

## The Spectres of James Joyce and Brian Friel: Hermeneutic Hauntology, Borders, and Ghost language

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## Chapter five

The Spectres of James  
Joyce and Brian Friel

## Hermeneutic Hauntology, Borders, and Ghost language



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**Abstract:** This chapter explores the ways in which Jacques Derrida's notion of hauntology pervades and intertwines the works of James Joyce and Brian Friel with the mnemonic decay of spectres' evanescent and polymorphic apparitions. It considers how spectres desynchronize memories of the past, interrupt all forms of specularity and exchange and cross hermeneutic borders in both Joyce and Friel. Then it focuses on how Joyce and Friel embarked on a journey of intersectionality and linguistic exile to unearth a subversive ghost language. And finally, it unveils Friel's hauntological incursion into Joyce's kindred wandering mind and discloses similar images of ghostly echoes and allusions to exile, mourning, Thanatos and keening.

**Keywords:** Hauntology, Spectres, Ghost language, Linguistic exile, Specularity, Keening, Memories, Hermeneutic borders

DERRIDA'S notion of hauntology pervades and intertwines the works of James Joyce and Brian Friel because the voices and the bodies of the ghosts fracture linear conceptions of temporality and assert an "always-already absent-present."<sup>1</sup> The ghost, "this being-there of an absent or departed one",<sup>2</sup> neither soul nor body, is yet both one and the other because for Derrida it "is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit."<sup>3</sup> The ghost desynchronizes memories of the past and offers in both

1. Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx, The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. Translated from the French by Peggy Kamuf, New York, Routledge Classics, 2006, p. 5. Originally published in French as *Spectres de Marx*, Paris, Galilée, 1993.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*

Joyce and Friel “the furtive and ungraspable visibility of the invisible”.<sup>4</sup> The term “hermeneutics” suggests an interpretation, which discloses something mysterious and hidden from ordinary understanding. Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom, Joyce’s subjective personae and beyond the grave voices in Friel’s theatre are to some extent figures of Dionysus, the Greek God who could offer rebirth or palingenesis and Hermes, the message-bearer because they have first and foremost opened themselves to a process of “un-concealment” and to a “spectral asymmetry”. James Joyce and Brian Friel dug into what is beyond language, the cryptic tongue of the ghost because “The time is out of joint” and for Hamlet, “That skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once” (Hamlet, 5.1.75). Joyce and Friel just like Seamus Heaney in *North* follow into the mud “Hamlet the Dane, / skull-handler, parablister, / smeller of rot/in a state, infused /with its poisons, /pinioned by ghosts/ and affections”.<sup>5</sup> The ghost speaks and looks at us from the past and yet interrupts all forms of specularly and exchange in the present. We find both in Joyce and Friel an interest in communicative failure, or breaks in verbal exchanges. If the ghosts can cross linguistic borders, the living are silenced like Myles Joyce in James Joyce’s essay ‘Ireland at the Bar’ (1907) or Sarah in Brian Friel’s *Translations*. They both become the archetypal representation of Gaelic, a ghost language, “an ancient and rich expression of articulate identity lapsing into irretrievable silence”.<sup>6</sup> We will first explore how ghosts in Joyce and Friel cross hermeneutic and haunted borders. Then we will focus on the subversive ghost language as the ultimate beyond the grave trickster of identity, political uncertainty and liminality. And finally we will ponder over Joycean and Frielian mourning with the irruption of spectres haunting Ireland and embodying both the reverence and rejection of the living towards the dead. How will Friel’s hauntologic incursion into Joyce’s kindred wandering mind unveil with a mesmerizing eye, images, ghostly echoes and allusion to exile, mourning, Thanatos and keening?

### Spectres in Joyce and Friel as Wanderers crossing Hermeneutic and Haunted Borders



Wanderers with whom both Joyce and Friel closely identified cross hermeneutic and haunted borders with internal reasons, i.e. a subjective motivational set, desires, beliefs, goals, wants as well as external reasons, determined by their environment or their relation with their environment. Joycean and Frielian wanderers with internal and external reasons

4. *Ibid.*

5. Seamus Heaney, *Poems 1965-1975*, New York, Noonday, 1980, p. 178.

6. George Steiner, *After Babel*, New York, Oxford U.P., 1975, p. 53.

encounter spectres, i.e. “the furtive and ungraspable visibility of the invisible”<sup>7</sup> by “jumping in graves” like Seamus Heaney, “dithering, blathering”<sup>8</sup>. They give a voice to the voiceless and are entangled in the mnesic net of spectres, following and being followed by ghosts. As Derrida wonders: “What does it mean to follow a ghost? And what if this came down to being followed by it, always, persecuted perhaps by the very chase we are leading? Here again what seems to be out front, the future, comes back in advance: from the past, from the back.”<sup>9</sup> Henri Cartier-Bresson was haunted by images of James Joyce and when he visited Ireland in 1952 and in 1962, he had a copy of *Ulysses* in his pocket and took photos of Joyce’s topos, Belvedere College, Clongowes College, the Quays of Dublin, the Martello Tower, the Mullingan’s public house, 7 Eccles Street to name but a few. Friel and Joyce dug deep into the past to renegotiate and rehearse endlessly the relationship between memory, exile and death. Friel’s inner exile pertains to the Yeatsian Wanderings of Oisín, “bent, and bald, and blind, with a heavy heart and a wandering mind” (Book I) and Joyce’s exile pertains to the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis*, a mnesic anchor journeying over perilous waters with linguistic mooring in Ireland. Joyce’s words like Seamus Heaney’s “lick around cobbled quays” and “go hunting /lightly as pampooties over the skull-capped ground”<sup>10</sup>. Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus wander too far into forbidden realms, in a linguistic and sexual terra incognita. In *Ulysses* (Chapter 14, *Oxen of the Sun*), Leopold Bloom is described as “that vigilant wanderer, soiled by the dust of travel and combat and stained by the mire of an incredible dishonour”<sup>11</sup>. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen Dedalus felt “a lust of wandering in his feet that burned to set out for the end of the earth”<sup>12</sup> and in *Ulysses* he understood that he had wandered too far like Don Giovanni because “Such is the end of the evildoer: the death of a sinner always reflects his life” (“*Questo è il fin di chi fa mal, e de’ perfidi la morte alla vita è sempre uguale*”).<sup>13</sup> Stephen’s “sins trickled from his lips, one by one, trickled in shameful drops from his soul festering and oozing like a sore, a squalid stream of vice. The last sins oozed forth, sluggish, filthy.”<sup>14</sup> And Stephen unlike the Prodigal son is unable to go back to his father’s house. Bloom asks him: “[...] but why did you leave your father’s home? To seek misfortune, was Stephen’s answer.”<sup>15</sup> Like Don Giovanni and Cass McGuire, Stephen and Bloom are exiled from their homes, wanderers walking into

7. Derrida, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

8. Heaney, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

9. Derrida, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

10. Heaney, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

11. James Joyce, *Ulysses*, London, Penguin, 2000, p. 547.

12. James Joyce, *A James Joyce Reader*, London, Penguin, 1993, p. 432.

13. Extract from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s last scene of his two-act opera, *Don Giovanni* (*Il dissoluto punito, ossia il Don Giovanni*) with an Italian libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte, premiered by the Prague Italian opera at the National Theatre (of Bohemia) on 29 October 1787.

14. Joyce, *A James Joyce Reader*, *op. cit.*, p. 403.

15. Joyce, *Ulysses*, *op. cit.*, p. 569.

eternity estranged from the faith of their childhood, i.e. Catholicism and Judaism. In *Circe*, the apparition of a spectre, Bloom's father, a voice from beyond the grave like Hamlet's father or the *Commendatore* in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* calls him "my dear son Leopold who left the house of his father and left the God of his father, Abraham and Jacob".<sup>16</sup> Bloom and Steven like Leif, the Skeleton in Friel's play *Volunteers*, are casualties of language and signifiers of borders. They are surrounded by a guilty Eros and an unforgiving and ruthless Thanatos and stray into the dark passages of their psyche. Stephen is haunted by his dead mother and yet revels in a *danse macabre*, a dance of death with prostitutes. Bloom wanders through the streets of Dublin on June 16th, 1904, haunted by the wraith of his little son Rudy and knowing that his wife is having sexual intercourse with Blazes Boylan. He is ensnared in the harrowing net of Eros and Thanatos in quest of a spectre, what Derrida described as "the tangible intangibility of a proper body without flesh, but still the body of *someone as someone other*".<sup>17</sup> Joycean and Frielian spectres are haunting the living and are hunted by the living in a relentless quest for eschatological answers. Gabriel is haunted by Michael Furey in *The Dead*: "His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead".<sup>18</sup> Gabriel witnesses his own identity "fading out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself, which these dead had one time reared and lived in, was dissolving and dwindling [...] Snow [...] was falling [...] on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried."<sup>19</sup> In a symbiotic and eschatological vision where the present and the past, the living and the spectres meet, Gabriel's "soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly [...] like the descent of their last end, upon the living and the dead".<sup>20</sup> And Gabriel's wife, Gretta is mourning Michael Furey, her "ghost by absence"<sup>21</sup> and keening him. For Derrida, "mourning consists always in attempting to ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first place by *identifying* the bodily remains and by *localizing* the dead".<sup>22</sup> In Friel's play, *The Freedom of the City*, the dead are localized in Derry and their spectres haunt the audience because history has been distorted. We see the spectres but they also see us. To paraphrase Derrida, the spectres hence weigh, think, intensify and condense themselves within Irish history i.e. the traumatic events of Bloody Sunday and the devastating Widgery Report. The audience has to answer for the dead and respond to the dead and it turns out to be an obsessive haunting because we are in the absence of any certainty or symmetry in terms of political discourses and judicial responses. The spectre is "the visibility of the invisible"... it "is also, among other things, what one imagines,

16. *Ibid.*, p. (15.261.62).

17. Derrida, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

18. Joyce, *A James Joyce Reader*, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 242.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Joyce, *Ulysses*, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

22. Derrida, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

what one thinks one sees and which one projects”.<sup>23</sup> Kate in *Dancing at Lughnasa* stares with “pretended horror” at young Michael’s kites: “Oh, good Lord, they put the heart across me! You did those? Oh, God bless us, those are scarifying! What are they? Devils? Ghosts? I wouldn’t like to see those lads in the sky looking at me!”<sup>24</sup> Michael ensnares the voices of his aunts and mother in the fabric of the play. He may be an unreliable narrator but the spectres of his childhood pass through the walls of memory, day and night, to trick consciousness and unveil trauma, exile and death by skipping generations. The spectre is a threat for Kate, the Roman Catholic headmistress because of its timelessness. For Derrida, the revenant or spectre is caught “between a present-past, a present-present, and a present-future, between a “real time” and a “deferred time”.<sup>25</sup> Michael in *Dancing at Lughnasa* 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-year-old boy. “Michael, who narrates the story, also speaks the lines of the boy, i.e. himself when he was seven”.<sup>26</sup> The boy is invisible on stage. He is a spectre. And yet Michael is also a present-future because he becomes the soothsaying voice of his aunts’ tragic ordeal, i.e. homelessness and death in London. In Joyce and Friel, the spectre of homelessness festers like a sore in the inner world of harrowing memories. And yet “As soon as there is some spectre, hospitality and exclusion go together.”<sup>27</sup> The other is both perceived as a threatening guest and a welcome spirit (‘Geist’) with a story to tell.

Indeed spectres haunt the stage in Brian Friel’s theatre not only in *The Freedom of the City* (1973), or *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990) but also in *Volunteers* (1975), *Living Quarters* (1977), *Faith Healer* (1980), *Translations* (1980), and *Performances* (2003). Friel’s drama comes with mastery to the threshold of changes where discourses of inclusion and marginalisation need not exclude or diminish the past, but are bound to reinterpret it through the voices of the dead. We hear the voices of the three spectres, Lily, Michael and Skinner in *The Freedom of the City* and witness stock-still ghost-like bodies, which are the quintessence of timeless remembrance and self-knowledge. In *Volunteers*, five political prisoners (Knox, Butt, Smiler, Keeney and Pyne) excavate from early Viking period down to late Georgian ready to start a dance of death since their political brethren in ‘a sort of kangaroo court’<sup>28</sup> have sentenced them to death for treason. Those five political prisoners are the pregnant male spectres of classical Greek literature. They are ready to deliver not a baby but the buried

23. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

24. Brian Friel, *Dancing at Lughnasa*, London, Faber & Faber, 1990, p. 9.

25. Derrida, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

26. Brian Friel, *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Stage Directions.

27. Derrida, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

28. Brian Friel, *Volunteers*, Loughcrew, Gallery, 1989, p. 52.

truths of a traumatic and violent past. They embody Dionysus and offer a rebirth, a palingenesis to their community. The excavated skeleton Leif is ‘a casualty of language’ for one of the Volunteers, Keeney. His repeated mantra ‘Was Hamlet really mad?’<sup>29</sup> lingers in the mind of the audience as a sacred utterance of a lost meaning with a haunting spiritual power. Leif is Keeney’s Yorick and the archaeological site is both Hamlet and the Volunteers’ graveyard. Both in *Hamlet* and in *Volunteers*, the audience is trapped in the graveyard. To quote Derrida, “we are still in the cemetery, the gravediggers are working hard, digging up skulls, trying to identify them, one by one, and Hamlet recalls that this one ‘had a tongue’ and it used to sing.”<sup>30</sup> Art and language become the unique junction between the living and the dead conveying through a contrasting set of Joycean and Frielian truth and falsity, forgotten traumas, injustice and murders. For Victor Hugo in *William Shakespeare*, “Art, like the flame has the power of sublimation. Toss into art, as into the flame, the poisons, the wastes, the rust, the oxides, the arsenic, the verdigris, transfer this incandescence through the prism or through poetry, you will obtain splendid spectres.”<sup>31</sup> Both Joyce and Friel offer “splendid spectres” like Victor Hugo and William Shakespeare because for Derrida “a genius always resists and defies after the fashion of a spectral thing. The animated work becomes that thing, the Thing that, like an elusive spectre, *engineers* a habitation without proper inhabiting, call it a *haunting*, of both memory and translation.”<sup>32</sup> Through memory and translation, we will see how Joyce and Friel use a subversive ghost language as the ultimate beyond the grave trickster of identity, political uncertainty and liminality.

### The Subversive Ghost Language

Both Joyce and Friel embarked on a journey of intersectionality and linguistic exile because they used and distanced themselves from the English tongue and yet became vigilant semiotic wanderers with a complete mastery of this lingua Franca. For Joyce, “writing in English is the most ingenious torture ever devised for sins committed in a previous life. Is not this adding a new horror to eternal punishment?”<sup>33</sup> Friel as well was tortured by this sense of exile: “exile is miserable... this is one of the problem with us... we are constantly being offered the English home; we

29. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

30. Derrida, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

31. Translation mine. « *L’art a, comme la flamme, une puissance de sublimation. Jetez dans l’art, comme dans la flamme, les poisons, les ordures, les rouilles, les oxydes, l’arsenic, le vert-de-gris, faites passer les incandescences à travers le prisme ou à travers la poésie, vous aurez des spectres splendides [...]* ».Victor Hugo, *William Shakespeare*, Paris, GF Flammarion, 2014, p. 138.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

33. James Joyce, (Letters 1:120:111.79; 11:88).

have been educated by the English home... And the rejection of all that, and the rejection into what, is the big problem".<sup>34</sup> Friel's journey into linguistic estrangement is in the tradition of Joyce because as Umberto Eco recalled in *The Name of the Rose*: "books speak of books: it is as if they spoke among themselves."<sup>35</sup> For Friel quoting Joyce "the whole cultural burden that every word in the English language carries is slightly different to our burden. Joyce talked in the *Portrait* of his resentment of the Jesuit priest because he possessed these words long before I possessed them."<sup>36</sup> Friel's and Joyce's words, novels and plays, enter into an imperceptible dialogue as if their work became what Eco defined in *The Name of the Rose* as "a living thing, a receptacle of powers not to be ruled by a human mind, a treasure of secrets emanated by many minds, surviving the death of those who had produced them or had been their conveyors."<sup>37</sup> Friel's and Joyce's works are haunted by the voices of the dead. As Roland Barthes stated "We now know that the text is not a line of words releasing a single theological meaning ('the message' of an Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash? The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of cultures."<sup>38</sup> Friel's hermeneutic incursion into Joyce's kindred wandering mind unveils with a mesmerizing eye, images, verbal echoes and allusion to linguistic exile, death and blindness. In *Faith Healer*, the wandering triptych, Frank, Grace and Teddy, offers a striking resemblance with Leopold Bloom, Molly and Stephen Dedalus, the Joycean triptych of *Ulysses*. The characters are haunted by the death of a child, the unborn voice, the supreme gift of eyesight lost forever, and a metaphor for a ghost language. In "Hades", as a child's coffin goes past him, Bloom thinks of his dead child, Rudy: "A dwarf's face, mauve and wrinkled like Little Rudy's was... Our. Little. Beggar. Baby. Meant nothing. Mistake of nature. If it's healthy it's from the mother. If not from the man".<sup>39</sup> Grace in *Faith Healer* thinks of her "black-face, macerated baby that's buried in a field in Kinlochbervie in Sutherland in the north of Scotland"<sup>40</sup> whereas for Teddy, the manager, it is a thing, "that little wet thing with the black face and the black body, a tiny little thing, no size at all... a boy it was..."<sup>41</sup> but for Frank, it meant nothing, it never existed: "I would have liked to have a child but she was barren".<sup>42</sup> Frank, Grace and Teddy contrive elaborate untruths, psychic disorder. In particular, they lie about the death of Frank and Grace's baby and also about the death of Jack and Mary, Frank's

34. Christopher Murray (Ed.), *Brian Friel, Essays, Diaries, Interviews: 1964-1999*, London, Faber & Faber, 1999, p. 112.

35. Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver, London, Picador, 1984, p. 286.

36. Paul Delaney (Ed.), *Brian Friel In Conversation*, Ann Arbor, Michigan U.P., 2000, p. 171

37. Eco, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

38. Roland Barthes, *Images, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, New York, Hill & Wang, 1977, p. 146.

39. Joyce, *Ulysses*, *op. cit.*, p. 119-120.

40. Friel, *Selected Plays*, *op. cit.*, p. 349.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 363.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 372.



parents. Joyce and Friel both question the expressive powers of language and the limits of communicability. Brian Friel expressed a deep sense of the unworthiness of language in *Faith Healer* or *The Freedom of the City* connecting the human capacity to utter falsehood to the conflict in Northern Ireland and to Irish, the ghost language in *Translations*. Friel added in his holographic notes on *Faith Healer* (Nov 75), “see Joyce, Stephen Dedalus. Can art restore the portrait of the artist or heal a maimed language, a distorted imagination, a divided identity, a labyrinthine psyche?”<sup>43</sup> Because as George Steiner stated in *After Babel*: “What we can say best of language, as of death, is, in a certain sense, a truth just out of reach”.<sup>44</sup> And writing in another language is for Joyce and Friel “the rage of Caliban at not seeing his face in the mirror”<sup>45</sup> and the omphalos of a new world in 1904. For Friel: “It’s a problem dramatists here never really faced up to: the problem of writing in the language of another country” [...] We’re a recent breed [...] We’ve only existed since Synge and Yeats. There was no such thing as an indigenous Irish drama until 1904.<sup>46</sup> How can the privacy of this torturing inner linguistic exile be staged? In *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* the division of Gar O’Donnell into two characters Gar Private and Gar Public suffuses the stage with the longing both to be elsewhere in Philadelphia and to remain at home in Ballybeg, the archetypal Irish small town. Friel remained home-bound and wrote about leaving Ireland, whereas Joyce left and wrote about walking into eternity on Sandymount Strand in Ireland. Friel wondered in his holographic notes on *Faith Healer*, (dated 19 May 75): “Is home the least likely environment for faith and the most needful of healing? Why does faith die at home? And why do we return home to kill the faith we have deliberately acquired elsewhere?”<sup>47</sup> Friel gives to “words something of the significance they have in dreams”.<sup>48</sup> Words become “organically active like renewed exorcisms”<sup>49</sup> and spectres. Not only Irish but Greek and Latin with Jimmy, the old scholar, fluent in those three languages exalt, bewitch, arrest our semiotic sensibility. Jimmy is an epistemological wanderer, a mortal in love with a Greek Goddess, guilty of linguistic exogamy. Eros is thus the way that leads man to divinity. For Jimmy, the scholar, sexual and linguistic exogamy is the only way to reach the truth, beauty is truth in quest of knowledge.

Jimmy Jack Cassie, the old scholar in *Translations*, like Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses*, crosses linguistic borders with “a lust of wandering”. They stole the fire of knowledge as polyglots, but are unable to save their world and their language. Yolland, the English Lieutenant, is yet

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

44. Steiner, *After Babel*, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

45. Joyce, *Ulysses*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

46. Delaney, *op. cit.*, p. 140

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

48. Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, trans. Victor Corti, Alma Classics, 2013, p. 66.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

another Prometheus, afraid of being an outsider and yet wreaking havoc and destroying the Irish world with the help of Owen, Hugh's son. In Brian Friel's *Translations*, and Joyce's *Ulysses*, discourse and intercourse function through inversion and renewal. It pertains to all that is slippery and twisted, elusive and ambiguous, and it moves in more than one direction simultaneously like the boundless sea. To paraphrase Jacques Derrida, we are facing a certain impossible possibility of saying the event. Joyce and Friel both ritualise and interrogate national identity by crossing linguistic borders between law and literature. Joyce excavated Myles Joyce figure, 'deaf and dumb before his judge' with his personal version of the Maamtrasna Murders in his essay 'Ireland at the Bar' (1907), 'L'Irlanda alla Sbarra', published in the Newspaper *Il Piccolo della Sera*. Myles Joyce was wrongfully convicted and executed because he did not know English. He was forced to speak and yet fully silenced, and raised, according to Margaret Kelleher in *The Maamtrasna Murders*, "compelling questions regarding law and language, justice and interpretation, translation and its original voice or text".<sup>50</sup> However the spectre of Myles Joyce lingered. James Joyce described him as a:

bewildered old man, left over from a culture which is not ours, a deaf-mute before his judge... a symbol of the Irish nation at the bar of public opinion. Like him, she is unable to appeal to the modern conscience of England and other countries.<sup>51</sup>

The silenced monoglot figure of Myles Joyce and elements of the Maamtrasna trial are intertwined into the fabric of The Festy King episode in *Finnegans Wake*. We find both in Joyce and Friel an interest in communicative failure, or breaks in verbal exchanges. Crossing linguistic borders are impossible for Sarah, who was to be called Unity by Friel in the first draft of the play *Translations*. She embodies the dichotomy between monolingualism and multilingualism. And like Myles Joyce, she is silenced and becomes the archetypal representation of Gaelic, a ghost language, an ancient and rich expression of articulate identity lapsing into irretrievable silence.

Joyce, or Friel with his rewriting of *The Widgery Report* after Bloody Sunday in *The Freedom of The City*, were both reporting trials intermingling law and literature and appealing to justice. They gave a voice to the disempowered before being themselves silenced. Friel was threatened and Joyce was prosecuted. Joyce's struggle for publication with the help of Ernest Hemingway, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Sylvia Beach and Harriet Shaw

50. Margaret Kelleher in *The Maamtrasna Murders, Language, Life and Death in Nineteenth century Ireland*, Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 2018, p. 212. Myles Joyce was only recently pardoned in 2018 by President Michael D. Higgins.

51. James Joyce, "L'Irlanda alla Sbarra" ("Ireland at the Bar") published in the Newspaper *Il Piccolo della Sera* in 1907.

Weaver is forever linked to the landmark federal obscenity trial of 1933, *United States v. One Book Called Ulysses* and Judge John Woosley's decision. For him, Joyce had attempted:

with astonishing success — to show how the screen of consciousness with its ever-shifting kaleidoscopic impressions carries, as it were on a plastic palimpsest, not only what is in the focus of each man's observation of the actual things about him, but also in a penumbral zone residua of past impressions, some recent and some drawn up by association from the domain of the subconscious. He shows how each of these impressions affects the life and behavior of the character which he is describing.<sup>52</sup>

Joyce and Friel crossed hermeneutic and epistemological borders. They explored the violence of justice, monolingualism v. multilingualism, family and homelessness, Eros and Thanatos. Their works enable artists to explore the hermeneutic borders of impermanence and mourning like Carol Wade who, through her project "Art of the Wake", seeks to weave Joyce's *Finnegans Wake's* wonderful tapestry of historical, social and cultural into illustrations.

### Mourning: Friel's hauntologic incursion into Joyce's kindred wandering mind

Mourning in both Joyce and Friel is pursued with strategies painstakingly constructed of lies and concealment and every variation on self-deception. For Derrida, "all ontologization, all semanticization—philosophical, hermeneutical, or psychoanalytical—finds itself caught up in this work of mourning but, as such, it does not yet think it; we are posing here the question of the spectre, to the spectre"[...].<sup>53</sup> Because the spectre irrupts in life when language has failed to heal the agony of mourning, and time and truth are out of joint. In *Ulysses*, James Joyce anatomized his chapters, each chapter being an organ and forming not a body but the maternal corpse of language. Buck Mulligan accuses Stephen Dedalus of killing his mother:

52. Kevin Birmingham, *The Most Dangerous Book, The Battle for James Joyce's Ulysses*, New York, Penguin, 2014, p. 328.

53. Derrida, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

You could have knelt down, damn it, Kinch, when your dying mother asked you... but to think of your mother begging you with her last breath to kneel down and pray for her. And you refused. There is something sinister in you.<sup>54</sup>

Language through failed mourning in *Ulysses* recreates the invisible mother, the womb, and the author becomes like Stephen Dedalus “himself his own father... made not begotten”, trying at the same time to erase, revive and survive the mother and the father with his writing, his alphabet becoming a cruel Artaudian flesh. Michael in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, like Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses*, escapes and invokes the harrowing spectres of his past, his aunts Agnes and Rose who died destitute in the streets of London and his Uncle Father Jack who died in Ireland twelve months after his return from Uganda. “Michael: [...] and when my time came to go away, in the selfish way of young men I was happy to escape.”<sup>55</sup> But Michael “standing downstage left in a pool of light”<sup>56</sup> is the one conjuring up the spectres of the past and longing to be “in touch with some otherness”.<sup>57</sup> And in *Ulysses* Stephen Dedalus as well conjures up a haunted stage with Shakespeare and Burbage playing *Hamlet*. “The play begins [...] It is the ghost, the king, a king and no king, and the player is Shakespeare who has studied Hamlet all these years of his life which were not vanity in order to play the part of the spectre”.<sup>58</sup> The theatre with its ghosts invades the narrative and in *Scylla and Charybdis*, Stephen Dedalus wonders with tingling energy “What is a ghost? [...] One who has faded into impalpability through death, through absence, through change of manners. Who is the ghost from *limbo patrum*, returning to the world that has forgotten him? Who is king Hamlet?”<sup>59</sup> Stephen Dedalus is haunted by his living father whom he wishes dead and his dead mother who lingers in his life. Stephen is at the same time Hamlet, his father the King but also Shakespeare and his son, Hamnet. The spectre is both the father and the son. “To a son he speaks, the son of his soul, the prince, young Hamlet and to the son of his body, Hamnet Shakespeare, who has died in Stratford that his namesake may live forever”.<sup>60</sup> The father-son relationship is “out of joint”, disarticulated, dislocated, dislodged, run down and both out of order and mad, and gives birth to a tormenting spectre. In Brian Friel’s play, *Living Quarters* (1977), the spectre of the father, Commandant Frank Butler, comes back from the dead after his suicide to endlessly live and relive his ordeal, the betrayal of his wife, Anna, with his son, Ben, helped by Sir, a kind of Human Hansard, who in a Pirandello manner directs the living and the

54. Joyce, *Ulysses*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.  
 55. Friel, *Dancing at Lughnasa*, *op. cit.*, p. 71.  
 56. *Ibid.*, p. 1.  
 57. *Ibid.*, p. 71.  
 58. Joyce, *Ulysses*, *op. cit.*, p. 241.  
 59. *Ibid.*, p. 240.  
 60. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

dead through the traumatic threshold of a distorted memory. Both Joyce and Friel were interpreters who listened to texts and deciphered their hidden meaning. Because to exist hermeneutically as a human being is to exist intertextually. They participated with mastery in the endless chain of listening that constitutes essential thinking. For Heidegger, “Each human being is in each instance in dialogue with its forbears and perhaps even more and in a more hidden manner with those who will come after it”.<sup>61</sup> Marvin Carlson in *The Haunted Stage* states that “the Noh play is surely the most intensely haunted of any of the world’s classic dramatic forms, since its central figure is often literally a ghost, who in the course of the play remembers and to some extent relives his story”<sup>62</sup>, but the Irish artists are also haunted and attracted to the voices from beyond the grave, always eager to rewrite, renegotiate, reshape the past in an everlasting cathartic quest for truth.

For Friel, “the true gift of theatre, the real benediction of all art is the ringing bell which reverberates quietly and persistently in the head long after the curtain comes down and the audience has gone home.”<sup>63</sup> And Joyce and Friel’s works reverberate quietly and persistently in the head with the beauty of mnemonic decay, loss and polymorphic dichotomies. Their interest in the post-Babelian power of language, in epistemological wanderers, in beyond-the-grave voices, speech patterns, music and cryptic meaning, was based upon their digging into the necessary uncertainty of inner exile and mourning, exposing themselves and at the same time hiding themselves behind each work. Seamus Heaney stated that Brian Friel was an experimental writer who was always involved in forging the conscience of the race when the playwright received the UCD Ulysses Medal in 2009. It was a clear reference to James Joyce and the last words of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: “O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.”<sup>64</sup> By “walking with spectres thro’ the midnight shade” to quote Regina Maria Roche in *Clermont*<sup>65</sup>, Joyce and Friel used language as a cunning and subversive trickster, a guide across boundaries. What will remain of Joyce’s and Friel’s hermeneutic, dauntless and haunted experimentation, is a cryptic, mesmerising and grovelling voice both defeating Thanatos and Harpocrates, the God of silence and “putting the afterlife in order”<sup>66</sup>, to quote Andrew Fitzsimons,

61. Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. P. Hertz, New York, Harper & Row, 1971, p. 40.
62. Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage, The Theatre as Memory Machine*, Ann Arbor, Michigan U.P., 2011, p. 20.
63. Murray (Ed.). *op. cit.*, p. 180.
64. Joyce, *A James Joyce Reader*, *op. cit.*, p. 526.
65. Regina Maria Roche, *Clermont*, ed. Nathalie Schroeder, Chicago, Valancourt, 2006, p. 4. Originally published in 1798. Quoting the poet Mark Akenside (1721-1770), “The Pleasures of Imagination,” Book the First (1744), lines 394-400.
66. Andrew Fitzsimons, *What the Sky Arranges, Poems made from the Tsurezuregusa of Kenko*, Tokyo, Isobar, 2013.

because “somewhere a high door opens”<sup>67</sup> and we are “silent, stared at, by night, by dawn”.<sup>68</sup> The spectres of Joyce and Friel set the darkness echoing by night and by dawn to trigger a collective response to the Irish talks of graves and worms and epitaphs.

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The Brian Friel Papers, National Library of Ireland, Dublin. Quotations allowed with the kind permission of the Estate of Brian Friel. I would like to warmly thank Simon Blakey from The Agency for allowing me access to the Brian Friel Papers in the National Library of Ireland.

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