</sup>

35. Derrida, *op.cit.*, p. 242.