Ireland: Spectres and Chimeras

*Mélanges en l'honneur
de Claude Fierobe*

edited by Sylvie Mɪᴋᴏᴡsᴋɪ, Marine Gᴀʟɪɴᴇ́
and Françoise Cᴀɴᴏɴ-Rᴏɢᴇʀ

IMAGINAIRES#23

Revue du Centre interdisciplinaire de recherches
sur les langues et la pensée CIRLEP ///
Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne

Directrice de publication ///
Yannick Bellenger-Morvan

IMAGINAIRES #23

Ireland: Spectres and Chimeras

edited by Sylvie MIKOWSKI, Marine GALINÉ
and Françoise CANON-ROGER

Dans ce numéro

General Introduction
Ireland: Spectres and Chimeras

SYLVIE MIKOWSKI
Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne

THIS 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.[1]

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 kopthsth. Remind you of the voice like the photograph reminds you of the face. Otherwise you couldn't remember the face after fifteen years, say.[2]

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 Portait of the Artist as a Young Man* calls "my dead king"[3]– 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 21st 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-kindle 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",[4] 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.[5]

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.[6] 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.[7] 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.[8]

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'.[9]

---

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".[10] 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'".[11]

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"[12]

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.[13]

To be traumatized, as Cathy Caruth has explained, is to be "possessed by an image or event located in the past".[14] 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".[15] 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*[16] 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 Hirsh, 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.[17]

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.[18]

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",[19] rendering visible what had previously been invisible,[20] 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".[21] 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".[22] 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".[23]

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?".[24] 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.[25]

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'".[26] 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".[27] 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 "synctactic 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".[28] 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"[29] 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".[30] 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".[31]

"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';[32] then by intertextuality, which Gérard Genette defines as "a relationship of copresence"[33] 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."[34]

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://irishgothichorror.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 disillusions, 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.[35]

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

Chapter One

From ghostly presence to haunting absence

Photography in Hugo Hamilton's *The Speckled People* and Dermot Bolger's *A Second Life*

HELEN PENET
Université de Lille

Abstract: This chapter studies the haunting nature of photography. In Hugo Hamilton's memoir, the photograph of the narrator's grandfather, the *Sailor in the Wardrobe*, provides the indisputable proof of the participation of Irish people in the British navy, to the horror of the narrator's father. Despite the truth value attached to it, the photograph is still, as are all photographs, a representation, and, therefore, ghostly. It is deliberately hidden, and its concealment haunts the narrator all the more. The narrator of Dermot Bolger's novel, *A Second Life*, is haunted by a photograph which was never taken – that of his birth mother, deliberately excluded, as were so many other women in 20th-century Ireland, after falling pregnant out of wedlock. After a car accident Sean Blake finds himself compelled to investigate his birth mother, for whom no photographic proof seems to exist. Returning to the convent where he believes his mother was held, he photographs the little remaining proof of the lives of the women and babies who passed through this place. The two narrators are haunted, one by a photograph which refuses to be forgotten, the other by a photographic blank which can only be prevented from haunting if it is remembered.

Keywords: Photography, Evidence, Representation, Haunting, Memory, Citizenry of photography

A RECENT exhibition organised by the LaM museum, Villeneuve d'Ascq,[1] entitled "Lesage, Simon, Crépin: Peintres, spirites et guérisseurs" brought together the works of three painters, all originally from the north of France, and all influenced by the

---

1.   LaM, Lille Métropole Musée d'Art moderne, d'art contemporain et d'art brut

spiritualist movement which originated in the United States in the middle of the 19ᵗʰ century, and which posited the continued presence of the deceased in the world of the living, and their communication with those they had left behind. Families who visited the exhibition were given the opportunity to have a ghostly family photograph taken, using a brief delay in the taking of the photograph during which family members changed position. The resulting photo showed each family member, and simultaneously their ghostly presence.

Like every reader of Hugo Hamilton's childhood memoir, I have been interested in the presence throughout both *The Speckled People* and the second volume of the memoir, of the photograph of the eponymous *Sailor in the Wardrobe*, Hugo Hamilton's paternal grandfather wearing a Royal Navy uniform. Hamilton's father finds this image so unacceptable that the photograph is buried in the wardrobe. What is intolerable to Hamilton's father relates to the truth value often attributed to photographs. In the early history of photography, this new technology was seen as providing the possibility of objective representation, and its intrinsic value came from its role as evidence, documentary proof that that which appeared in the photograph – at least before the advent of Photoshop – was indisputably there.

And yet the ghostly family photographs taken at the LaM museum shine another light on the nature of photography. A photograph, however objectively it represents its subject, is nonetheless still a representation, and the very business of representation – where one, present, element stands in for another, absent, element – is necessarily "ghostly" or spectral: that is, its sense necessarily depends on something that is not there.

In portrait photography, which we most often encounter in the form of family photography, we are more often than not reminded of the mortality (past or future) of the person or people represented. For Susan Sontag in *On Photography*,

> Photography is the inventory of mortality […] Photographs show people being so irrefutably there and at a specific age in their lives; group together people and things which a moment later have already disbanded […] Photographs state the innocence, the vulnerability of lives heading toward their own destruction, and this link between photography and death haunts all photographs of people.[2]

Susan Sontag suggests that not only are photography and death innately linked, but that this link is itself a source of haunting.

---

2. Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, London, Penguin, 1977, p. 70.

Roland Barthes goes one step further in this intertwining of photography and ghostliness when in *La Chambre claire*, he remarks that having one's own photograph taken is the moment when the subject of the photograph becomes object, and in so doing "*je deviens vraiment spectre*",[3] the logical conclusion of his subdivision of the taking of a photograph into three moments: "*faire* (Operator), *subir* (Spectrum), *regarder* (Spectator)".[4]

To return to the photograph at the heart of *The Speckled People*, the history of the Hamilton family as told by the child narrator is inhabited, almost haunted, by this photograph which was first discovered by the narrator and his siblings in the very early pages of the text:

> But then we found a big black and white picture of a sailor. He was dressed in a sailor's uniform with square, white lapels over his tunic and a rope lanyard hanging down over his chest. He had soft eyes and I liked the look of him. I wanted to be a sailor, even though I had no idea what this sailor was doing in my father's wardrobe.[5]

The discovery, and the mystery of its concealment, fascinates the young Hugo, as witnessed by numerous references to it throughout the subsequent pages of *The Speckled People*, and he gradually comes to understand why this photograph has been buried. Hugo Hamilton's father cannot accept that his own father had been a member of the Royal Navy, fighting for a king and a country whose spectral presence in Ireland his son refuses to acknowledge. While Hamilton's German maternal grandparents' photograph has pride of place above the mantelpiece in the "good room", his Irish grandparents are hidden away out of sight:

> There's a picture in the front room of Franz Kaiser and Berta Kaiser with her head leaning on his shoulder, both of them laughing with a big glass of wine on the table in front of them. There's no picture of John Hamilton or his wife Mary Frances, alone or together, hanging anywhere in our house. Our German grandparents are dead, but our Irish grandparents are dead and forgotten.[6]

However, for people who are dead and forgotten, they appear reluctant to remain so, and the very concealment of the photograph transforms it into a haunting presence, more than if their photograph had been displayed for all to see. In Derrida's theory of hauntology, "*le fantôme ne meurt jamais, il reste toujours à venir et à re-venir*".[7] It is through the forced absence of a photograph which would have testified to a past which

---

3.   Roland Barthes, *La Chambre claire. Note sur la photographie*, Paris, L'Étoile, 1980, p. 30.
4.   *Ibid.*, p. 22.
5.   Hugo Hamilton, *The Speckled People*, London, Harper Collins, 2003, p. 11.
6.   *Ibid.*, p. 12.
7.   Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, Paris, Galilée, 1993, p. 163.

will not go away, that the ghostly presence of Hamilton's paternal grandfather comes to haunt the entire Hamilton family. No questions will be answered about this mysterious ancestor, and he will be disappeared again on Hamilton's father's strict instructions:

> The picture of the sailor with the soft eyes disappeared and we never saw him again after that. Nobody mentioned him. I had no way of keeping him in my head because he was gone, back into the wardrobe where nobody could rescue him. We didn't know how to remember him, and like him, we lost our memory.[8]

Losing their memory of their paternal grandfather is precisely what Hugo Hamilton's father is hoping to achieve by hiding the photograph, because it represents a past which the father rejects in favour of a brighter future which he hopes to be instrumental in creating. But in *Family Frames: Photography, narrative and postmemory*, Marianne Hirsch describes how the haunting power of a photograph confirms the immutability of a past event, however much one might like to change it: "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."[9] As Hugo and his siblings never knew their paternal grandfather, their memory of him is mediated by the photograph and its concealment. In depriving his children of this understanding of their grandfather, Hugo Hamilton's father is attempting to prevent the photograph from doing what Barthes contends is the very nature of photography: "*cette chose un peu terrible qu'il y a dans toute photographie: le retour du mort*."[10] Returning to Marianne Hirsch, "Photographs in their enduring 'umbilical' connection to life are precisely the medium connecting first- and second-generation remembrance, memory and postmemory."[11] The sailor in the wardrobe is a ghostly presence which, try as he might, Hugo Hamilton's father cannot return to the spirit world from which it emerges.

While Hugo Hamilton's *The Speckled People* explores how one family can be haunted by a photograph which one might wish never to have been taken, another text explores how a never-taken photograph might have a corollary effect. One aspect of photography which has not yet been explored is its selective nature. The status of any single photograph does not go without saying: it is part of a wider context – it is, literally, a framed out-take of a larger surrounding, which begs a number of questions: why

8.   Hamilton, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
9.   Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, narrative and post-memory*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard U.P., 1997, p. 20.
10.   Barthes, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
11.   Hirsch, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

has it been taken, who has taken it, who has selected what to frame, who has decided that this particular picture is worthy of being taken?

The answers to these questions regarding the photograph of the sailor in the wardrobe may be relatively easily divined, as the sailor would undoubtedly have been considered a member of what Ariella Azoulay has termed "the citizenry of photography", the same cannot be said about all of the people and scenes which have not been photographed, which have not been deemed worthy of the interest of the eye of the photographer, and for which, therefore, there is no documentary evidence. Such people might include the women and children victims of what has been referred to as the architecture of containment which prevailed in Ireland throughout much of the 20th century, like the narrator's birth mother in Dermot Bolger's *A Second Life*.[12] These individuals were explicitly excluded from the citizenry of photography as discussed by Azoulay:

> Simply acknowledging that you and I live in a world in which photographs might be taken of us, and in which we might also take photographs, is sufficient requirement for entry into this citizenry. Photographs can be both an acknowledgement of the subject's existence as a citizen of photography and a demand to be recognised as a citizen in a political sense. […] her arguments […] apply to […] many other marginalised or oppressed groups.[13]

Bringing together the haunting presence of the sailor in the wardrobe in Hugo Hamilton's text with the ghostly absence of photographic evidence in *A Second Life* might appear spurious, were it not for the profession (none other than photographer) and recent near-death experience of the narrator. Sean Blake, the novel's narrator, survives a car crash in the early pages of the novel, but his heart briefly stopped beating, and the images which he believes he saw on this occasion will haunt him throughout his recovery, and will only be resolved by his transformation of those images into a series of photographs, which fill a gap – a haunting absence

---

12. *A Second Life* was written in 1993, the year the nuns of the High Park Magdalene laundry in Drumcondra applied for the exhumation of the women buried there. In an article published in *The Irish Times* when the revised edition of the novel was about to come out, Dermot Bolger makes the connection between Sean's mother's story and that of the Magdalene laundries: "On the day I entered the GPO in Dublin to post the original manuscript of this book, three survivors from that Magdalene laundry were seated outside the entrance, visible at last in a historical site of rebellion, defiantly collecting signatures for a petition to have a monument erected to those nameless woman whose ashes were in that mass grave. I stopped to sign the petition and to talk. I almost held aloft the Jiffy bag and was about to say, 'This book is about you and women like you. It tells one of your stories.' But wisely I said nothing: this book could not be about them, because nobody could tell the stories they uniquely owned". Dermot Bolger, "A novel idea: why it was time for a rewrite", *The Irish Times*, September 18, 2010 (https://www.irishtimes.com/1.652600).
13. Owen Clayton, "Barthes for Barthes' Sake?: Victorian Literature and Photography beyond Post-structuralism", *Literature Compass*, 13(4), 2016, p. 245-257 (doi:10.1111/lic3.12327), p. 253.

of photographs taken of his birth-mother and any number of other women who found themselves in the same situation as her.

The adopted son of a photographer, Sean became aware at an early age of the power of photography to irrefutably prove that something took place, but equally that it can be manipulated to conceal a different truth. On his tenth birthday, his parents told him that he had been adopted and, as if to soften the blow, simultaneously gifted him his first camera. He surprised himself with the violence of his reaction: suspended from school for stealing, he destroys the family photographs which he now sees as having dissimulated the truth about his existence:

> The old album was kept in the press downstairs. […] My life was laid out, dutifully recorded in black and white snaps. […] I had trusted photographs always, badgering my mother to take the album out and retrace each year of my life with her. I turned to the first page, where the first ever photograph of me was pasted in by itself. […] Now I knew that the photograph was lying. I was not her son. […] I felt no anger towards her or my father, it was the photograph which I blamed. It would never cheat again.[14]

Sean subsequently allowed himself to move on with his life, marrying and becoming a parent himself, and following in his father's professional footsteps as a photographer, aware of the power this profession gave him to provide evidence of a life about to disappear, as when he photographs the miners in the last coal mine in Ireland on their last day of work, recording this reality for posterity: "They worked that day as though the mine would last for ever, aware perhaps that soon these images would remain as the only proof that they had existed as a body of men. Their features slipped in and out of focus as I clicked so that they seemed just one more integral part of the mine."[15] While these photographs record the reality of the men's existence, the miners also become ghosts of themselves, slipping in and out of focus and becoming spectral elements of a deserted landscape.

Despite a slightly superstitious refusal to have his own photograph taken, Sean's photography bears unself-consciously witness to the reality he chooses to photograph – that which is deemed worthy of the photographer's attention. He also wipes from his mind any other family than that of his adoptive parents, not allowing himself to be haunted by questions about his birth-mother. It is this situation which changes during the brief moments when he himself is dead following a collision with a bus outside the Botanic Gardens in Dublin. During his recovery, while he is between

---

14. Dermot Bolger, *A Second Life*, London, Penguin, 1994, p. 57.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

consciousness and unconsciousness, he revisits episodes of his own life, and realises for the first time how little he knows about its inception:

> I think about that anonymous woman whose features may perhaps echo my own. […] Nobody would have been waiting for her in some isolated rural convent, except for the other girls in that same predicament. Mothers allowed to hold their children for a few seconds before the nuns took them away. […] But I find myself haunted by something I have not thought of for years: my total ignorance about my own birth.[16]

Haunted by this image, he is even more so by the image of an unknown male face, which he intuits to be that of his father: "that face which is haunting my sleep […] He is my real father, I think suddenly, the nameless bastard who ran away. I feel a quivering excitement, the exhilaration of release. I have him now, that figure I know nothing of, not even if he knew of my existence."[17] It is as if his brush with death functioned as a dark room allowing photographic images to be developed for the first time. During and after his recovery, Sean falls prey to "the obsession to place him", and repeatedly states that this face haunts his sleep ("But then what about that face which haunted my sleep?"[18], "I know that face now which has haunted me since the accident"[19]). It is only much later that he realises that the face of his father is not that which truly haunts him: "That was what I had been doing, burying myself away, playing at ghost-hunting to avoid risking the pain of my real search. *Let the dead take care of the dead. Find her while you can.*"[20]

Through a series of spectral parallelisms, the novel brings Sean closer and closer to an encounter with his birth-mother Elizabeth Wilkins, née Sweeney, originally from Dunross in the Slieve Bloom mountains, living in Coventry, England at the time of Sean's accident. Elizabeth is woken one morning by the sound of a car crash, only to discover that if a crash had taken place, it had done so in some ghostly part of her mind:

> The street was still, yet she knew that she had heard a crash […] It had been something real, beyond this house, a noise which had cut into her. […] She walked on, her hair blown by the slipstream of the trucks, searching to find the crash. When the police discovered her that evening, walking along the motorway in her slippers, the woman constable wrote down the only words she could discern from

---

16.   *Ibid.*, p. 9.
17.   *Ibid.*, p. 10.
18.   *Ibid.*, p. 44.
19.   *Ibid.*, p. 62.
20.   *Ibid.*, p. 220.

> her mumbling: It was him. I know it was Paudi. My baby's dead and he'll never find me now.[21]

Elizabeth's intuition was right – Sean would not find her before her death, but his research does bring him into contact with his aunt Ellen, his mother's younger sister, who meets with him shortly after her sister's death, only to discover that a ghostly connection had allowed Elizabeth some awareness of her lost son's life:

> 'Since I started this obsession about finding my real mother, […] ever since I survived an accident last year.'
> Ellen put her cup down.
> 'Was it between Christmas and New Year?' she asked.
> Paudi sat back. His face was white. He didn't need to answer her.
> 'Lizzy was woken up one of those mornings,' Ellen said. 'She claimed it was by the noise of a crash.'[22]

So while some ghostly connection between mother and son had never been severed, Elizabeth herself had been erased from history. This deletion from history was made apparent to her by her husband, as can be seen through this anecdote:

> The Sunday after they were married he had shown her the same photograph printed twice in the Sunday Express. It was of Joseph Stalin with a group of Soviet generals. 'Look,' he said, 'how simple it is to make somebody vanish.' In the second copy of the photograph one of the generals had been airbrushed out and a pillar superimposed in his place. 'Poor blighter's either shot by now or else digging up the salt for our dinner.'[23][…] She thought of all the homes in Dunross, the photographs of the eleven girls who made their confirmation in the 1948 class with a space which had appeared in the centre; and how in the photograph, cut from the Nationalist and framed above the teacher's desk in the classroom with the three high windows, the Laois county cup for camogie was left hanging in midair now that the Dunross captain in her green skirt had vanished.[24]

Lizzie sees how Irish society functioned in a similar way to that of Stalinist Russia and how she had been removed from photographs, removing any proof of her existence, showing how unmarried mothers were

---

21. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 233-234.
23. No doubt a reference to the photo known as that of the "vanishing commissar" where Nikolai Yezhov, who had been head of the secret police during Stalin's Great Purge has been removed subsequent to his execution. (1940). This makes Lizzie think of her own situation, as the end of quotation shows.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 21-22.

an inconvenient truth whose presence was no longer desirable, depriving them of their "citizenry of photography". It is this haunting absence of photographic evidence which lies at the heart of Sean/Paudi's search for the truth. This search takes him to St. Martha's in County Mayo, now a reputed girl's school, proud to display the achievements of its past pupils: "There were framed photographs of former students receiving awards,"[25] but no evidence, photographic or otherwise, of the role played by this convent and many others at the time of Sean/Paudi's birth. His anger boils over as he found that he

> […] was shouting. 'Padraig Sweeney. That's my name in those filing cabinets over there, or wherever else you've stacked your dirty linen. I'm another of your past pupils, so why don't you stick my fucking photograph up on your wall there? […] What about a photograph of my mother and all the other girls who were locked behind these gates?[26]

Sean feels the need to fill the haunting absence of photographic evidence of his mother's life, and goes in search of any visual proof of the convent's past life which he could photograph:

> […] the dump which the girls had spoken of. It was a mile beyond the convent. I had gone past before I realized what it was. […] All that was left were bits of broken beds, the smashed wooden bars of cots and scraps of loose debris so discoloured that it was hard to know what they had once been. There were six rolls of film in the camera bag. My hands were covered with nettle stings by the time I had shot my way through them. […] I felt more calmed.[27]

Back in his studio, Sean works on the photographs until he is happy with them:

> These were an elegy for the forgotten, the only monument to my true past which I could leave. But they were also my way of coming to terms with that past. For long periods I had just sat and cried for the mother I had lost, or else had been engulfed by the most intense of angers. Then the impersonal photographer would take over again, finding the shape in the image, coaxing it to life. In those long hours alone in that darkroom I had gradually allowed myself to remember and to accept.[28]

---

25.   *Ibid.*, p. 255.
26.   *Ibid.*, p. 256.
27.   *Ibid.*, p. 264.
28.   *Ibid.*, p. 300.

Marianne Hirsch spoke of photographs having an "enduring 'umbilical' connection to life", allowing for the connection between the generations. This link between Elizabeth Sweeney, Paudi's mother, and Sean Blake, Lizzie's son, had been severed, as no photograph had ever recorded it. It was the absence of photographic proof of their connection which had haunted both Lizzie and Sean, and which haunts Lizzie until the end: "She knew that she had to decide whether to allow herself to be dead or to try and pull herself back down into the pain. He had never found her. Already everything else in her life seemed distant, but that yearning remained, trapping her in the tunnel between two worlds."[29] In the final haunting of the novel, Lizzie allows herself to escape this in-between state by accepting death, as she foresees the scattering of her ashes at the graveyard in Dunross organised by Sean and her sister Ellen, the yearning finally coming to an end, and Sean finally genuinely feeling this connection with her: "And the funny thing was that it seemed like I could almost feel my mother's presence there, for the first time in my life, as we left the gravel path and began to make our way carefully among the graves."[30]

The two texts discussed here explore haunting through the medium of photography – in the one instance, a photograph whose ghostly presence refuses to be forgotten, and in the other, a photographic blank which haunts by its absence and can only be prevented from haunting by being remembered.

Bibliography

Barthes, Roland, *La Chambre claire. Note sur la photographie*, Paris, L'Étoile, 1980.

Bolger, Dermot, "A novel idea: why it was time for a rewrite", *The Irish Times*, September 18, 2010 (https://www.irishtimes.com/1.652600).

———, *A Second Life*, London, Penguin, 1994.

Clayton, Owen, "Barthes for Barthes' Sake?: Victorian Literature and Photography beyond Post-structuralism", *Literature Compass*, 13(4), 2016, p. 245-257 (doi:10.1111/lic3.12327).

Derrida, Jacques, *Spectres de Marx*. Paris, Galilée, 1993.

Hamilton, Hugo, *The Speckled People*, London, Harper Collins, 2003.

Hirsch, Marianne, *Family Frames: Photography, narrative and post-memory*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard U.P., 1997.

Sontag, Susan, *On Photography*, London, Penguin, 1977.

---

29.   *Ibid*., p. 308.
30.   *Ibid*., p. 311.

Chapter two
"A light in the path to us women of today"

Constance Markievicz's forgotten heroines of the past

Claire Dubois
Université de Lille

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to study how Constance Markievicz used the stories of Irish heroines to advocate gender equality and encourage women to take an active part in the struggle for Irish independence as well as their own emancipation in the years leading up to the Easter Rising and its aftermath. Using articles, drawings, and caricatures by Markievicz, I wish to show how she addressed the issues of womanhood and nationhood and provided role models for a new generation of advanced nationalists including herself. Going against the representation of Ireland as a nation of fathers and sons only and recovering female efforts in the 1798 rising, she claimed the right for Irish women to become political actors and revolutionaries.

Keywords: Ireland, Twentieth century, Nationalism, Feminism, Revolution, Markievicz

IN an article published in December 2018 in the *Irish Times*, Lauren Arrington, author of Markievicz's latest biography *Revolutionary Lives: Constance and Casimir Markievicz*, summed up the countess's life saying she "devoted herself to fighting for Irish freedom, women's rights and the poor", adding later that throughout her life "her rhetoric may have changed, but the underpinning ideas were constant".[1] Arrington's article corrects simplistic depictions of Countess Markievicz as revolutionary heroine or anti-Treaty hysteric. In this paper I intend to study articles, drawings and caricatures by Constance Markievicz published in the wake of, during and in the aftermath of the revolutionary

---

1. Lauren Arrington, "Constance Markievicz, the divisive revolutionary heroine", *The Irish Times*, 10 December 2018 (https://www.irishtimes.com/1.3710763).

period (1913-1923) that addressed the issues of womanhood and nation-hood in Ireland.

In the 1890s while studying art at the Slade School in London, Constance Markievicz – then Gore-Booth – had been involved in the struggle for women's suffrage.[2] Back in Ireland, she was elected as president of the North Sligo Women's Suffrage Association in 1896. Studying at the Académie Julian in Paris, she met her husband Casimir Markievicz, a Polish count. After their marriage, she moved to Dublin with him in 1903. There she became the member of various artistic and literary circles and met the leading figures of the Gaelic League. In 1908 she became politically active by joining Sinn Féin and Inghinidhe na hÉireann, a woman's revolutionary movement founded by Maud Gonne. Radical from the start of her political career, in 1909 Markievicz co-founded with Bulmer Hobson Na Fianna Éireann, a paramilitary nationalist organisation that instructed young men to use firearms. Some of these youths tried to eject her and Helena Molony from the first meeting organised on the grounds that this was a physical force organisation and that there was no place for women.[3] Despite widespread opposition to the involvement of women in the national struggle,[4] Markievicz is known for taking part in the fighting dressed in her Irish Citizen Army uniform during the 1916 Easter Rising.[5] She became a leading figure in Irish republicanism but she very early had a divisive legacy. Hanna Sheehy Skeffington reacted strongly to Éamon de Valera's speech at the unveiling of a bust of Constance Markievicz in Saint Stephen's Green in July 1932, excoriating him for painting "the image of a chocolate-box heroine".[6] In her witness statement to the Bureau of Military History, Helena Molony expressed concerns that Markievicz was "in great danger of being misunderstood" following the publication of her biography by Séan Ó Faoláin in 1934.[7] Her whole political career illustrates the extreme reactions that she inspired, between fascination for her

2.   Eva Gore-Booth met British suffragist Esther Roper in 1896. Both Eva and Constance became involved in founding a local branch of the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association. See Sonja Tiernan, *Eva Gore-Booth: An Image of Such Politics*, Manchester, Manchester U.P., 2012, p. 28-44. For the links between the sisters' activism and their suffrage politics, see Lauren Arrington, "Liberté, égalité, sororité: the poetics of suffrage in the work of Eva Gore-Booth and Constance Markievicz", *Irish Women's Writing 1878-1922*, Anna Pilz & Whitney Standlee (Eds.), Manchester, Manchester U.P., 2016, p. 209-226.
3.   Charles Townshend, *Easter 1916: the Irish Rebellion*, London, Penguin, p. 21-22.
4.   Pašeta shows however that, contrary to the Irish Parliamentary Party, Sinn Féin supported women's suffrage and opened its executive positions to women. See Senia Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women 1900-1918*, Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., 2013 (doi:10.1017/CBO9781107256316), p. 105.
5.   Joseph MacKenna, *Guerilla Warfare in the Irish War of Independence 1919-1921*, Jefferson, McFarland, 2014, p. 112.
6.   Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, "Constance Markievicz – What She Stood For", *An Phoblacht*, 16 July 1932.
7.   Helena Molony, BMH.WS0391, p. 53.

idealism and her radical politics and rejection of her militancy in a judge-mental way.[8]

Moving within this mixed legacy, I would like to study how Markievicz used the stories of Irish heroines to advocate gender equality and encourage women to take an active part in the national struggle. Trying to provide role models for a new generation of advanced nationalist women in the years leading up to the Easter Rising and in its aftermath, Markievicz wrote from a different perspective than the authorised one and dispelled the romance surrounding the involvement of women in the 1798 rising, thus acting against Jacques Rancière's idea of "consensus" as being "the reduction of the various 'peoples' into a single people identical with the count of a population and its parts, of the interests of a global community and its parts".[9] Markievicz championed women's militancy, questioning the representation of Ireland as "a nation of fathers and sons",[10] rendering visible what had previously been invisible,[11] i.e. women's involvement in the struggle for Irish freedom.

Markievicz linked the cause of Ireland and the cause of gender equality from her first public speeches and publications. She began writing for *Bean na hÉreiann* (Woman of Ireland), the nationalist woman's periodical founded by Helena Molony in 1908. The monthly developed as a platform for women wishing to participate in the struggle for Irish freedom but also in the feminist and socialist movements:[12] "advocating militancy, separatism and feminism".[13] Looking back on the paper that she founded, Helena Molony said: "It was a funny hotch-potch of blood and thunder, high-thinking and homemade bread".[14] For these women, "the time had come when the point of view of women on the many aspects of Social and National life, had to be expressed definitely". They also considered Griffith's Sinn Féin was too moderate and wished "a complete separation from England" and the "achievement of National Freedom by the force of arms if necessary".[15] Markievicz's monthly column, "The Woman With a Garden", ran from February 1909 to March 1910. Some critics have noted how in this column Markievicz shifted from insurgency to

8.   For developments on this idea, see Lauren Arrington, *Revolutionary Lives: Constance and Casimir Markievicz*, Princeton, Princeton U.P., 2015 (https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvc776nf), p. 265-266 and Karen Steele, *Women, Press and Politics during the Irish Revival*, Syracuse, Syracuse U.P., 2007, p. 201-202.
9.   Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, trans. Steven Corcoran, Cambridge/Malden, Polity, 2009, p. 115.
10. Declan Kiberd, "Fathers and Sons", *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*, London, Vintage, 1996.
11. Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. and intro. Stephen Corcoran, London, Bloomsbury, p. 37-39.
12. Steele, *op. cit.*, p. 110.
13. Helena Molony as quoted by R.M., Fox, *Rebel Irishwomen*, Dublin, Talbot, 1935, p. 121.
14. Helena Molony, BMH.WS0391, p. 10. Pašeta remarks that after a while the monthly had become exclusively radical and the fashion advice and the cookery notes had disappeared. See Pašeta, *op. cit.*, p. 98-99; See also Steele, *op. cit.*, p. 122.
15. Helena Molony, BMH. WS0391, p. 7-8.

domesticity in a sometimes-disarming way and how she used the allegory of the garden as an opportunity for a radical message.[16] Karen Steele considers Markievicz's gardening column as innovative in so far as it "allegorically described how readers could resist domesticity *and* imperialism through that most visible icon of the Ascendancy class, the garden".[17] Using a pen name inspired by Irish mythology, Armid,[18] Markievicz sought, through her gardening advice, to enlist women to the cause of insurgency and advocate for their greater representation in the nationalist movement. Using a parodying and outrageous tone, Markievicz seems to have avoided censorship by playing with hidden meanings and subversive messages.

The gardening column was organized in two parts with an introduction drawing parallels with Irish or European politics while the second part gave seemingly harmless gardening advice. The garden thus became the occasion to teach the readers lessons in history and economics. In November 1909, Markievicz reminded the readers of "the importance of buying Irish-grown roses", as "cheap foreign roses are more liable to disease, smaller and altogether less satisfactory than their Irish-grown sisters".[19] That practical advice is close to the political advice from Sinn Féin and the buy Irish campaigns. Markievicz used the month the column was published in together with the seasonal plants as opportunities to draw political and historical parallels with the Irish or European past and present. A December hurricane "tells us of that wild Christmas Eve long ago, when Red Hugh and the two other lads, slipped down the Castle wall to face the bitter gale and the blinding snow that lay between them and the work they had to do for Ireland",[20] while the oak tree reminds Markievicz of "Ireland's sister in misfortune, Poland, of which it is the emblem".[21] Many columns used stories from the Irish past to inspire present-day women to actively engage in the struggle for freedom.

As *Bean na hÉireann* was becoming more and more militant, the articles linked to domesticity gradually disappeared to give way to "clear thinking on more important national issues".[22] It became clear with the publication of "Physical Force" in September and October 1909 that the editors of the journal encouraged women to join the men in an armed revolution.[23] Markievicz's gardening column was retained by the editors,

16. See Kiberd, *op. cit.*, p. 399, C.L. Innes, *Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society 1880-1935*, Hampstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993, p. 42-43,
17. See Steele, *op. cit.*, p. 117.
18. In Irish mythology, Airmid was one of the Tuatha Dé Danann. She was the goddess of healing and herbs.
19. Armid, "The Woman with a Garden", *Bean na hÉireann*, November 1909, p. 7.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
22. Helena Molony, *Bean na hÉireann*, November 1909, p. 3.
23. "Physical Force", *Bean na hÉireann*, September 1909, p. 3-5 and October 1909, p. 3-4.

pointing at its radical potential. In October 1909, Markievicz suggested that political activism required hard work and sacrifice:

> I thought that Ireland – like the garden – lies sleeping and resting, recouping her vital powers for the struggle that will come, and how it is our duty to till and to dig and do all that which lies in our power to aid the tender plant of nationality in its struggle for existence, and to protect and arm it in the fight that is before it against the cruel frosts, the cold winds and bitter blight of English rule and occupation that has laid it broken and withered on the ground for so long.[24]

The passage clearly addresses women and their traditional activities with the use of gendered language like "the tender plant of nationality". But to this is juxtaposed a call to "arm [Ireland] in the fight […] against […] the bitter blight of English rule" that renders this gardening advice radical and subversive.

In June 1909, Markievicz even made a parallel between crushing slugs and fighting Ireland's enemies:

> It is very unpleasant work killing slugs and snails, but let us not be daunted. A good nationalist should look upon slugs in a garden much in the same way as she looks on the English in Ireland, and only regret that she cannot crush the nation's enemies with the same ease that she can the garden's, with just one tread of her fairy foot.[25]

While still using gendered language ("fairy foot"), the column makes very clear how grim the war can be with the use of graphic images. Column after column, Markievicz made female militancy more acceptable and tried to accustom the readers to the perspective of women taking arms in an armed insurrection. In July 1909, she reminded the readers of the sacrifices that the cause of Ireland made necessary, making a parallel between the red roses she admired in the garden and the blood shed during the 1798 rebellion: "the petals of Roisin Dubh lay as red and as strange then on the green hillsides of Wexford – scattered a crimson shedding over the land from little Arklow to the shore of Lough Foyle, from the sea-bounds of the Atlantic to among the dusty streets of Dublin".[26] Yet she considered that the blood of Ireland's martyrs "shall not have been shed in vain" and women should engage in militant activity and challenge the idea that they should be excluded from the fight.[27]

---

24. Armid, "The Woman With a Garden", *Bean na hÉireann*, October 1909, p. 12.
25. Armid, "The Woman With a Garden", *Bean na hÉireann*, June 1909, p. 11.
26. Amid, "The Woman With a Garden", *Bean na hÉireann*, July 1909, p. 12.
27. Benton shows that the republican ethic excluded women "from the arms-bearing citizenry" and "placed them as members of the private household which the male citizen must protect". See Sarah Benton, "Women Disarmed: The Militarization of Politics in Ireland 1913-1923",

While giving them gardening advice, Markievicz metaphorically encouraged women to engage in different militant activities either in broad daylight or covertly: "You must creep about in the dusk, with a lamp, and catch [slugs] in the act; or make traps by placing little heaps of bran near the plants",[28] and do whatever was necessary for them to qualify for citizenship.[29]

Writing at a time when feminist activists were far from encouraging women to take arms, Markievicz tried to link nationalism and feminism, considering that women were the victims of a double bind: colonial and patriarchal domination.[30] This echoed James Connolly's anti-imperialism and his perception that socialism and feminism were indivisible. For both Connolly and Markievicz the inequalities produced by the system were reproduced within the family.[31]

Markievicz made this clear in a lecture entitled "Women, Ideals and the Nation" that she delivered to the Students' National Literary Society in Dublin in 1909 and that was partly reproduced in *Bean na hÉireann* in November 1909. In this lecture she addressed "the rising young women of Ireland",[32] encouraging them to take arms in the fight both for Irish freedom and their own emancipation. Opposing the "chains" weighing down women in the old world to the "fresh ideas, fresh energies" brought by this new generation she was addressing, Markievicz explicitly called them to arms:

> Arm yourselves with weapons to fight your nation's cause. Arm your souls with noble and free ideas. Arm your minds with the histories and memories of your country and her martyrs, her language, and a knowledge of her arts, and her industries. And if in your day the call should come for your body to arm, do not shirk that either.[33]

These lines show Markievicz believed in women's intellectual qualities, asking them to prepare for the struggle to come through physical training but also intellectual reflection and historical study. Her view of

---

Feminist Review, 50 (The Irish Issue: The British Question), Summer 1995, p. 148-172 (doi:10.2307/1395497), p. 161.

28. Armid, "The Woman With a Garden", *Bean na hÉireann*, June 1909, p. 10-11.

29. Sarah Benton argues that "the readiness to bear arms for the state was the qualification *par excellence* for citizenship". The men of Ireland were expected to "make the republic". See Sarah Benton, art. cit., p. 155.

30. Markievicz, "To Miss Nora Cassidy", *Bean na hÉireann*, June 1909, p. 14.

31. Maria-Daniela Dick, Kirsty Lusk & Willy Maley, "'The Agitator's Wife' (1894): the story behind James Connolly's lost play?", *Irish Studies Review*, 27(1), 2019, p. 1-21 (doi:10.1080/09670882.2018.1558473), p. 10.

32. Constance Markievicz, *A Call to the Women of Ireland*, Dublin, Fergus O'Connor, 1918, p. 3. Parts of the lecture were reproduced in *Bean na hÉireann* in April 1909 and then it was published under the title *Women, Ideals and the Nation* by Inghinidhe na hÉireann (Dublin, The Tower Press, 1909) and re-published by Cuman na mBan in 1918.

33. Markievicz, *A Call, op. cit.* p. 16.

militancy was therefore much more encompassing than just the readiness to use physical force[34] and she considered women to be an asset in the fashioning of the new Irish nation: "Women, from having till very recently stood so far removed from all politics, should be able to formulate a much clearer and more incisive view of the political situation than men".[35]

To encourage women to enlist, Markievicz provided examples and role models for her audience by describing in a gender-neutral vocabulary how women in Russia and Poland "work as comrades, shoulder to shoulder with their men"[36] to overthrow tyrannical and unjust governments. The example of Poland – that Markievicz also used in her *Bean na hÉireann* column "The Woman With a Garden" in November 1909 – allowed her to put the Irish situation in a larger European context and to build "the international solidarity of a nationalist sisterhood". Poland could indeed prove to be a powerful example for Irishwomen in their attempt to resist British oppression, especially after the Polish revolution in 1905 and as Poland's resistance to Russian rule was growing.[37]

By evoking "the magnificent legacy of Maeve, Fleas, Macha and their other great fighting ancestors"[38] and the role of women fighting during the 1798 rising or contributing to the *Nation* newspaper in the 1840s, Markievicz presented Irishwomen as having a revolutionary spirit inherited from powerful historical women but also lesser-known revolutionary women. All the women she mentioned found ways of expressing themselves in the public sphere, fighting for Ireland's freedom in different contexts, either rhetorically or physically. Markievicz also regretted the lack of involvement of women who "have been content to remain at home quietly, and leave all the fighting and striving to the men",[39] insisting several times on the idea that even if women were enslaved, they should find individual ways of fighting for their nation. Markievicz thus rejected the idea that women could only serve their country in the domestic sphere. She also blamed the women who brought up their daughters in "English ways" for "allowing the Irish situation to deteriorate" and acknowledging the perception of British culture as superior.[40]

She closely linked nationalism and feminism, dismissing both the nationalism that did not support gender equality, "Fix your minds on the ideal of Ireland free, with her women enjoying the full rights of citizenship

---

34. See Steele, *op. cit.*, p. 113.
35. Markievicz, *A Call*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
37. Anita Stepien, "'Ireland's Sister in Misfortune, Poland': Polish Militant Suffrage and its Echoes in Ireland", *Polish and Irish Stuggles for Self-Determination: Living Near Dragons*, Galia Chimiak & Bozeana Cierlik (Eds.), Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars, 2020, p. 91-112, p. 94, p. 109.
38. Markievicz, *A Call, op. cit.*, p. 5.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

in their own nation",[41] and the suffrage societies that failed to promote national freedom: "A Free Ireland with No Sex Disabilities in her constitution should be the motto of all Nationalist women".[42] Markievicz called women for active participation using a lot of imperative forms and her emphasis on some words was marked with capital letters in the pamphlet that was published after the lecture was given. Moving beyond abstract rhetoric, she provided examples of militancy that could link nationalism and feminism:

> If the women of Ireland would organize the movement for buying Irish goods more, they might do a great deal to help their country. If they would make it the fashion to dress in Irish clothes, feed on Irish food – in this as in everything, LIVE REALLY IRISH LIVES, they would be doing something great, and don't let our clever Irish colleens rest content with doing this individually, but let them go out and speak publicly about it, form leagues, of which "No English Goods" is the war-cry. Let them talk and talk, publicly and privately, never minding how they bore people – till not even one of the peasants in the wilds of Galway but has heard and approved of the movement.[43]

This paragraph encourages women to gather and express their ideas in the public sphere. It also gives practical advice on the boycott of foreign goods, following Sinn Féin's economic policy, in the context of projected laws that Markievicz identifies as detrimental to Ireland, the Liberals' Land Tax and the Conservatives' Tariff Reform.[44] *Bean na hÉireann*, in which Markievicz's lecture was printed, only advertised Irish manufacturers and their products to encourage the Irish economy. For Markievicz, it was clear that if women contributed to the liberation of their nation, by taking arms or by other means, they would take in charge their own destiny.

In *Women, Ideals and the Nation*, Markievicz only shortly mentioned the Gaelic past with its great fighting heroines and its magnificent legacy. She came back to this glorious past in a speech given at a meeting of the Irish Women's Franchise League on 12 October 1915 that was printed in the *Irish Citizen* under the title "The Future of Irish Women" on 23 October 1915, underlining the fact the women of her times were the victims of oppression.

---

41.   *Ibid.*, p. 7.
42.   *Ibid.*, p. 6.
43.   *Ibid.*, p. 11.
44.   *Ibid.*, p. 9.

> Ancient Ireland bred warrior women, and women played a heroic part in those days. Today we are in danger of being civilized by men out of existence. What distinguished Ireland chiefly of old was the number of women who held their own against the world, who owned no allegiance to any man, who were super-women.[45]

She went on to lament the disappearance of those "great fighting women", considering the suffragettes as the only heiresses of that "spirit". Contrary to what cultural nationalists like Maud Gonne would do, Markievicz did not wish to encourage women's participation in the movement for the preservation of Gaelic culture only[46] but rather to foster their militancy by giving them examples of women who took arms. In the article, the idea that women were silenced or discarded by men because of their militancy is tackled with the example of the groundbreaking Ladies Land League (1880-81) that took over the activities of the Land League while its main leaders were imprisoned, was asked to disband and badly treated as soon as the men were released.[47] Analyzing this episode, Markievicz declared that the women had not been given credit for their achievements and had even been written out of history because they "started to do the militant things the men only threatened and talked of". Focusing on the representation of women in the Irish poetic tradition, she further criticized the attitude of male nationalists who objectified women thus denying them the right to active participation in the national struggle. She dismissed Thomas Moore[48] whose poetry gave "a very low idea of woman to worship", that of a passive and submissive being: "she is very like the lap dog which, when it meets a larger animal, rolls over on its back, turns up its toes and looks pathetic". Broadening her criticism, she included the members of Cumman na mBan who "are there chiefly to collect funds for the men to spend", adding that they "demoralize women, set them up in different camps, and deprive them of all initiative and independence". Markievicz rather advised women to move away from the traditional representations and the secondary role ascribed to them: "dress suitably in short skirts and strong boots, leave your jewels and gold wands in the bank and buy a revolver". She suggested women should trust themselves and move out of the domestic space. For her imminent war would "help to do this by shaking women out of old grooves and forcing responsibilities on them".

In this speech that demanded more active involvement from women, Markievicz briefly alluded to the participation of women in the

---

45.   Constance Markievicz, "The Future of Irishwomen", *Irish Citizen*, 23 October 1915.
46.   Maud Gonne, "Maedh", *United Irishman*, 5 October 1901.
47.   See Margaret Ward, "Gendering the Union: Imperial Feminism and the Ladies' Land League", *Women's History Review*, 10(1), 2001, p. 71-92 (doi:10.1080/09612020100200279).
48.   Thomas Moore was the author of *Irish Melodies* and one of the founders of the *Nation* nationalist newspaper.

1798 rebellion, only saying that "little is known of them" but "their roles seem to have been passive". The "women of '98" had indeed essentially been depicted through their relationships with the men, as United Irish widows – Mathilda Tone, wife of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Pamela, wife of Edward Fitzgerald and Sarah Curran, lover of Robert Emmet. Markievicz regretted the lack of inspiration they could provide, dismissing "weak Sarah Curran, who drifted to madness on Emmet's death, and married one of his bitter foes" and therefore accepting the received representation of these women.[49] Yet, from November 1915, just a few weeks later, she published in the *Irish Citizen* a five-part historical column dedicated to them and entitled "The Women of '98".[50] As the title suggests, Markievicz not only perpetuated the masculine heroic tradition of 1798 but recovered and re-appropriated the female revolutionary efforts in the rising, writing "stories concerning exclusions and invisibilities", in other words writing "ghost stories" to quote Avery Gordon.[51]

The beginning of the first article alludes to the recovery task that Markievicz undertook as she thought it would have been difficult to "gather sufficient material among the histories and memoirs" while the last one argues that her "trouble has been to know what to select, compress or leave out".[52] Markievicz thus hinted at the fact that the stories of female involvement in 1798 may have been intentionally left out: "but all through the record of the struggle for independence allusions to deeds done by women and girls drift, giving us an idea of the place taken by the women of Ireland in the national struggle" and later "we get glimpses of them through the smoke of their burning homesteads, and the dust and din of the battlefields".[53] For Caulfield, the use of words like "allusions", "drift", "idea" and "glimpses" suggest female efforts were overshadowed in a conservative social context. Markievicz also made a parallel between the social conservatism of the eighteenth century and that of her own times, insisting on the suffering of women, even if she chose to explicitly blame the Penal Laws rather than the gender norms that discarded female militancy.[54]

Tracing the history of female involvement in the 1798 rising, Markievicz provided an alternative national narrative giving women a

49. Nineteenth-century writers such as Thomas Moore and R. R. Madden had indeed depicted the involvement of the United Irishwomen as stemming entirely from the men and suggesting they were not engaged in the republican cause.
50. Constance Markievicz, "The Women of '98", *Irish Citizen*, 6 November 1915, "The Women of Ninety-Eight", *Irish Citizen*, 13 November 1915, 20 November 1915, 27 November, 4 December 1915.
51. Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Minneapolis, Minnesota U.P., 2008, p. 17.
52. Markievicz, "The Women of '98", *op. cit*., 6 November 1915 and 4 December 1915.
53. *Ibid.*, 6 November 1915.
54. Mary Caulfield, "Whenever the Tale of '98 is Told: Constance Markievicz, the National Memory and The Women of Ninety-Eight", *Ireland, Memory and the Historical Imagination*, Mary Caulfield (Ed.), London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 87-100, p. 89-90.

place in this nationalist and republican landmark, and thus trying to legitimize women's participation in the national struggle as a whole, past and present. In this counter-narrative, she assumed the role of a story-teller, to revise the traditional male-dominated account and tell the "tales" of ordinary women who chose roles that she described as either "passive" or "active", wishing their stories "[would] be remembered in song and history whenever the tale of '98 is told".[55] In a dramatic tone, she uncovered efforts by women who were either lesser-known heroines and activists like Molly Weston, Mary Doyle, Betsy Grey and Mary McCracken, or were ordinary women who chose to have supportive roles as nurses or messengers. Markievicz considered Molly Weston who joined the insurgents at Tara dressed in a green uniform or Betsy Grey who was short during the Ulster Rebellion to be of "heroic greatness". All the stories she told describe the sufferings and heroism of these women who provide role models for female activism, implying there could be many different forms of militancy and talents to emulate: "a light in the path to us women of today".[56] Markievicz celebrated both active and passive resistance writing for instance: "one way in which the women of '98 were able to do good service to their country was by carrying, by word of mouth, messages too dangerous to be trusted to paper and ink".[57] She thus endeavoured to "redefine revolution and the role of the revolutionary to include women as political actors".[58] Markievicz's "Women of '98" provide both a nationalist and a feminist approach to '98, constructing a women's national narrative and striving to incorporate it in collective memory, to act against the process of female exclusion from the national struggle. A few years later, after some women took part in the Easter Rising[59] and the War of Independence, Markievicz remarked that as many women were brought in political activity and the public sphere because of the national struggle, the social conservatism of Irish life started being questioned in a more pressing way, much to the dismay of a part of the political actors. When debating in the Dáil on 2 March 1922 on "Irishwomen and the Franchise", Markievicz alluded to Arthur Griffith's concern that votes for women would benefit the anti-treaty side and underlined the fact that some "men of the IRA" were ready to "turn down the girls who stood by the men in the days of the fight for freedom". She blamed the Treatyites for not doing "justice to these young women and young girls who took a man's part in

55. Markievicz, "The Women of '98", *op. cit.*, 6 November 1915.
56. *Ibid.*, 16 November 1915.
57. *Ibid.*, 4 December 1915.
58. Kristine Byron, "The Woman with a Garden (and a Gun): Constance Markievicz", *Irish Studies: Geographies and Genders*, Marti D. Lee and Ed Madden (Eds.), Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars, 2008 p. 81–91, p. 83.
59. Margaret Ward estimates that around 90 women took part in the Rising while Ruth Tallion gives 180 names. Over 70 women were arrested. See Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism*, Dublin, Pluto, 1989 (1995: doi:10.2307/j.ctt18mbdpc) and Ruth Tallion, *When History was Made: The Women of 1916*, Belfast, Beyond the Pale, 1996.

Fig. 1: Constance Markievicz, "Midnight Assassins", 1922
(PD 3062 TX, Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland)

the Terror", excoriating men like Joseph MacGrath who had no respect for the women who fought "in men's clothing".[60]

Markievicz's rhetoric seems to have changed with time and was sometimes described as inconsistent. Yet she went on representing Republican women as popular heroines ready to sacrifice for the cause like the "women of '98", contradicting the received image of women during the revolutionary period. If her earlier work clearly rejected the exclusively domestic role of women, Arrington argues that she could also fall into more conventional gender roles and play up to certain stereotypes if she considered it necessary.[61] Many of her best-known caricatures and drawings published in the Civil War period emphasized the brutality of Free State forces by seemingly representing women as victims or passive figures.[62] This is the case of "Midnight Assassins. Raid on Mrs. De Valera" (1922) in which Mrs. De Valera is represented in a night gown with her six children surrounded by Free State officers holding her at gun point **(Fig. 1)**. If the brutality of Free State forces is represented through the attack on a woman and her children at night, Mrs. De Valera appears rather stoic and almost unaffected by the attack on her family. Such a situation could be relatively

---

60. The debate over women's franchise includes a heated moment between Joseph MacGrath and Constance Markievicz over the women who took part in the fighting in men's clothing and the inconsistency of women in general: https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1922-03-02/23/#spk_227 (last accessed 10 September 2020).
61. Arrington, "Liberté, égalité, sororité", art. cit., p. 217.
62. Markievicz made an effective a case against the Irish Free State by contributing articles and caricatures to several Republican newspapers published under the initiative of the IRA publicity department supervised by Erskine Childers.

Fig. 2: "Free Staters breaking up Maud Gonne meeting" (1922, Lissadell Collection)

frequent at the time as many republican women told of frequent night-time raids by the British and then the Free State forces.[63] *At a Republican Home* (1922) evokes First World War recruitment propaganda and stereotypically portrays the woman being left at home while her husband goes off to fight: "Kiss Daddy goodbye Darling, he's going off to fight for the Republic".[64] If this depiction could sometimes be accurate, in the case of Markievicz's caricatural portrayal of Free State politics, it certainly added melodrama to the scene and the home was described as "republican", adding ambiguity to the role of the woman after her husband's departure. In other caricatures, the ambiguity is made even clearer through the use of an ironic caption. Markievicz's series *Free Staters in Action* (1922) depicted the exactions of this new army that she described as replacing the British forces and perpetuating their work. One caricature in the series describes Free Staters attacking a meeting organized by Maud Gonne and gathering women and children on O'Connell Street **(Fig. 2)**. It shows different reactions among the female figures, from despair to calm and composure as a form of resistance while the caption ironically indicates the ladies continued the meeting elsewhere before being attacked again:

63. Louise Ryan, "'Furies' and 'Die-Hards': Women and Irish Republicanism in the Early Twentieth Century", *Gender and History*, 11(2), July 1999, p. 256-275 (doi:10.1111/1468-0424.00142), p. 268.
64. Arrington, *Revolutionary Lives*, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

Fig. 3: "Cuman na mBan bicycles taken by Free Staters" (1922, Lissadell Collection)

> This courageous attack was launched against ladies, wives, mothers
> and children of Republican prisoners, who were holding a meeting in
> O'Connell Street. Mrs Despard is addressing the meeting and Mme
> Gonne McBride stands by her. The ladies made an orderly retreat on
> Mountjoy, where they continued the meeting. They were followed by
> two Lancia cars and again attacked.

While the cartoon plays on the trope of women as victims, the caption uses military vocabulary that almost represents the women as a rival army: "the ladies made an orderly retreat". The repetition of attacks on women shows the vanity of Free State action. Another caricature **(Fig. 3)** in the series *Free Staters in Action* represents several of them threatening two Cuman na mBan auxiliaries in a Dublin street (1922). Markievicz ironically chose to exaggerate the difference in height and stature between

the Free staters and the two women, together with the representation of one the Free Staters with disproportionate fists. But the caption totally discredits the action of Free Staters: "Glorious Victory over the two Miss O'Reed's. Two valuable bicycles captured" while the women are represented as calm and strong. Using ambiguous or stereotyped caricatures allowed Markievicz to represent Republican women as martyrs and female heroes like the "Women of '98". In *The Bodyguard of the Republic* (1922), the figure of Hibernia is shown with her arm around a female Republican fighter holding a gun while a man, also in uniform is ready to fight with a rifle in hand (Fig. 4). Both the man and the woman are represented protecting the Republic hand in hand like their Polish counterparts in Markievicz's 1909 lecture *Women, Ideals and the Nation*.

Fig. 4: Constance Markievicz, "The Bodyguard of the Republic" (PD 3076 TX 14, Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland)

This question of dress and costume is often emphasized in Markievicz's rhetoric, all the more as she used it herself as political tactics. In her historical column on the "Women of '98", Markievicz described the costumes and dress of the women whose mini-biographies she related. One was "dressed in a green habit with the tricolor and red plume in her hat". Another "had talents for acting and disguising herself", which allowed her to gather information unnoticed and disturb the English army. This shows that the feminine body could be a subject of dispute as some women played an active part in the national struggle instead of asking the men to go off to fight.[65] For Markievicz, women could be soldiers too and they had to dress suitably for that purpose. Uncovering the previously untold stories of the "women of '98" enabled her to go against the accepted behaviour of women in her own time.

Some famous 1915 studio photographs of Markievicz show her dressed in a military outfit and plumed hat that was reminiscent of the costumes and uniforms she described in "The women of '98". It could thus be argued that her own outfit was chosen to create a link with earlier women fighting for Ireland.[66] As a trained artist, Markievicz was well aware of the potential of portraits for political expression and she used

---

65. Mary Caulfield shows that the character of Peggy O'Byrne in the play *Blood Money* (1925) by Markievicz provides a subversive critique on the nationalist image of femininity. See Mary Caulfield, "Fashion Advice: Constance Markievicz's 'Unmarked', 'Mismarked' and 'Remarkable' Women", *Staging Thought: Essays on Irish Theatre, Scholarship and Practice*, Rhona Trench (Ed.), Oxford…, Peter Lang, 2012, p. 191-203.
66. Steele, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

studio portrait photography to shape her public image and call the women of Ireland to join her in taking up arms. Steele argued that her poses as Joan of Arc clasping a sword and her more famous portraits with a gun seemed to be chosen to hide her feminine body and enhance her militant energy with the idea of masculine combativeness.[67] Dowler rather claimed that Markievicz's photographs provided a "model for accepted behavior of women in war" focusing on Markievicz's supposed uneasiness with her gun, her feathered hat and the pastoral landscape in the background, considering the image given of Markievicz corresponded more to the expression of "femininity and status" rather than to the heroic description of her actions during the Easter Rising.[68] I would rather argue that Markievicz's studio portraits were transgressive, following Benton's argument that in the republican ethics, women were excluded from arms-bearing and should be protected by the men. Markievicz's deliberately theatrical cross-dressing, her hyperbolic self-representation – the uniform with the feathered hat – should thus be read "as a sign and symptom of the dissolution of boundaries, and of the arbitrariness of social law and custom". The strong reactions she inspired show cross-dressing's "considerable power to disturb, its transgressive force".[69] Her self-representation was one of the ways she chose to act against the "consensus" that discouraged female militancy.

After the Civil War, Markievicz was elected to the Daíl for South Dublin in August 1923 but refused to take the oath of allegiance to the king, thus disqualifying herself from sitting. Removed from politics, she went on producing publications that focused on her memories of former glories. Disappointed by contemporary realities, she turned back to theatre as part of her propaganda campaign and in an attempt at incorporating female militancy in collective memory through another medium. She dramatized female militancy in her plays including *The Invincible Mother* (1925) and *Blood Money* (1925). Mrs. Fagan, the main character of *The Invincible Mother*, is inspired by the story of the "Patriot Mother" told in Markievicz's 1915 column "The Women of '98". In the play, the story is not set in 1798 but sometime after 1850, thus linking the heroism of the 1798 patriot mother to contemporary female efforts. The English soldiers try to force Mrs. Fagan to become an informant to save her son's life but she recalls her family history of dying "true" and evokes the martyrs of 1798. The character, who appears weak at first, can be read as a subversion of Mother Ireland as she challenges the expected notions of motherhood. Markievicz's *Blood Money* is reminiscent of the story of "Norah,

---

67. *Ibid.*
68. Lorraine Dowler, "Amazonian Landscapes. Gender, War and Historical Repetition", *The Geography of War and Peace from Deaths Camps to Diplomats*, Colin Flint (Ed.), Oxford, Oxford U.P., 2005, p. 133-148, p. 140-142.
69. Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interets: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, New York, Routledge, 1992, p. 25, p. 71.

pride of Wexford maids", that was also told in the column "The Women of '98", providing the tale with an alternative successful ending.[70] Only produced posthumously by the Republican Players Dramatic Society, *Broken Dreams* (1927) expresses Markievicz's disillusionment with the repression of women in the republican movement.[71]

With the stories that she told in her historical column in the *Irish Citizen*, Markievicz demonstrated that she was well aware of the role of theatre in shaping the minds of the revolutionary generation.[72] She also wished to continue fostering women's active participation in the public and political life of the nation in spite of the Free State's attempt to take rights from women and gradually eliminate them from public life.[73] Women were indeed expected to fall back into domesticity as they disturbed the myth of manliness and brotherhood on which the neo-colonial state sought to build itself.[74] Markievicz's plays, journalism and self-representation challenged the many limitations imposed on Irish women and provided alternative possibilities for women's roles in Irish society and in the nationalist struggle, using roles models taken from a forgotten or silenced past, from "ghost stories". Each of her contributions and publications provide insight into her conception of her own role and that of women in the Irish struggle for independence. Markievicz also had to address an audience made of feminists and nationalists that could be more socially conservative than she was herself. Once the war of independence was over, she had to deal with the fact that many men feared the radicalism and militancy of the women the war had brought to political activism. This led some of them who had always supported woman suffrage like Arthur Griffith to weigh that up against their support for the Treaty, as the vast majority of Republican women were known to oppose the Treaty. Markievicz's late theatre and journalism expressed her sense of betrayal at the politics of the Free State had trouble considering women as militants and rejected "women in men's clothing"[75] as "furies"[76] and "die-hards".[77]

70. Caulfield, "The Women of '98", art. cit. p. 88.
71. Mary Caulfield, "'The Woman With a Garden': Unearthing the Artistry and Activism of Constance Markievicz 1908-1927", PhD Thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 2011 (hdl:2262/77913), p. 102.
72. Roy Foster, *Vivid Faces*, *The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland 1890-1923*, London, Penguin, 2014.
73. See Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, "Defining Their Role in the New State: Irishwomen's Protest against the Juries Act of 1927", *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 18(1) (Women and Irish Politics), July 1992, p. 43-60 (doi:10.2307/25512895).
74. Benton describes brotherhood as essential in times of war thus denying women's participation both in the mythic and actual struggle. Benton, art. cit., p. 148.
75. Markievicz makes a reference to a remark made by a Teachta who spoke before her. See Markievicz, "On Women's Franchise", art. cit.
76. "Politics and Patriotism, Bishop's Advice to People, Women Who are Furies", *Cork Examiner*, 18 May 1925.
77. President Cosgrave, cited in *Irish Times*, 1 January 1923.

Claire Dubois is a senior lecturer in Irish Studies at Lille University, France. Her main research area is Irish cultural history, art, gender studies and the representation of Ireland from the 18th century. She has written numerous articles on Irish women, Irish culture and its representation in Britain and France, which have been published, among others, by Peter Lang, *Irish Studies in Europe* (WVT), Cambridge Scholars Publishing and *Études irlandaises*.

Chapter three

Resurrecting *Alltar*

Looking Past the Anthropocene with Liam Ó Flaithearta's *Dúil*

CALLUM BATESON
Trinity College Dublin

Abstract: This paper analyses how older work written in minoritised languages can be of use in forming more nuanced, less anthropocentric understandings of the climate crisis. To explore this question, two Irish language short stories from Liam Ó Flaithearta's 1953 collection *Dúil*, 'An Charraig Dhubh' and 'An Scathán' are evaluated as ecological art, using eco-critics Jane Bennett and Timothy Morton to do so. I argue 'An Charraig Dhubh' successfully de-centres the human, even if it relies on a touch of Anthropocentrism. However, though 'An Scathán' uses a similar style of distanced of narration in describing the non-human, its perpetuation of misogynistic hierarchies illustrates some of the difficulties in producing truly ecological, non-anthropocentric art. In conclusion, this paper affirms the importance of older work, especially that written in minoritized languages, in comprehending the climate crisis.

Keywords: Irish, Anthropocene, Minority language, Liam O'Flaherty, Eco-Criticism, Climate Crisis

IN the Irish language there is a term *alltar*, which means the "other world" or "hinterland". It is considered to be the opposite of *ceantar*, which has come to mean "area", but it is also used to refer to the physical, human world. *Alltar* is no longer in common linguistic use, something that is perhaps unsurprising given that according to some, this is the Anthropocene, the age of the human. The use of such a term implies the triumph of human technology and a banishing of old spectres. In this paper, however, I seek to show how important it is to look to the past when considering present issues of climate change by examining representations of the non-human in a number of short stories from Liam O'Flaherty's 1953 Irish language collection *Dúil*. In opposition to the logic of the Eurocentric Anthropocene, I argue that minority languages like Irish are

no ghosts of the past but can act as vital mediums to improve human/non-human relations and bridge the nature/culture divide.

If there is a lack of consensus on what this current era should be named and when it started – alongside the Anthropocene, other terms such as "Capitaloscene," and "Plantationscene" have been suggested[1] – there is general agreement that the current dominant economic model is inherently unsustainable. That there is a climate emergency is increasingly recognised on both a political and societal level, witnessed through the rise in popularity of Green parties internationally and the emergence of large protest groups such as *Extinction Rebellion*. What is striking, however, is that despite this newfound awareness and desire to "do something" about the climate crisis, humans continue to contribute to its root causes: it is likely that the majority of countries will fail in their commitments made at the 2015 Paris Climate Summit, and greenhouse gas emissions continue to increase. Indeed, the impotence of human action in the face of what Timothy Morton describes in his work *Being Ecological* as a mass-extinction[2] is made clear by the fact that in February 2020, emissions in China declined by around 25 per cent on an annual basis.[3] The cause, however, was not a carbon tax, the adoption of renewable energy sources, or an increase in electric car sales, rather a viral pandemic – something that exists outside of human control. While greenhouse gas emissions have since rebounded – and are on track to grow by 5% this year globally – that such a dramatic contraction in emissions occurred as a result of non-human intervention underscores a need to revise current understandings of environmental change.[4]

Despite good intentions, it does not appear that the current "do something, do anything" approach towards the looming environmental catastrophe is working. How then can the climate crisis be better handled? According to an increasing number of theorists, including Jane Bennett and Timothy Morton, the solution lies in adopting what has been called a "thinkivist" rather than a "activist" approach.[5] Central to this shift is the relatively new philosophical line of inquiry called object-oriented ontology. Termed by US-American philosopher Graham Harman, OOO or triple O is a subset of the more loosely defined school of Speculative

---

1. For more, see the work of Anna Tsing, who proposes the "Plantationscene" as a term to account for the role of colonialism in the climate crisis, and Jason Moore who suggests the term "Capitaloscene" in light of capitalism's role on the process. Various starting dates for the current era of climate crisis have been proposed, including 1492 (the start of European imperialism in America), 1712 (the invention of the steam pump) and 1945 (the start of the Atomic age.)
2. Timothy Morton, *Being Ecological*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2018, p. 15.
3. https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/coronavirus-causing-carbon-emissions-to-fall-but-not-for-long (last accessed 18 June 2020).
4. https://www.iea.org/news/global-carbon-dioxide-emissions-are-set-for-their-second-biggest-increase-in-history (last accessed 05 May 2020)
5. https://www.mu.nl/en/txt/ethics-ecology-and-the-future-art-and-design-face-the-anthropocene (last accessed 19 June 2020).

Realism. The underlying principle in the manifesto of OOO is viewing the world through a "flat ontology", which dictates that 'all objects must be given equal attention whether they be human, non-human, natural, cultural, real or fictional.'[6] From the outset, therefore, object-oriented ontology seeks to subvert the human-centred philosophical tradition that describes the Anthropocene by treating the human as an ontological object no more significant than any other.

Art, often side-lined or commodified in neoliberal societies, is given a central position in this new way of thinking, with a role to help humans reimagine relationships with non-human objects through a critical process of making – what Morton terms – "ecological art."[7] Ecological art supports and articulates the idea that there are limits to human knowledge and agency, especially with regards to the environment, and that humans deserve no more attention than other types of beings, building on Latour's "network theory."[8] A number of contemporary visual artists can be seen to be incorporating the concepts above into their work. For example, the *Dear Climate* collective can be understood as practising this form of art through the medium of posters that question human/non-human relationships. Freely available to download from their website, helping them to reach a wide audience, the posters challenge the egocentrism of humanity, place non-humans in human contexts and reference the often-devastating agency that the natural world possesses.[9]

While eco-criticism is a growing area of literary criticism, and an increasing amount of contemporary fiction takes up environmental themes, these themes are often characterised, like the visual art movements mentioned above, as recent occurrences. In this paper, however, it will be argued that one can also look to older literature as forerunners to this line of thinking, especially work written in minority languages. To illustrate this, this paper will examine a selection of Liam Ó Flaithearta's early 20th century Irish language short stories, demonstrating how they can be seen to fit with more recent concepts of ecological, or non-anthropocentric art. In short, this paper will look backwards in an attempt to look beyond the Anthropocene.

Before the works themselves are discussed, it is important to fully anchor their relevance (and that of minority languages) to the topic of ecological art. Liam Ó Flaithearta was a writer from Inis Mór, an island off the coast of Galway and was raised in the Irish language. As an adult, he travelled widely and published predominately in English. Later in his life,

6.   Graham Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything*, London, Pelican, 2018, p. 9.
7.   Morton, *op. cit.*, p. 61.
8.   *Ibid.*, p. 63.
9.   https://www.dearclimate.net (last accessed 18 June 2020).

in 1953, however, he published *Dúil*, a collection of short stories in Irish, many of which date back to the 1920s and all of which are set in Irish speaking communities in the West of Ireland.[10] The stories dealt with in this paper all derive from this collection. Minority languages, as is argued in this paper, could and should play a fundamental role in the environmental humanities. Although the very term 'minority language' is indeed broad, enveloping thousands of languages ranging from Itonam, a moribund language spoken by fewer than five people in eastern Bolivia, to Català, spoken by upwards of ten million, there are commonalities to be found between them: all have been or are still threatened by a larger, imperial language, and most have been deemed as irrelevant to the advance of modernity at some point, existing in the minds of many only as spectres of past eras. It is precisely this last point that potentially renders minority languages so valuable to the environmental humanities.

Latour claims in his seminal text *We Have Never Been Modern*, modernism created and is best characterised by a divide between nature and culture (and thus humans and non-humans).[11] If this is the case, then it could be argued that one should look to languages that were less implicated within modernism in an attempt to sidestep the human-centric perspective that became so dominant. European modernism was fundamentally intertwined with the colonial project, and thus the very minority languages that were suppressed (and in many cases near-eradicated) offer the potential to subvert the modernist approach to human/non-human relations. Though we are living in the era of postmodernism, the driving force of modernism – that is the industrialised capitalist economy – continues to shape the societies we inhabit, and the culture that is produced.

At this point, it might be helpful to return to the term "Anthropocene" and briefly problematise it. While the word implies a universality in the impact humans have on the earth, this understanding, as critics such as Donna Haraway have argued, lacks nuance. In a 2015 text, Haraway asks: "The anthropos–what is that? All of Homo Sapiens Sapiens? All of mankind? Well, who exactly?" She then continues to argue that the Anthropocene is a product of industrial humanity – i.e. the financially prosperous countries of the global north.[12] This is indeed obvious when one looks at the comparative greenhouse gas emissions of Germany and Ethiopia, for example. Although they have similar populations, Germany emits around ninety times as much carbon dioxide as Ethiopia.[13] When one talks about humans as responsible for climate change, in reality it is

---

10. https://www.dib.ie/biography/oflaherty-liam-a6753 (last accessed 18 June 2020).
11. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Cambridge, MA., Harvard U.P., 1993, p. 11.
12. Donna Haraway, "Anthropocence, Capitalocene, Chthulhucene. Donna Haraway in conversation with Martha Kenney", *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*, 2015, p. 255.
13. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.ATM.CO2E.PC (last accessed 18 June 2020).

only the inhabitants of the global north, specifically the wealthy inhabitants, who are implicated. Therefore, through their exclusion from industrial modernity and new capitalism, minority languages and the culture produced in them might offer another way to examine human/non-human relations.

Within the spectrum of minority languages, Irish occupies a strange space. On one level, it is a native language of a wealthy Western European country, one which ranks amongst the worst greenhouse gas emitters in the world on a per capita basis[14]. However, it (alongside many aspects of Gaelic culture) was oppressed under British colonial rule, and its subsequent decline and minoritisation mirrors that of many smaller languages. Despite strong legal protections on a national and EU level (it is the only minority language to be granted status as an official language of the European Union)[15] the threats to the regions in which Irish is still used as a vernacular, namely isolation, emigration and lack of economic opportunities, are shared with many other minority languages. In a sense, Irish can therefore be seen to occupy a position between dominant and subordinate cultures. Though Irish is growing as an urban language, the rural nature of many Gaeltacht regions and the historical ties between Irish and landscape – evidenced by place-naming traditions which often refer to physical features – make it stand to reason that Irish language literature would feature a different way of representing the non-human. In the first few decades of the 20th century, there was a large emphasis placed on *Béaloideas* (oral tradition) and the primacy of the rural experience within Irish language literary production, which means that there are written records – both real and imagined – of how isolated communities interacted with the non-human before the widespread arrival of electricity or the car. Indeed, *An Cnuasach Bhéaloideas Éireann* (The Irish Folklore Collection), consisting of thousands of stories collected in rural communities from the 1930s, is amongst the most significant archives of its type in Europe.[16] Of course, it is important not to romanticise such positions – life in these communities was often difficult, and people there were still in contact with and subject to many of the same pressures seen in other parts of Ireland. Many of those who wrote in Irish at this time also published in English, and were based in the 'Galltacht',[17] including Liam Ó Flaithearta.

14. https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-eii/eii18/greenhousegases andclimatechange (last accessed 25 Feb. 2020).
15. https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/eu-languages (last accessed 19 June 2020).
16. https://www.duchas.ie/ga/info/cbe (last accessed 18 June 2020).
17. The term *Galltacht* is often used to refer to regions of Ireland where Irish is no longer a community language. Though it sometimes is used disparagingly (*gall* meaning "outsider", historically in the context of Norman and English settlers), I use it here to contrast with the term and concept of *Gaeltacht*. Some sociolinguists make use of the term *Iar-ghaeltacht* (former Irish speaking area) instead.

In this context, "An Charraig Dhubh" (The Black Rock) is particularly striking. As John Cronin notes, it is one of a handful of Ó Flaithearta texts that were originally written in Irish and have no English translation,[18] and crucially, it is also one of only a few of his stories that involve no human characters. It is interesting to consider how these two facts might be connected, in terms of how language affects modes of thinking. Moreover, "An Charraig Dhubh" is not narrated from a noticeably human or personalised perspective, rather in the same distanced, third-person narrative style that is used in human-centred stories such as "Daoine Bochta" (Poor People). These traits alone are enough to highlight that "An Charraig Dhubh" deserves analysis as a piece of ecological art.

It is a brief story, describing a rock on the shore that is teeming with life: "Bhí mórghleo ag an iomad ainmhí, iad ag ithe go santach agus ag déanamh aeir faoi sholas gléigeal na gréine" [There was much noise from the many animals, eating greedily and enjoying themselves under the bright light of the sun.][19] Many types of non-human beings are described individually, including sea lice, periwinkles and crabs.[20] It is noteworthy that equal narrative time is given to describing each sort of life, enabling the reader to view the rock as something of a flat ontology. An argument against this perhaps would be the apparent hierarchy regarding the position of the gull at the top of the rock "ina sheasamh ar leathchois, a cheann faoi sciatháin agus é ina chodladh" [standing on one foot, its head under its wing asleep.][21] It could be argued that as the gull is described individually, rather than collectively, as is the case with most of the small animals, Ó Flaithearta allows a human bias towards large animals to enter into his work. Furthermore, when the rock is eventually destroyed by the ocean, the gull is the only animal whose survival is made explicit, the fate of most of the residents of the rock is to end up as "coirp bheaga bhídeacha na marbh ag imeacht ar bharr uisce san áit a raibh an charaig ina seasamh" [minuscule dead bodies floating on top of the water where the rock once was.][22]

However, the importance of such divisions comes into question when one considers how, in the face of the destructive power of the ocean, all of the rock's inhabitants are equal in defencelessness. This brings to mind Morton's theory of "hyperobjects" – objects that are "massively distributed in time and space compared to humans."[23] The climate or the ocean could be considered hyperobjects, as humans – and presumably

18. John Cronin, "Liam O'Flaherty and Dúil", *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua*, 7(1), 2003, p. 45–55 (https://www.jstor.org/stable/20557854).
19. Liam Ó Flaithearta, *Dúil*, An Spidéal, ClÓ Iar-Chonnacht, 2013, p. 22.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
23. Harman, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

many smaller non-humans – are unable to comprehend them as a whole. Instead, humans are only able to interpret parts of them (rain in the case of climate, or waves in the case of ocean, for example). Whatever implied hierarchy there might be between the gull, crabs, mussels and sea lice is flattened by the hyperobjects of storm and climate. The reader ultimately is left with an impression of the transient nature of life, relative to the permanence of the natural world – an implication that resonates strongly with OOO theory.

The starkness of Ó Flaithearta's descriptions is also of relevance here: Despite the loss of much life, there is no attempt to romanticise the death and destruction wreaked on the rock by the storm. Instead, what unfolds is described in a clear, factual manner through short and direct sentences. Again, one can argue that insofar as is possible, human, and human-centric biases, are removed from the story. In this respect, "An Charraig Dhubh" is notable amongst Ó Flaithearta's work in not expressing any value judgement towards non-human things. This is in contrast to how in "An Seabhac" (The Hawk), for example, the hawk is described as not having any charity or fear in his heart.[24] Clearly, this is based on the human-centric idea of birds of prey as evil. This is a belief that lingers on today, demonstrated by the poisoning of twenty-three buzzards in West Cork in late 2019.[25] The transmission of such modes of thinking through art can be seen as an example of how culture can reinforce damaging stereotypes about non-human things. It should be noted that "An Seabhac" was first written in English and then translated, and is perhaps, therefore, influenced by English speaking perspectives.

While there is, as evidenced above, a strong case to classify the world of "An Charraig Dhubh" as an example of a flat ontology, given that it foregrounds the non-human both in its narrative style and subject matter, Ó Flaithearta also makes clear use of anthropomorphism. For example, he writes of the periwinkles, "…agus a gcuid adharca ag treabhadh an aeir amach rompu go luaineach mar a bheadh méaracha ceoltóra" […and their horns feeling the air ahead of them, nimble like a musicians' fingers.][26] This is a somewhat contested way of rendering the non-human. On one level, transposing human characteristics to non-human items might be seen as problematic, as it has the potential to reduce non-human objects to peripheral parts of the human experience.

However, it can also be argued, as Jane Bennett does in *Vibrant Matter*, that it is only through anthropomorphism that humans can attempt to understand the non-human and the concept of an interconnected

24.   Ó Flaithearta, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
25.   https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2020/0512/1138015 (last accessed 18 June 2020).
26.   Ó Flaithearta, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

biosphere. As Bennett writes, "an anthropomorphic element […] can uncover a whole world of resonances and resemblances."[27] That is to say, while initially the use of anthropomorphism might be seen as narcissistic, by transposing human metaphors and emotions onto animals, it can help comprehend the experience of other living beings. In "An Charraig Dhubh", Ó Flaithearta's use of anthropomorphism, it can be argued, is benign in so far as it is used to help the reader (as a human) better imagine the actions of different non-human beings. Furthermore, while its use does enable the human reader to romanticise nature, the destruction of the idyllic appearing rock and its ecosystem by the storm can be seen to fit Morton's assertion that "ecological art must include ugliness and disgust."[28] However, if anthropomorphism can be seen as an inevitable, and perhaps helpful, aspect in creating ecological and non-anthropocentric art, questions remain as to Ó Flaithearta's renderings of humans in his work.

This paper will now turn to "An Scáthán" (The Mirror) to examine this. Interestingly, this story immediately follows "An Charraig Dhubh" in *Dúil*, and initially appears to share many of its stylistic traits. It is narrated from a third-person narrative perspective, and describes non-human beings in depth, including limpets and seaweed, while there is also a paragraph dedicated to the tide turning.[29] However, in contrast to "An Charraig Dhubh", the focus of the story is on a young girl collecting limpets on the shore. At the start of the story, Ó Flaithearta's descriptions of her appear neutral, and in the same vein as descriptions of non-human things. For example, the reader is told "bhí corrdhos dá fionnghruaig ag sileadh lena grua agus iad slíochtha le allas." [A tuft of her blonde hair fell on her sweat-slicked cheeks].[30] In addition, the girl is unnamed, allowing the reader to imagine "girl" as a species descriptor, in the same way as "limpet" is used (though the gendered aspect of this description must be taken into account). However, as the story progresses the descriptions become more human-centric and notably sexualised. Attention is paid to her breasts, and the fact that she is a "cáilín ríbhreá dea-dhéanta" [a beautiful, well-made girl].[31] It is at this point that one must consider the impact of the authorial 'male gaze'.

While the narrative style of "An Scáthán" masquerades as neutral, the objectification implicit within the descriptions of the young woman shatters this illusion, allowing the maleness of the author to intrude. While on one level the way in which the girl is described can be seen as

27. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, Durham, Duke U.P., 2010 (https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv111jh6w), p. 99.
28. Morton, *op. cit.*, p. 87.
29. Ó Flaithearta, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*

her fitting in as part of the biosphere, this assertion is pulled into question when one considers that nowhere in *Dúil* is a male subject treated similarly. At the end of "An Scáthán", the reader is told that the girl has lost the shame surrounding her body, instead accepting her beauty and ??"le rún diamhair a broinne a chur i bhfeidhm" [to make use of the dark secret of her womb].[32] In a sense, Ó Flaithearta is playing into the notion that women's main purpose is to recreate and that this is their 'natural' role. Meanwhile, men in his work are given voices, free-will, and even names. In "Mearbhall" (Confusion), the story is told from a first-person perspective by a male narrator, and when he is faced with a ghost-like barkeeper, the narrator is given the agency to leave the bar by Ó Flaithearta.[33]

Timothy Morton argues that in neo-platonic, anthropocentric modes of thought there is the belief that humans act and animals behave.[34] In Ó Flaithearta's work it seems that men act, while women behave, and hence there is the implication that while there might be a flat ontology in *Dúil* between women and non-human things, men are positioned as separate and above this. Returning to the very notion of 'Anthropocene,' or the human-dominated earth, given the predominance of men in polluting and extractive industries, one might consider the Anthropocene to be a kind of 'Men-o-scene'. If one accepts this – even partially – Ó Flaithearta's portrayal of human beings starts to appear anthropocentric and, far from being radical, as work that upholds the misogynistic status quo. This, of course, is an issue that is much larger than Ó Flaithearta – nature writing remains a male-dominated field and the image of the solitary, white man endures in work set in wild spaces.

What, then, can be made of the above? In this paper I have argued for the importance of minority languages in *expanding* understandings of ecological art, presenting Irish as an interesting case given its geographical location and specific history. In "An Charraig Dhubh" Ó Flaithearta seems to successfully represent a flat ontology by not including humans in the narrative, and through dedicating time to describing a society of non-humans. However, this paper then argued that he is less successful when humans become part of the narrative, evidenced by the way in which a young woman is described in "An Scáthán" and the disparity between this and how men are portrayed elsewhere in *Dúil*. The gendered way in which he depicts males and females complicates attempts at classifying Ó Flaithearta's work as ecological, and the effect of language choice – whether work was written initially in Irish or in English – on portrayals of human/non-human relations deserves further study. Despite these issues, *Dúil* makes a strong argument for expanding the search for

---

32.   *Ibid.*, p. 32.
33.   *Ibid.*, p. 59.
34.   Morton, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

ecological art into the past, and for exploring minority language art in this context. It shows that art created before the Anthropocene can have just as much relevance as we attempt to grasp what comes next. Like the term *Alltar*, many minority cultures – especially non-European cultures – have been side-lined and overlooked for not being in sync with modernity and its demands. Perhaps this is exactly why non-majority cultures should be foregrounded now.

Callum Bateson is a postgraduate researcher at the VU Amsterdam and writer from West Cork, Ireland. His research interests include the capitalocene, minority languages, and contemporary Ireland as a (post)colonial space. He holds an M.Phil in Creative Writing from Trinity College Dublin and his creative work has been published in the College Green Journal. He has a forthcoming academic publication in *Networking Knowledge*.   ✉ c.p.bateson@student.vu.nl

Bibliography

Primary Text
Ó Flaithearta, Liam, *Dúil*, An Spidéal, ClÓ Iar-Chonnacht, 2013.

Secondary Sources
Bennett, Jane, *Vibrant Matter*, Durham, Duke U.P., 2010 (https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv111jh6w).
Cronin, John, "Liam O'Flaherty and Dúil", *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua*, 7(1), 2003 (https://www.jstor.org/stable/20557854).
Harman, Graham, *Object-Oriented Ontology : A New Theory of Everything*, London, Pelican, 2018.
Haraway, Donna, "Anthropocence, Capitalocene, Chthulhucene. Donna Haraway in conversation with Martha Kenney", *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters among aesthetics, politics, environments and epistemologies*, 2015.
Latour, Bruno, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard U.P., 1993.
Morton, Timothy, *Being Ecological*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2018.

Online Sources
https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.ATM.CO2E.PC (last accessed 18 June 2020).
https://www.dib.ie/biography/oflaherty-liam-a6753 (last accessed 18 June 2020).
https://monthlyreview.org/2015/09/01/when-did-the-anthropocene-beginand-why-does-it-matter (last accessed 18 June 2020).
https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-eii/eii18/greenhousegasesandclimatechange (last accessed 25 Feb. 2020).
https://www.dearclimate.net (last accessed 18 June 2020).
https://www.duchas.ie/ga/info/cbe (last accessed 18 June 2020).
https://www.iea.org/news/global-carbon-dioxide-emissions-are-set-for-their-second-biggest-increase-in-history (last accessed 05 May 2020)
https://www.mu.nl/en/txt/ethics-ecology-and-the-future-art-and-design-face-the-anthropocene (last accessed 19 June 2020).
https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/coronavirus-causing-carbon-emissions-to-fall-but-not-for-long (last accessed 18 June 2020).
https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2020/0512/1138015 (last accessed 18 June 2020).
https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/eu-languages (last accessed 19 June 2020)

Chapter four

"*Plays and ghosts have a lot in common*"

Les fantômes de Stewart Parker et Brian Friel

Martine Pelletier
ICD - EA 6297, Université de Tours

Résumé: Cet article s'attache à explorer les liens entre théâtre et spectralité que deux dramaturges nord-irlandais contemporains, Stewart Parker et Brian Friel, proposent dans leurs œuvres. Les *Three Plays for Ireland* de Parker, écrites et jouées dans les années 1980, à un moment de grande tension politique en Irlande du Nord, montrent une histoire irlandaise conflictuelle et violente, hantée par des fantômes assoiffés de vengeance ; son travail dramatique tente de les exorciser par la compréhension, l'espoir, l'humour et l'amour, pour échapper à la paralysie et au ressassement. *Faith Healer* (1980) et *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990), deux des œuvres les plus célèbres de Brian Friel, sont des pièces de mémoire qui peuplent la scène de fantômes nous faisant entendre « toutes ces voix mortes » pour reprendre la belle formule de Samuel Beckett. Brian Friel convoque sur la scène de la mémoire et du théâtre tant dans *Faith Healer* que dans *Dancing at Lughnasa*, un passé qui ne passe pas, des deuils impossibles.

Parker et Friel nous offrent par la magie de ce rituel ancien qu'est le théâtre, des pièces qui hantent et qui elles-mêmes sont hantées : par des productions mémorables, par d'autres textes… Que l'on songe au fantôme bienveillant de Tchékhov, consubstantiel du théâtre de Friel ou au pastiche de dramaturges irlandais dans *Northern Star*. On ne s'étonnera pas que *Faith Healer* ait fasciné Laurent Terzieff, lui pour qui « le théâtre est avant tout le lieu où se rencontrent le monde visible et le monde invisible, le lieu où mes fantômes espèrent bien rencontrer ceux du public ».

Mots-clefs: Brian Friel, Stewart Parker, Laurent Terzieff, *Faith Healer*, *Dancing at Lughnasa*, *Northern Star*, *Pentecost*, théâtre irlandais, fantômes

DANS l'introduction à sa trilogie pour l'Irlande, le dramaturge nord-irlandais Stewart Parker écrivait, peu avant sa mort prématurée à 47 ans en 1989 : « *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. Plays intend to achieve resolution, however, whilst ghosts appear to be stuck fast in the quest for vengeance*[1]. » Du fait de la recherche que je mène actuellement sur la réception française de l'œuvre de Brian Friel[2], une autre référence s'est rapidement imposée à moi. En 2001, dans son « Manifeste pour le théâtre » Laurent Terzieff qui, le premier, permit au public français de découvrir Friel grâce à une adaptation de *Faith Healer*[3], revendique ce lien intime entre théâtre et spectralité :

> Pour moi, le théâtre est avant tout le lieu où se rencontrent le monde visible et le monde invisible, le lieu où mes fantômes espèrent bien rencontrer ceux du public, sinon, ce que je propose, restera, c'est le cas de le dire, « fantomatique ». C'est le lieu où se rencontrent l'action concrète et l'imaginaire, où la présence vivante et réelle de l'acteur se conjugue avec la réflexion et la poésie, la conscience et l'inconscient du rêve, c'est le lieu de communion du visible et de l'invisible, je ne récuse pas la connotation religieuse de la formulation[4].

Brian Friel (1929-2015) et Stewart Parker (1941-1988) appartenaient à deux générations différentes ; ils étaient tous deux Nord-Irlandais, bien que natifs et résidents de deux villes différentes, Derry et Belfast. Ils se sont côtoyés notamment par l'intermédiaire de la compagnie théâtrale Field Day, fondée par Friel et l'acteur belfastois Stephen Rea en 1980. C'est pour Field Day que Parker – qui avait de longue date une relation professionnelle et amicale avec Rea[5] – écrivit sa dernière pièce, *Pentecost*, créée au Guildhall de Derry le 23 septembre 1987. Parker vécut toute sa vie dans l'ombre de la mort : amputé d'une jambe à l'âge de 19 ans il devait décéder à 47 ans d'un cancer de l'estomac. Sa carrière fut courte mais pleine :

---

1. Stewart Parker, *Three Plays for Ireland*, Birmingham, Oberon, 1989, p. 9.
2. Voir notamment Martine Pelletier, « Brian Friel on the French stage: From Laurent Terzieff to Women Directors of Dancing at Lughnasa », *Ilha do Desterro*, 73(2) (The Irish Theatrical Diaspora), 2020, p. 85-97 (doi:10.5007/2175-8026.2020v73n2p85).
3. Terzieff crée « Témoignages sur Ballybeg » en 1986 au théâtre du Lucernaire. Le texte de l'adaptation de Pol Quentin est publié dans *L'Avant-Scène Théâtre* (n° 785, 1er mars 1986). En 2005 il mettra en scène « Molly », adaptation de *Molly Sweeney* au théâtre de la Gaîté-Montparnasse, dans une traduction d'Alain Delahaye. En 1984 Jean-Claude Amyl avait monté « La Dernière Classe », adaptation de *Translations*, mais la pièce, malgré une publication du texte à *L'Avant-Scène Théâtre* (n° 756, 15 octobre 1984) était passée pratiquement inaperçue.
4. Laurent Terzieff, *Seul avec tous*, Paris, La Renaissance, 2010, p. 188.
5. Voir notamment la biographie de Parker, par Marilynn Richtarik, *Stewart Parker. A Life*, Oxford, Oxford U.P., 2012, p. 137-138, 244, 305-307. Stephen Rea a rendu un bel hommage à son ami en mettant en scène *Northern Star* dans une production *in situ* de Field Day et Tinderbox à la First Presbyterian Church de Belfast en 1998, dans le cadre du bicentenaire du soulèvement des Irlandais-Unis de 1798.

il écrivit pour la radio, la télévision, la scène, se passionna pour la critique musicale.

Les trois pièces pour l'Irlande de Parker sont encore peu connues et n'ont jamais fait l'objet de représentations professionnelles en France ; elles n'en sont pas moins passionnantes dans leurs mises en scène des fantômes de l'histoire irlandaise, comme nous le verrons. J'aborderai ensuite deux des œuvres les plus célèbres de Brian Friel, *Faith Healer* (1980) et *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990), pour analyser comment ces « pièces de mémoire » (*memory plays*) peuplent la scène de fantômes et nous font entendre « toutes ces voix mortes » comme l'écrivait Samuel Beckett[6], une réplique d'Estragon reprise en écho par Frank McGuinness à propos de *Faith Healer*[7]. Brian Friel convoque sur la scène de la mémoire et du théâtre, tant dans *Faith Healer* que dans *Dancing at Lughnasa*, un passé qui ne passe pas, des deuils impossibles. Il transforme la représentation en un espace-temps sacré où le rituel d'exorcisme nécessaire peut avoir lieu. Ces fantômes ne sont pas ceux de la littérature fantastique ou du mélodrame victorien ; ils ne sont ni sanglants ni violents, mais plutôt intimes et familiers. Pourtant, leur capacité à hanter personnages et spectateurs n'en est pas moins puissante et troublante.

Le théâtre et les fantômes ont bien partie liée comme l'affirme Parker. Que l'on pense au paradoxe de l'incarnation théâtrale où l'acteur donne littéralement corps à des ombres, des êtres de mots devenus chair dans la lumière des projecteurs, pour peupler une scène désespérément vide sans eux, soir après soir, pour notre plus grand plaisir, dans l'attente, et peut-être même encore, à notre époque un rien cynique et désabusée, dans l'espoir d'une possible catharsis. Terzieff encore : « C'est [avec Roger Blin] que m'est apparu ce pouvoir du théâtre de rendre l'invisible présent et communicable. Tout coexistait, le réel et l'irréel, le concret et l'impalpable, les vivants et les fantômes[8] ». Présentant *Témoignages sur Ballybeg*, l'adaptation française de *Faith Healer*, dans *L'Avant-Scène Théâtre*, Jean-Luc Toula-Breysse voyait « trois êtres fantomatiques [qui] traversent leurs souvenirs comme ces bourgades galloises ou écossaises aux consonances magiques[9] » ; il citait les propos de Terzieff pour qui dans cette pièce « les fantômes de l'auteur rejoignent mes fantômes et ceux du public, ils sont à la fois très particuliers et pourtant universels[10] ». Partons à la rencontre de ces fantômes très irlandais donc mais qui pourtant, par la grâce et la magie du théâtre, peuvent devenir les nôtres.

---

6. Réplique d'Estragon dans *Waiting for Godot.* Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, Londres, Faber & Faber, p. 58
7. Frank McGuinness, « *Faith Healer*: All the Dead Voices », *Irish University Review*, 29(1) (Brian Friel), Spring/Summer 1999, p. 60-63 (https://www.jstor.org/stable/25511529).
8. Terzieff, *Seul avec Tous, op. cit.*, p. 108.
9. *L'Avant-Scène Théâtre*, n° 785, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

Les trois pièces pour l'Irlande de Parker sont, par ordre chronologique de création, *Northern Star* (1984), *Heavenly Bodies* (1986) et *Pentecost* (1987). Toutes trois figurent des fantômes identifiés comme tels dans le script. *Northern Star* traite du soulèvement de 1798 et se concentre sur la figure historique de Henry McCracken, un des meneurs de cette insurrection républicaine à l'issue tragique. Une indication scénique situe l'action, avec une ironie caractéristique : « *Ireland the continuous past* ». Dans ce passé continu qui lie les violences de 1798 à celles, bien contemporaines, des *Troubles* des années 1960 à 1990, Parker propose une exploration dramatique sensible et exigeante de ce que l'on peut appeler « *the unfinished business of Irish Republicanism* », un mouvement républicain qui n'a pu aboutir et poursuit sa quête d'une république irlandaise par des moyens souvent bien sanglants. Henry et sa compagne Mary ont trouvé refuge dans une maison hantée par une « mariée fantôme » (« *the Phantom Bride* »), dont nous apprenons la tragique histoire dès la scène d'ouverture : son mari ayant été assassiné dans un meurtre sectaire juste avant ses noces, elle se pendit en robe de mariée et depuis l'on dit que « *any man that looks her straight in the eye is a dead man* » (p. 16). Mort et sexualité, frustration et vengeance sont réunies dans cette figure aussi séductrice que prédatrice, une Irlande privée de la consommation de son union heureuse, avatar d'un trope connu de la littérature et de l'histoire irlandaises mais aussi bien plus universelle, mêlant Eros et Thanatos… Juste avant la fin de ce premier acte, tandis que Mary chante doucement, la mariée fantôme revient : « *As the song continues, [McCracken] turns upstage to face her. She kisses him, and then with a predatory leap, clamps her bare legs round his waist and her arms round his neck.* » (p. 50). C'est pourtant avec Mary que nous retrouvons McCracken au lit, au début de l'acte deux, troublé et incrédule car lui, l'homme des Lumières et de la Raison, pense avoir vu la mariée fantôme à laquelle il ne saurait croire :

> McCracken: I could have sworn to God I saw her myself, down there, in the very house.
> Mary: Sure why wouldn't you? Isn't it her house?
> McCracken: I can't stand my own mind! The one thing I always cherished. The men of Reason, logic and reason, and now I keep seeing the most damnable things, shadows and moonshine, when I most need to be clear and true. What have I to do with ghosts?
> Mary: There's no escaping them in this homeland. We're well used to the walking dead, we have more spooks than living bodies round these parts. What of it? There's no harm in seeing ghosts. There's just no call to turn into one, before your time. (p. 51-52)

À la Raison qui refuse le surnaturel et donc les fantômes, Mary oppose une conception plus ancienne, plus spirituelle du monde ; elle ancre ces apparitions et visions dans un cadre familier (« *these parts, this*

homeland ») et non hostile ou inconnu (« *the most damnable things* »). Le fantôme échappe aux formes de connaissance et de compréhension raisonnables. Pour Mary, la présence des spectres est une donnée, non une menace ou une aberration. Henry va être arrêté par les soldats anglais qui répriment la rébellion. Il est marqué par une mort imminente et il n'y a dans la pièce aucun suspense : nous savons que ce héros du soulèvement de 1798 est bien mort, condamné à la pendaison, et que son sort allait inspirer de nouveaux sacrifices. L'image de l'union de McCracken et de la mariée fantôme évoque immanquablement la belle et impitoyable, l'inconsolable et insatiable Kathleen à laquelle les hommes d'Irlande sacrifient leur vie dans ce passé continu (« *bridegroom to the goddess* », comme l'a formulé Seamus Heaney dans « The Tollund Man », en 1972) où rebellions et représailles s'enchaînent, au fil des siècles, dans l'attente vaine d'une résolution (*closure*). Le constat de l'échec du soulèvement des Irlandais-Unis est formulé un peu plus tard, non sans ironie, par le protagoniste lui-même : « *We hadn't the ghost of a chance* » (p. 57).

D'autres fantômes hantent cette œuvre étonnante : ceux des auteurs irlandais dont Parker pastiche le style pour donner à chaque scène de la tragédie de McCracken une résonance littéraire spécifique[11], s'inscrivant dans une lignée, une tradition théâtrale. Parker rend ainsi un bel hommage au talent de dramaturges – tous de tradition protestante libérale d'ailleurs, comme McCracken – dont les ombres bienveillantes donnent au spectateur avisé le plaisir du jeu de la reconnaissance. Ce « ventriloquisme théâtral » que Homi Bhabha n'avait pas encore rendu populaire dans le monde de la critique répond également selon lui à un impératif dicté par une histoire contestée, comme il l'expliquait dans le programme de la pièce :

> So how to write an Ulster history play? – since our past refuses to express itself as a linear, orderly narrative, in a convincing tone of voice? Tune into any given moment from it, and the wavelength soon grows crowded with a babble of voices from all the other moments, up to and including the present one. I have tried to accommodate this obstinate, crucial fact of life by eschewing any single style, and attempting instead a wide range of theatrical ventriloquism[12].

Le second volet de la trilogie, *Heavenly Bodies*, dont je ne traiterai pas ici, poursuit cette exploration du passé de la littérature irlandaise en prenant pour personnage central le dramaturge Dion Boucicault. Pas de mariée fantôme dans cette pièce mais un violoniste, « *the phantom*

11. On reconnaîtra, dans le désordre, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Oscar Wilde, Dion Boucicault, George Bernard Shaw, John Millington Synge, Sean O'Casey et Samuel Beckett. On pourrait ici parler d'une forme de mimétisme (*mimicry*), concept que Homi Bhabha allait bientôt identifier comme un élément caractéristique des cultures coloniales et postcoloniales, notamment dans *The Location of Culture* (London/New York, Routledge, 1994).
12. Richtarik, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

fiddler », qui trouve sa place dans l'univers théâtral et fantastique du mélodrame victorien à la Boucicault. Ce fantôme serait le père du dramaturge, mais aussi une projection de sa propre frustration, « *Boucicault setting out to avenge himself on the world, for being illegitimate, for being Irish* » selon Marilynn Richtarik[13].

La facture réaliste de *Pentecost* (1987), dernier volet de la trilogie et dernière pièce écrite par Parker peu avant sa mort, amène à la création d'un fantôme bien différent mais néanmoins désigné comme tel dans les indications scéniques sinon dans la distribution. Lily Mathews était la locataire de la maison ouvrière d'un quartier protestant de Belfast dans laquelle Marian et ses amis vont se retrouver, au beau milieu de la grève loyaliste de 1974 contre le projet d'accord de Sunningdale qui prévoyait un partage de pouvoir entre catholiques et protestants, nationalistes et unionistes. Marian traverse une grave crise personnelle et souhaite se séparer de son mari, Lenny. Ce dernier vient d'hériter de la maison et le fantôme de Lily va s'opposer à l'intrusion de la trop catholique Marian dans une maison que nous sommes invités à voir comme le symbole de la classe ouvrière protestante nord-irlandaise et de sa résistance intransigeante à toute revendication susceptible d'affaiblir la cause unioniste. Marian est le seul personnage capable de voir le fantôme de Lily, ce qui ouvre la possibilité – rationnelle – de voir Lily non comme un spectre mais comme une projection née de l'imagination de Marian après sa lecture du journal intime de la vieille dame :

> *Lily Mathews, in Sunday coat and hat and best handbag, appears in the shadowy doorway leading from the pantry.*
> *Lily: I don't want you in my house.*
> *Marian keeps her eyes on the knitting pattern: on guard but not entirely frightened, aware that her mind is playing tricks on her*
> *Marian: You needn't try to scare me, Lily.* (p. 155)

Les deux femmes vont faire ensemble le chemin qui mène du conflit ouvert, de l'opposition absolue, à la reconnaissance d'un deuil partagé et à une forme d'acceptation, voire de rédemption, dans une pièce dont la langue et l'inspiration sont profondément évangéliques :

> *Marian: You think you're haunting me, don't you? But you see, it's me that's actually haunting you. I'm not going to go away. There's no curse or hymn that can exorcise me. So you might as well just give me your blessing and make your peace with me.* (p. 180)

---

13.   *Ibid.*, p. 293.

Marian découvre le secret de Lily et ensemble elles vont se libérer des douloureux fantômes du passé, l'enfant mort de Marian et l'enfant adultérin abandonné par Lily : « *Marian takes Lily's hand and holds it against her own heart. Forgive me Lily* » (p. 197). L'idée, un peu folle, de Marian de préserver la maison comme un monument à la gloire de Lily Mathews et des femmes des quartiers ouvriers de Belfast en la confiant au National Trust est abandonnée ; la maison ne doit pas rester dans un passé mortifère, un lieu hanté ; il faut au contraire l'ouvrir pour accepter une vie nouvelle, faire de la place à ce qui pourra advenir et non s'enfermer dans un passé marqué par la culpabilité et la haine : « *That was the wrong impulse. A mistaken idea. It would only have been perpetuating a crime… condemning her lo life indefinitely. I'm clearing most of this out. Keeping just the basics. Fixing it up. What this house needs most is air and light* » (p. 202). Marian poursuit, devenue porte-parole d'un dramaturge pour qui l'accord anglo-irlandais de 1985 offrait une réelle opportunité non d'enterrer le passé mais bien de faire confiance à l'avenir. Marian, comme mue par l'Esprit Saint (*holy ghost*), a la révélation d'un pardon possible et d'une vie nouvelle, libérant les fantômes des victimes innocentes de leur servitude et d'un ressentiment éternel :

> *Personally, I want to live now. I want this house to live. We have committed sacrilege enough on life, in this place, in these times. We don't just owe it to ourselves, we owe it to our dead too…our innocent dead. They're not our masters, they're only our creditors, for the life they never knew. We owe them at least that – the fullest life for which they could ever had hoped, we carry those ghosts within us, to betray those hopes is the real sin against the Christ, and I for one cannot commit it one day longer.* (p. 208)

Avec ces fenêtres qu'elle ouvre en grand sur le plateau, littéralement et métaphoriquement, les ténèbres recèdent, la lumière l'emporte sur l'ombre, la vie sur la mort, pas dans l'oubli mais dans le pardon, condition nécessaire pour permettre aux morts de ne pas errer comme des revenants en quête d'une vengeance mortifère. Peut-être pouvons-nous avec Marian (qui vit ici une sorte d'assomption, d'élévation…) mettre enfin un terme au cycle de la « rétribution » évoqué par le dramaturge à propos des fantômes des trois pièces et de l'histoire de l'Irlande. *Pentecost*, pièce écrite par un homme d'à peine 45 ans pourtant au seuil de la mort, suggère une circulation des fantômes qui ouvre sur une rédemption, la possibilité de vivre avec le passé et ses pertes, avec ses morts et ses deuils, sans y sacrifier le présent et l'avenir. Si « toutes les pièces sont des pièces pour fantômes[14] », le théâtre peut aussi contenir « les fantômes implacables de

---

14. « *All plays are ghost plays* » (Stewart Parker, *Dramatis Personae and Other Writings*, Gerald Dawe, Maria Johnston et Clare Wallace (dir.), Prague, Litteraria Pragensia, 2008, p. 25).

l'histoire[15] » et nous placer non du côté du désir de mort mais du côté du jeu et de la vie[16]. La performance, au sens du performatif, est un acte de foi en l'homme et en son pouvoir de pardonner créant, pour reprendre les termes de Stewart Parker, un théâtre « qui pourrait laisser entrevoir une vision de l'avenir[17] ».

Le deuil rendu possible de l'enfant mort de Marian et Lenny offre une transition aussi aisée que douloureuse vers *Faith Healer*[18] de Brian Friel, car l'ombre de l'enfant mort-né de Grace et Frank Hardy, image récurrente de la stérilité, d'un avenir avorté, hante cette pièce comme l'ombre du bien-nommé Christopher plane sur *Pentecost*. À propos de ce qui reste comme une œuvre majeure de Friel et du théâtre irlandais, le dramaturge Frank McGuinness, lui aussi fort doué pour le dialogue avec les ombres de l'histoire irlandaise (*Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching towards the Somme*) écrivait en 1999 :

> *Beckett in Waiting for Godot spoke of the dead voices, speaking together, each one to itself. In Faith Healer, Brian Friel speaks not of dead voices but with them.* […] *Bit by bit it dawns that Frank and Grace speak as ghosts. The certainty of that information comes from the evidence of the only survivor from this unholy trinity, Teddy the showbiz veteran, teller of many incredible fictions, but obsessed by only one truth, the love of Frank and Grace Hardy, that inspired his absolute love for both of them. When Teddy speaks, the dead voices disappear. A living voice is heard, but it is only speaking of death as well. Frank returns to the stage to die his death. As in Greek tragedy the violent action occurs offstage, reported by a messenger. But here the messenger is the man of action, the man of suffering himself, speaking from the grave*[19].

Chez Brian Friel la mémoire a clairement partie liée au spectral. C'est bien souvent en évoquant ce dont l'on se souvient, celles et ceux qui nous ont quittés mais qui sont néanmoins toujours avec nous, par la grâce – ou la malédiction – du souvenir, qu'il fait théâtre. *To remember everything is a form of madness*[20]… Avant *Faith Healer*, Brian Friel avait mis en scène des personnages déjà morts, dont il nous révélait le statut indirectement : *Freedom of the City* (1974), *Living Quarters* (1977) ont des mises en scènes élaborées qui nous amènent inéluctablement vers une fin annoncée ;

---

15. « *Drama… can contain the conflicts and contradictions, the cruelty and the killings, the implacable ghosts, the unending rancour, pettiness and meanness of spirit, the poverty of imagination and evasion of truth which unites our two communities in their compact of mutual impotence and sterility – all in a single image.* » (*Ibid.*, p. 26).
16. « *To assert the primacy of the play-impulse over the deathwish* ». (*Ibid.*, p. 27).
17. « *begin to hint at a vision of the future.* » (*Ibid.*, p. 26).
18. Brian Friel, *Faith Healer*, Londres, Faber & Faber, 1980. Édition utilisée ici : Loughcrew, Gallery Press, 1991.
19. McGuinness, « *Faith Healer*: All the dead voices », *op. cit.*, p. 62-63.
20. Réplique de Hugh dans *Translations*, Londres, Faber & Faber, 1981, p. 67.

celle des trois manifestants de Bloody Sunday, exécutés à la scène finale mais dont nous avons vu les corps enlevés dès la première scène ; celle de Frank Butler, qui se suicidera sans que sa famille puisse empêcher son geste, ce qui les contraint à ré-imaginer à l'infini, à remettre en scène sous la direction de Sir, ces jours où ils auraient pu changer le cours des choses mais ne l'ont pas fait. Le super metteur en scène pirandellien, Sir, est né comme il l'explique lui-même d'une nécessité psychique propre aux personnages/protagonistes de la tragédie (« *out of some deep psychic necessity*[21] » incarnant là encore un besoin de résolution (*closure*) car le présent est paralysé, parasité par un passé qui ne passe pas. Pourtant, paradoxe bien connu du théâtre, en scène ni Frank ni les trois manifestants ne sont joués comme des fantômes ou des morts ; ils apparaissent au contraire bien réels et vivants, incarnés par des acteurs de chair et de sang dont le statut ontologique, en apparence, ne diffère pas de celui des autres personnages…

Faith Healer est une pièce pour trois voix : celle du guérisseur, Frank Hardy, qui encadre par ses deux monologues les interventions de sa femme – qu'il préfère appeler sa maîtresse – Grace, et de son agent, Teddy le cockney. Une citation d'Avery Gordon s'applique à la perfection à cette œuvre austère et troublante : « *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*[22] ». Le spectateur en fait l'expérience absolue et bouleversante car Frank, Grace et Teddy viennent chacun leur tour nous livrer leur version des faits qui ont conduit à la mort de Frank, un soir en Irlande, puis au suicide de Grace, un autre jour, à Londres. Des versions contradictoires où la victime elle-même revient d'entre les morts pour nous préciser les circonstances de sa disparition, son exécution, voire sa passion. Trois portraits de Frank en guérisseur, en mari, amant, fils, ami, figure christique, bouc émissaire. C'est donc la voix d'un mort qui encadre la pièce et nous fait entendre encore toutes ces voix mortes… Si le fantôme est bien un emblème de la perte, une absence sensible, marquée dans le monde tangible et visible, alors *Faith Healer* est, à chaque représentation, l'invocation rituelle de deux, sinon trois fantômes. Dès que j'invoque le nom de Frank Hardy, les ombres/fantômes de Donal McCann, l'acteur irlandais qui a créé le rôle de Frank en Irlande dans une incarnation d'une rare puissance et justesse, et de Laurent Terzieff qui mit en scène et interpréta cette pièce en France – s'imposent à moi. Frank Hardy, le guérisseur, apparaît, tiré des ténèbres d'un plateau sombre. Sa litanie de noms de villages gallois qui se meurent, puis l'évocation de reliques de rituels abandonnés (*harvest thanksgiving*, *Christmas decoration*) convoquent un monde postchrétien dont les survivants, ceux qui viennent à lui, un par un, cherchent la guérison ou plus

21. Brian Friel, *Living Quarters*, Loughcrew, Gallery, 1992, p. 11.
22. Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the sociological Imagination*, Minneapolis, Minnesota U.P., 1997, p. 8.

probablement la certitude rassurante qu'ils sont inguérissables. Il voit en eux les envoyés de la foule innombrable et menaçante de celles et ceux qui ont presque, mais pas encore totalement, perdu l'espoir, une armée muette d'ombres menaçantes et sinistres qui pourraient le poursuivre, l'anticipation de l'inéluctabilité de son ultime sacrifice :

> *The crippled and the blind and the disfigured and the deaf and the barren…Sometimes I got a strange sense that they weren't there on their own behalf at all but as delegates, legati, chosen because of their audacity; and that outside, poised, mute, waiting in the half-light, were hundreds of people who held their breath while we were in the locality. And I sometimes got the impression, too, that if we hadn't come to them, they would have sought us out.* (p. 17)

Ces mots résonnent étrangement aux oreilles de celles et ceux qui ont lu *Apprendre à perdre*, un récent essai du philosophe et écrivain Vincent Delecroix :

> Ce qui est perdu peuple le monde à la manière d'un fantôme […] La mondialisation est au fond une accumulation de pertes, c'est même là son secret honteux… La manière que nous avons de vivre avec les fantômes, de leur parler, de faire en sorte qu'ils soient là mais ne reviennent pas sous forme de revenants, c'est-à-dire de spectre qui viennent accuser l'existence présente, est une question éminemment politique[23].

Les régions où circulent Frank et ses acolytes sont bien celles qui sont abandonnées et leurs occupants ceux qui sont marginalisés par le progrès, la modernité. Mais un autre fantôme hante la pièce et notamment le monologue de Grace : celui de l'enfant mort-né et enterré en Écosse près du village de Kinlochbervie. Il est le secret, le refoulé :

> *Kinlochbervie's where the baby is buried. And he never talked about it afterwards; never once mentioned it again; and because he didn't, neither did I. So that was it. Over and done with. A finished thing. Yes. But I think it's a nice name Kinlochbervie – a complete sound – a name you wouldn't forget easily…* (p. 24)

Pas d'oubli possible même si ce fantôme n'est jamais matérialisé sur scène ; la détresse de Grace, puis les détails donnés par Teddy garantissent que cette image reste avec nous, comme elle reste avec eux. Grace est donc hantée par deux fantômes, celui de son bébé mort-né (« *the black-faced, macerated baby that's buried in a field in Kinlochbervie in Sutherland in the*

---

23. Vincent Delecroix, *Apprendre à perdre*, Paris, Payot-Rivages, 2019. Texte cité dans *L'Obs*, nº 2876, 19 décembre 2019, p. 111-114.

north of Scotland », p. 28) et celui de son mari, dont la mort violente est un traumatisme dont elle ne se remet pas malgré l'injonction du docteur qui la suit et lui prescrit les somnifères dont elle fera une overdose volontaire et fatale : « *Of course you've had a traumatic experience Mrs Hardy; absolutely horrific. But it's over, finished with* » (p. 22). Si, selon Cathy Caruth, « être traumatisé, c'est être possédé par une image ou un événement situé dans le passé[24] », Grace est indéniablement traumatisée, comme l'était Marian, mais elle ne parvient pas à dépasser ce traumatisme, à vivre avec la mort de Frank, à vivre sans lui :« *Frank, finding some kind of sustenance in me… finally he drained me* […] *I need him to sustain me in that existence – O my God, I don't know if I can go on without his sustenance. Fade to black* » (p. 32). Il faudrait, dans le monde moderne, nous dit Delecroix, ironique, « "réussir son deuil", paraît-il, nous défaire au plus vite de ce qui est perdu… Épouvantables injonctions, peur archaïque des fantômes[25] ». Grace n'y parvient pas et nous comprenons bien pourquoi elle vit toujours avec ses fantômes, qu'elle choisit de rejoindre. Il revient à Teddy, au monologue suivant, de nous apprendre le suicide de Grace. Quand Frank revient pour son ultime monologue c'est pour clore le récit et nous dire comment un matin, de retour en Irlande à Ballybeg, au terme d'une nuit de célébration et de beuverie, il s'est avancé dans la cour vers une mort certaine qui lui garantit non la résurrection christique mais une forme de résolution, qui ouvre la possibilité de cette résurrection théâtrale pour nous spectateurs :

> *And as I walked I became possessed of a strange and trembling intimation: that the whole corporeal world – the cobbles, the trees, the sky, those four malign implements – somehow had shed their physical reality and had become mere imaginings* […] *that even we had ceased to be physical and existed only in spirit, only in the need we had for each other. The maddening questions were silent – at long last I was renouncing chance.* (p. 54-55)

Vincent Delecroix toujours : « Ce qui est perdu, c'est-à-dire ce qui flotte entre l'être et le non-être, ce qui hante mais n'est pas, échappe aux ontologies binaires être/non-être. Que fait-on de ce truc étrange ?[26] » *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990) nous propose une possibilité de transformation de « ce truc étrange ».

Dancing at Lughnasa est la *memory play* par excellence ; on peut la placer, comme le font nombre de critiques, aux côtés de *Our Town* de Thornton Wilder et de *The Glass Menagerie* de Tennessee Williams. La structure de la pièce est remarquable. Tout est filtré par la

24. Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins U.P., 1995, p. 5.
25. Delecroix, art. cit., p. 113.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

conscience/présence de Michael, narrateur adulte qui se remémore son enfance à Ballybeg et en particulier l'été de 1936 dans le cottage où sa mère et ses tantes l'élevèrent, enfant illégitime d'un père séduisant mais absent. Sur scène et dans la perception du spectateur, passé et présent coexistent, mais Michael et les sœurs Mundy n'existent pas sur le même niveau temporel ; preuve en est que dans les scènes de 1936 l'enfant est une absence, un vide que le Michael adulte comble depuis le bord du plateau en lançant quelques répliques avec sa voix d'adulte. Michael est hanté par ses souvenirs : « *A dream music that is both heard and imagined; that seems to be both itself and its own echo; a sound so alluring and so mesmeric that the afternoon is bewitched, maybe haunted, by it* » (p. 71). En se remémorant ces jours d'été, sa mère, ses tantes, il leur redonne vie, nous faisant parfois oublier que ce que nous voyons sur scène n'est que la projection, plus ou moins fidèle, de souvenirs partiels, déformés par le temps et colorés par sa culpabilité d'être parti : « *And when my time came to go away, in the selfish way of young men I was happy to escape* » (p. 71). Est-ce cette fuite, combinée à son illégitimité, qui le condamne à ressasser ces souvenirs, comme l'affirme Prapassaree Kramer :

> *Michael's performance as narrator and producer of his play is affected not only by his need to "legitimize" himself as a "love-child" but by his need to expiate guilt. 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*[27].

Toujours est-il que *Dancing at Lughnasa*, pièce remarquable et grand succès international, fait passer ces femmes courageuses de Glenties[28] de l'ombre de la mort et de l'oubli, à la lumière dorée d'un été sans fin, de la scène intime de la mémoire à l'espace sacré et partagé de la scène de théâtre. Ceci est d'autant plus poignant que Friel a reconnu le caractère partiellement autobiographique de la pièce. Et d'autant plus fort que *Dancing at Lughnasa* a marqué le changement radical de la place de la femme dans la société irlandaise à partir des années 1990.

Parker et Friel, comme tant d'autres dramaturges d'Irlande et d'ailleurs, nous offrent par la magie de ce rituel ancien qu'est le théâtre, des pièces qui hantent et qui elles-mêmes sont hantées ; hantées par les actrices et acteurs qui ont incarné les protagonistes et les ont amenés à la vie de la scène ; hantées par des productions mémorables ; hantées par d'autres textes, des échos délibérés d'œuvres antérieures : que l'on songe

---

27. Prapassaree Kramer, « *Dancing at Lughnasa*: unexcused absence », *Modern Drama*, 43(2), Summer 2000, p. 178.
28. La pièce est effectivement dédiée « *In memory of those five brave Glenties women* », sachant que la famille maternelle de Friel était originaire de Glenties, petite ville chère à l'auteur qu'il transmuta en Ballybeg.

au fantôme bienveillant de Tchekhov, consubstantiel du théâtre de Friel ou au pastiche de dramaturges irlandais dont les accents résonnent dans *Northern Star*. Quand Benoît Lavigne a monté *Guérisseur* à Paris en 2019, il concluait sa note d'intention par cette invocation : « À travers cette production je voulais me souvenir de Laurent Terzieff et Pascale de Boysson qui en 1986 créaient ce texte en France, ici au Lucernaire, sous le titre *Témoignages sur Ballybeg* et dont l'aventure théâtrale, l'exigence et l'engagement sont pour moi, en toute humilité, le chemin à suivre[29] ». Chacun à leur manière, Parker et Friel, dans leur relation au passé, à la mémoire, à l'histoire et à leurs fantômes, spécifiques et universels, valident ce que dit Régine Robin sur « le passé ouvert dans ce qu'il a encore à nous dire et dans ce que nous avons encore à lui dire[30] » en Irlande et partout ailleurs.

Martine Pelletier est maître de conférences à l'université de Tours et membre de l'équipe de recherche ICD (EA 6297). Elle est l'auteur du livre *Brian Friel : Histoire et histoires* publié au Septentrion en 1997 ainsi que de nombreux articles sur le théâtre irlandais contemporain, notamment *The Cambridge Companion to Brian Friel* sous la direction d'Anthony Roche (2006), *Irish Literature Since 1990: Diverse Voices*, Michael Parker et Scott Brewster (dir.), (Manchester U. P., 2009), *Irish Drama. Local and Global Perspectives*, Nicholas Grene et Patrick Lonergan (dir.), (Carysfort, 2012). Elle a rédigé les préfaces aux onze traductions françaises par Alain Delahaye des pièces de Brian Friel parues aux éditions L'Avant-scène Théâtre entre 2009 et 2010. Ses publications les plus récentes sont, avec Carine Berbéri, *Ireland : Authority and Crisis*, paru en 2015 dans la collection « Reimagining Ireland » chez Peter Lang, et, avec Valérie Peyronel, le numéro spécial des *Études irlandaises*, « La Crise ? Quelle crise ? » (hiver 2015).

---

29. Benoît Lavigne, Note d'intention pour sa mise en scène de « Guérisseur » de Brian Friel, dans la traduction d'Alain Delahaye, au théâtre du Lucernaire, première le 31 janvier 2018 (http://www.lucernaire.fr/spectacles-passes/2164-guerisseur.html, consulté le 5 mars 2020).
30. Régine Robin, *La Mémoire saturée*, Paris, Stock, 2003, p. 56.

Chapter five

The Spectres of James Joyce and Brian Friel

Hermeneutic Hauntology, Borders, and Ghost language

/////////////

Virginie Roche-Tiengo
Université Sorbonne Paris Nord

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 mnesic 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."[1] The ghost, "this being-there of an absent or departed one",[2] 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."[3] 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".[4] 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, parablist, /smeller of rot/in a state, infused /with its poisons, /pinioned by ghosts/ and affections".[5] The ghost speaks and looks at us from the past and yet interrupts all forms of specularity 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".[6] 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"[7] by "jumping in graves" like Seamus Heaney, "dithering, blathering".[8] 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."[9] 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 Oisin, "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".[10] 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".[11] 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"[12] 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 ugual*").[13] 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."[14] 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."[15] 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".[16] 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*".[17] 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".[18] 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."[19] 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".[20] And Gabriel's wife, Gretta is mourning Michael Furey, her "ghost by absence"[21] 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".[22] 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".[23] 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!"[24] 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".[25] 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".[26] 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."[27] 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'[28] 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?'[29] 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."[30] 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".[31] 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".[32] 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?"[33] 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".[34] 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."[35] 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."[36] 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."[37] 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."[38] 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".[39] 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"[40] 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…"[41] but for Frank, it meant nothing, it never existed: "I would have liked to have a child but she was barren".[42] 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 Arbord, 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?".[43] 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".[44] And writing in another language is for Joyce and Friel "the rage of Caliban at not seeing his face in the mirror"[45] 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."[46] 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?"[47] Friel gives to "words something of the significance they have in dreams".[48] Words become "organically active like renewed exorcisms"[49] 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".[50] 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.[51]

The silenced monoglot figure of Myles Joyce and elements of the Maanstrasna 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.[52]

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"[…].[53] 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 Mullingan 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.[54]

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."[55] But Michael "standing downstage left in a pool of light"[56] is the one conjuring up the spectres of the past and longing to be "in touch with some otherness".[57] 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".[58] 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?".[59] 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".[60] 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".[61] 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"[62], 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. "[63] And Joyce and Friel's works reverberate quietly and persistently in the head with the beauty of mnesic 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."[64] By "walking with spectres thro' the midnight shade" to quote Regina Maria Roche in *Clermont*[65], 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"[66], 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 Harbor, 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"[67] and we are "silent, stared at, by night, by dawn".[68] 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.

Virginie Roche-Tiengo teaches legal English at the University Paris 13, Sorbonne Paris Cité, France and is Assistant Dean for International and Institutional Relations in Sorbonne Paris Cité Law Faculty. Following her Ph.D. at the Sorbonne on *Lost Unity: The Poetics of Myth in the Theatre of the Irish Playwright Brian Friel*, she has published on Irish drama, in particular the work of Brian Friel, Thomas Kilroy, Frank McGuinness, and Samuel Beckett. The latest international conference she co-organized in October 2018 was entitled *Crossing Borders: Contemporary Anglophone Theatre in Europe*. The conference aimed to allow academics, translators, publishers and a wide range of theatre practitioners, to confront their experience with Anglophone theatre throughout Europe. 22 papers from 11 European countries (Czech Republic, France, Germany, Great-Britain, Greece, Italy, Malta, Montenegro, Serbia, Spain, and Portugal) were selected and the Play *An Irish Story* by Kelly Rivière was staged in the MSH (Maison des Sciences de l'Homme) Paris Nord. Virginie Roche-Tiengo is currently working on the Brian Friel Papers in the National Library of Ireland and in the archives of NUI Galway as part of a new book project. She is a member of GIS Eire and GIS Sociability and will be working in the National Archives of London on eighteenth century Irish playwrights (Richard Brinsley Sheridan and Charles Macklin) in July 2022. She is involved in the Molière Kansas City 2022 Project in Missouri, USA. Her research focuses also on law, crossing borders and the Irish stage.

Bibliography

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

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

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

Carlson, Marvin, *The Haunted Stage, The Theatre as Memory Machine*, Ann Harbor, Michigan U.P., 2011.

Delaney, Paul (Ed.), *Brian Friel In Conversation*, Ann Harbor, Michigan U.P., 2000.

Derrida, Jacques, *Spectres of Marx, The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, New York, Routledge, 2006. Originally published in French as *Spectres de Marx*, Paris, Galilée, 1993.

Eco, Umberto, *In the Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver, London, Picador, 1984.

Fitzsimons, Andrew, *What the Sky Arranges, Poems made from the Tsurezuregusa of Kenko*, Tokyo, Isobar, 2013.

Friel, Brian, *The Freedom of the City*, London, Faber & Faber, 1974.

———, *Living Quarters after Hippolytus*, London, Faber & Faber, 1978.

---

67.   *Ibid.*
68.   *Ibid.*

———, *Faith Healer*, London, Faber & Faber, 1980.

———, *Translations*, London, Faber & Faber, 1981.

———, *Selected Plays*, London, Faber & Faber, 1984.

———, *Dancing at Lughnasa*, London, Faber & Faber, 1990.

———, *Molly Sweeney*, Loughcrew, Gallery, 1994.

———, *Volunteers*, Loughcrew, Gallery, 1989.

Genette, Gérard, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman & Claude Doubinsky; foreword Gerald Prince, Lincoln, Nebraska U.P., 1997. Originally published in French as *Palimpsestes : la littérature au second degré*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1982.

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

Heidegger, Martin, *On the Way to Language*, trans. P. Hertz, New York, Harper & Row, 1971.

Hugo, Victor, *William Shakespeare*, Roubaix, Flammarion, 2014.

Joyce, James, *A James Joyce Reader*, London, Penguin, 1993.

———, *Ulysses*, London, Penguin, 2000.

Kelleher, Margaret, *The Maamtrasna Murders, Language, Life and Death in Nineteenth century Ireland*, Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 2018.

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

Roche, Anthony, *Brian Friel, Theatre and Politics*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Roche, Regina Maria, *Clermont*, ed. Nathalie Schroeder, Chicago, Valancourt, 2006.

Steiner, George, *After Babel*, New YorkOxford U.P., 1975.

Chapter six

"Neither god nor ghost"

Why does Seamus Heaney resurrect the Tollund Man?

PASCALE AMIOT
Université de Perpignan-Via Domitia, CRESEM

Abstract: Seamus Heaney's haunted poetry abounds in familiar spectres and family ghosts, tutelary spirits, presences and apparitions, visitations and resurrections, the most pregnant of which is the figure of Suibhne Geilt in the "Sweeney Redivivus" section of *Station Island*—a collection of poems inspired by Dante's meeting with ghosts in the *Purgatorio*. Rising from the corpus of Seamus Heaney's bog poems, the Tollund Man gradually becomes a central figure in the artist's imagination. He first appears as a sacrificial victim in the eponymous poem, "The Tollund Man" (*Wintering Out*, 1972), hovers in "Tollund" (*The Spirit Level*, 1996), only to re-awaken ten years later in "The Tollund Man in Springtime" (*District and Circle*, 2006). In this last poem, he becomes a Sweeney-like alter ego for the artist.

This study aims at analyzing the reasons why Seamus Heaney chose to resurrect the Tollund Man at three key-moments in his poetic career: moving from the violent communal history of the 1970s to the relative appeasement of the 1994 IRA ceasefire, then to a confrontation with twenty-first century urban Ireland. Through the *persona*, perspective and voice of the revived "green man", Heaney gives a haunting vision of the world we inhabit, while sharing his poetic experience of being "a parablist [...]/pinioned by ghosts".

Keywords: Seamus Heaney, The Troubles, 1994 IRA ceasefire, Bog poems, Ghost, Resurrection, Tollund Man, Alter ego, Parablist

> [...] ghosts who'd walked abroad
> Unfazed by light, to make a new beginning
> And make a go of it, alive and sinning,
> Ourselves again, free-willed again, not bad.[1]

IN the spirit of these Shakespearean lines, Seamus Heaney's verse may be apprehended as haunted poetry. From *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) to *Human Chain* (2010), the writer's work is crossed by familiar ghosts, tutelary spirits, shades and apparitions, exhumed mummies, nightmarish figures, uncanny visitations and resurrections. In a chapter entitled "Ghost writing", Stan Smith 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.[2]

One of the most uncanny revenants in Seamus Heaney's corpus is Suibhne Geilt in the "Sweeney Redivivus" section of *Station Island* (1984), a volume inspired by Dante's meeting with ghosts in the *Purgatorio*. Yet, a decade before Sweeney's resurrection, Heaney introduced the revival motif in his "bog poems", a body of work triggered by his encounter with archeologist P. V. Glob's *The Bog People*– "a book with a power to haunt",[3] as the poet later explained. Much has been written about these controversial poems, published in 1975 in *North*, and about "The Tollund Man", published three years before in *Wintering Out*. This poem can be read as the prototype of Seamus Heaney's ghostly "bog poems", in which the writer exploits the uncanny potential of bog bodies as expounded by art historian Karin Sanders: "The uncanny 'flash of the past,' like Walter Benjamin's 'disinterred corpses of the ancestors', will come back to haunt us. The latent uncanny potential [...] is implicitly tied to bog bodies in whatever cultural incarnations they embody."[4] Indeed, the uncanny seems to be quintessential to the bog itself:

---

1. Seamus Heaney, "Tollund", *The Spirit Level*, London, Faber, 1996, p. 69.
2. Stan Smith, *Irish Poetry and the Construction of Modern Identity: Ireland between Fantasy and History*, Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 2005, p. 102-103.
3. Seamus Heaney, "Revisiting an Old Friend", *The Times*, August 20, 2010.
4. Karin Sanders, *Bodies in the Bog and the Archeological Imagination*, Chicago, Chicago U.P., 2009, p. 45.

> Like haunted houses, bogs represent–to make use of an expression from the American art historian Anthony Vidler–exactly "that mingling of mental projection and spatial characteristics associated with the uncanny."[5]

Rising from the corpus of Seamus Heaney's bog poems, 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'."[6]

Through Heaney's archeological and mythologizing imagination, Tollund Man first appears as a sacrificial victim in the eponymous poem (*Wintering Out*, 1972), hovers as a "presence" in "Tollund" (*The Spirit Level*, 1996), and re-awakens in a twenty-first century environment in "The Tollund Man in Springtime" (*District and Circle*, 2006). Four years after the latter's resurrection, the poet writes a self-reflexive essay entitled "Seamus Heaney on Being Haunted by the Bog Man".[7] From "The Tollund Man" to "The Tollund Man in Springtime", published more than three decades later, the "temporal arc of the Tollund poems"[8] has attracted critical attention, with an emphasis either on the metonymic relationship between the poet and the Tollund Man (Péter Dolmnayos, 2012) or on the political implications of Heaney's exploitation of the Danish bog (Juan Christian Pellicer, 2017).

Encroaching upon the field of spectrality, this paper aims at unearthing the reasons why Seamus Heaney chooses to revive the Tollund Man at three key-moments in his poetic career, while shedding light on the evolution of the poet's empathic relation with his compound ghost, and disclosing the way in which he resorts to the spectral in order to face the paradox of the homely[9] and negotiate the dialectics of home and homelessness. We will thus invoke "The Tollund Man" as a Wordsworthian experience of "Apt Admonishment", read "Tollund" as an epiphanic ghost-reviving experience, and shed light on Tollund Man's resurrection and "spiriting into the street" in "The Tollund Man in Springtime".

---

5. *Ibid.*, p. 7. The quote is extracted from Anthony Vidler's *The Architectural Uncanny, Essays in the Modern Unhomely*, Cambridge, Harvard U.P., 1992, p. 11.
6. Seamus Heaney, "'Apt Admonishment': Wordsworth as an Example", *Hudson Review*, 61(1), 2008 (https://www.jstor.org/stable/20464796), p. 22.
7. *The Times*, August 10, 2010.
8. Juan Christian Pellicer, "A Region in the mind, Heaney's Jutland and the circumference of Nordic literature", *Scandinavia – International Journal of Scandinavian Studies*, 56, 2017 (https://www.scandinavica.net/article/12063), p. 125.
9. We are indebted to Richard Kearney's appendix "Heaney, Heidegger and Freud–the Paradox of the Homely", *Transitions: Narratives in Modern Irish Culture*, Dublin, Wolfhound Pr., 1988, p. 113-122.

"The Tollund Man" as an experience of "Apt Admonishment"

"The Tollund Man" is Seamus Heaney's first "bog bodies" poem. Dillon Johnston considers it as "a prototype of the bog poems of *North* and Heaney's first creative response to the rich imaginistic mine of P. V. Glob's *The Bog People*."[10] This controversial poem was written during the Easter of 1970 in a context of violence and tension in Northern Ireland. In "Feeling into Words", the poet recalls:

> From that moment the problems of poetry moved […] to being a search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament. […] I felt it imperative to discover a field of force in which […] it would be possible to encompass the perspectives of a humane reason and at the same time to grant the religious intensity of the violence its deplorable authenticity and complexity.[11]

Heaney further explains that the photographs of the sacrificial victims that he discovered in Glob's *Bog People* "blended in [his] mind with the photographs of atrocities, past and present, in the long rites of Irish political and religious struggles."[12] Described through an *ekphrasis* in the first quatrains of the poem, the photograph of the Tollund Man's unearthed body triggers historical, religious and mythical associations. Edna Longley suggests that the three parts of the poem may be "tabulated as evocation, invocation and vocation."[13]

The first section of the poem opens on a pledge: "Some day I will go to Aarhus". Neil Corcoran observes that "Heaney's 'mythologized' 'I' appears twice in the poem's opening section, in the repeated solemnity of a promise of pilgrimage; and the section lovingly disinters the man's body, carrying him from the photograph into language."[14] Fusing the human, animal, vegetal and mineral realms, the initial quatrain focuses on the dead man's "peat-brown" head, "the mild pods of his eyelids, / His pointed skin cap", before recreating his exhumation ("Where they dug him out") and ritual sacrifice ("Naked except for / The cap, *noose* and girdle"). The following lines raise an ambiguity as to who will "stand […] naked […] Bridegroom to the goddess". As J. Hufstader observes, "some curious tricks of syntax contrive to substitute the poet for the man."[15] The fourth quatrain evokes

---

10. Dillon Johnston, "Violence in Seamus Heaney's Poetry", *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry*, Matthew Campbell (Ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., 2003, p. 116.
11. Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations*, New York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1980, p. 56-57.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
13. Edna Longley, "'North': 'Inner Emigré' or 'Artful Voyeur'?", *The Art of Seamus Heaney*, Tony Curtis (Ed.), Chester Springs, Dufour, (1982) 1994, p. 67.
14. Neil Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney*, London, Faber, 1986, p. 79.
15. Jonathan Hufstader, "Coming to consciousness by 'Jumping in Graves': Heaney's Bog Poems and the Politics of *North*", *Irish University Review*, 26(1), Spring/Summer 1996

a pagan fertility rite, the sacrificial bridegroom's strangulation ("She tightened her tork on him "), his burial and miraculous preservation in the bog ("And opened her fen, / Those dark juices working / Him to a saint's kept body). The corpse turns into a relic, a "trove" now "reposing" at Aarhus: the first section of the poem circles back on itself, yet the focus is no longer on the victim's head but on the Christ-like "stained face". The second section stages the poet's sacrilegious invocation of the heathen figure. He appeals to the exhumed scapegoat to intercede and put an end to violence and barbarity in the "cauldron bog" of modern-day "unholy" Ireland:

> I could risk blasphemy
> Consecrate the cauldron bog
> Our holy ground and pray
> Him to germinate
> The scattered, ambushed
> Flesh of labourers,
> Stockinged corpses
> Laid out in the farmyards,
> Tell-tale skin and teeth
> Flecking the sleepers
> Of four youg brothers, trailed
> For miles along the lines

These shocking images refer to the Irish war in the 1920s, during which a farmer's four sons were "ambushed" and slaughtered by paramilitaries, and their bodies trailed along railway lines. Modern barbarity colludes with prehistoric violence as the poet "meditates on these sacrificial and ritual killings. "[16] In an empathic projection, the final section fuses the state of mind of the Iron Age victim being led to sacrifice and the pilgrim-poet's prospective feelings as he mentally travels through Jutland: "Something of his sad freedom / As he rode the tumbril / Should come to me, driving". The second quatrain points at his disorientation and feeling of estrangement ("Watching the pointing hands / Of country people, / Not knowing their tongue."). The concluding lines indict murderous violence and voice the subject's disillusionment and despair:

> Out here in Jutland
> In the old man-killing parishes
> I will feel lost,
> Unhappy and at home.

As Péter Dolmanyos observes, these paradoxical lines offer "a disillusioned closure in which the concept of 'home' is revisited along the

---

(https://www.jstor.org/stable/25484649), p. 62.
16.   Corcoran, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

complicated confines of the conflict-ridden home province of the poet".[17] In "Apt Admonishment", Heaney evokes his encounter with the prehistoric figure as a "poetic recognition scene", one of these meetings "bathed in an uncanny light, [...] when the poet has been [...] unhomed, has experienced the *unheimlich*:

> It was as if the Tollund Man and I had come from far away to a predestined meeting [...] where there was something familiar between us yet something that was also estranging and luminous. [...] I gazed with complete entrancement at my familiar ghost, as if he were indeed "a man from some far region sent / To give me human strength by apt admonishment."[18]

Admonishment–as the earnest expression of warning or reprimand, the giving of solicitous advice, and the indication of duties or obligations– plays a crucial role in the poem on both a national and a personal scale. On the collective level, the poet is drawn to the archetypal dimension of the Tollund Man's fate, in which he finds a "befitting emblem of adversity".[19] Heaney re-reads the ritual violence of the Jutland past in order to understand the present Irish predicament, his distressful sense of "home" bearing comment on the similarities that he draws between archaic and modern-day violence–an analogy which has fueled vivid critical response. Yet, as Neil Corcoran observes, the connection which gives the poem its emotional intensity is not that between Ireland and Jutland, but between the Tollund Man and Seamus Heaney himself:

> In placing its emotional weight [...] on the relationship between poet and evoked human figure, "The Tollund Man" [...] dissolves its more ambitious mythical elements into something sharply immediate: the pain of personal incomprehension, isolation and pity.[20]

In the victimized figure of the Tollund Man the poet finds an objective correlative. In "Apt Admonishment", he acknowledges the affective dimension of his identification with the Tollund Man: "Here [...] were the features of [...] a man of sorrows, one whose outer looks seemed to be an inviolable image of the inner state I and others shared silently in those days, "lost, unhappy and at home". Twenty-four years later, "Tollund" may be read as a paradoxical resolution of the dialectic of home and homelessness.

---

17. Péter Dolmanyos, "District and Circles", *Eger Journal of English Studies*, 12, 2012, p. 32.
18. Heaney, "Apt Admonishment", art. cit., p. 28.
19. "The question, as ever, is 'How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea?' And my answer is, by offering 'befitting emblems of adversity'. Some of the emblems I found in [...] *The Bog People*." (*Preoccupations*, p. 57-58).
20. Corcoran, *op. cit.*, p. 79-80.

"Ghosts unfazed by light"

"Tollund" was composed in September 1994, twenty-one years after Seamus Heaney's first visit to Jutland, and a few days after the cease-fire in Ireland. As the IRA Provisionals and the Ulster paramilitaries agreed to a truce, the spectre of violence and murder in Northern Ireland seemed to be on the wane. In this context, while fulfilling the promise made to the Iron Age victim in the opening lines of the preceding poem, "Tollund" can be read as "the revisiting of old haunts in a new light",[21] as Stephen Regan points out.

Throughout this poem, the subject, standing on the site where Danish turf-cutters excavated the Tollund Man in the 1950s, registers the changes that have occurred. The process of change is immediately made clear through the speaker's initial *double entendre*: "That Sunday Morning, we had travelled far"–"we" referring both to the poet, his wife and friends, and to the Irish people. Sacrificial "Tollund Moss" (*moss* is a synonym for bog) has turned into well-groomed farmlands and fields. The speaker equates the site with the topos of John Hewitt's "Townland of Peace",[22] a pastoral "poem of dream farms / Outside all contention". The speaker in Heaney's poem emphasizes the familiarity of the "outback" (an Irish name for bogland): discovering "The low ground, the swart water, the thick grass", the "willow bushes; rushes; bog-fir grabs", the latter remarks: "It could have been Mulhollandstown or Scribe".

Yet, the subject perceives the site as both "hallucinatory and familiar", thus re-introducing uncanniness in the midst of a bright and homely Sunday morning. As Juan Christian Pellicer observes, "when Heaney revisits the bog near Silkeborg […], he describes the scene by the trope of the uncanny."[23] Several features may account for the "hallucinatory"– that is phantasmagoric, imaginary or illusory–dimension of the experience. The first is the resonance of the prehistoric site, "a liminal place, poised between the ancient and the modern, the natural and the cultural, the actual and the virtual, as well as between separate cultures."[24] The second may be the intimately familiar character of this far-away place. The third is the changes brought in by modernity and tourism in an Iron Age site, encompassing "light traffic sound", "the satellite dish in the paddock", "the standing stone resituated and lansdcaped", "the tourist signs

21. Stephen Regan, "*Door into the Light:* The Later Poems of Seamus Heaney", "*The Soul Exceeds its Circumstances*": *The Later Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, Eugene O'Brien (Ed.), Notre Dame, Notre Dame U.P., 2016 (doi:10.2307/j.ctvpj77d1), p. 298.
22. John Hewitt's poem was published in 1944.The first line of the poem, "Once walking in the country of my kindred", relates to the dialectic of familiarity and estrangement developed in Heaney's own poem.
23. Pellicer, art. cit., p. 126.
24. *Ibid*.

in *futhark* runic script / In Danish and English", triggering the speaker's ironic and potentially disillusioned comment: "Things had moved on." The uncanny is also enhanced by what Pellicer calls the "hypothetical mode", which enables the poet to present the scene "at not one remove but two": "Tollund 'could have' also been a scene *out of a scene* from someone else's poem."[25] Above all, the hallucinatory nature of the experience may be related to the eponymous figure's absence. Indeed, the spectre of the sacrificial victim hovers upon the modern-day site as a Yeatsian presence, endowing both the place and the poem with a spectrality emphasized by the term "hallucination". Ironically, the persona of the Tollund Man invoked in the title is a missing apparition.

Multiple references and resonances point at the former poem, like the echoes between the "swept and gated farmyard" and the "Stockinged corpses / Laid out in the farmyards", between "the names in black / And white" and "the names / Tollund, Grauballe, Nebelgard", between "Where we stood […] at home" and "I will feel lost, / Unhappy and at home." Indeed, the conclusion of the poem can be read as an explicit response to the subject's ambiguous feeling of disorientation in "The Tollund Man"– things having "moved on" for the better. Yet the uncanny still resonates in the paradoxical last five lines, which combine the perception of familiarity ("at home") with a sense of freedom ("footloose") and the suggestion of potential exclusion ("beyond the tribe"), while equating the visitors with both scouts and spectres:

> More scouts than strangers, ghosts who'd walked abroad
> Unfazed by light, to make a new beginning
> And make a go of it, alive and sinning,
> Ourselves again, free-willed again, not bad.

The concluding quatrain is a master-piece of ambivalence, since it can be read both as a message of hope–the promise of the "new beginning" ushered by the IRA Ceasefire–or an "apt admonishment"–a warning against the chimerical nature of over-optimism. The roles have been twice reversed: flesh and blood beings (the poet and his wife) have turned into ghosts only to be resurrected, "alive and sinning, / […] not bad", in the new morning light. In the *Stepping Stones* recording, Seamus Heaney comments on the (inverted) Shakespearean dimension of this process:

> One of the most beautiful passages in Shakespeare has to do with an old belief about the spirit walking abroad after death but having to return to purgatory at dawn when the cocks crow and the light brightens. In ["Tollund"], however, I will revise this superstition and

---

25.   *Ibid.*, p. 134.

> end with an image of ghosts coming back to life, re-entering the light and managing to begin again with a new energy and resolution.[26]

Reflecting on the last line, the poet adds: "It was like a world restored, the world of the second chance, and that's why there's an echo of that Shakespearean line, 'Richard himself again', in the last stanza."[27] Helen Vendler encapsulates the resonances of this spectral quatrain:

> Released back into light, freed into autonomy, sinners but without the strain of civil strife, they can once again be domestic and private. "Tollund" can stand for a poem of Afterwards, marking [the poet]'s response in a post catastrophic moment.[28]

Tollund Man Redivivus

‖‖‖‖‖‖‖‖‖‖‖‖‖

Meditating upon "The Tollund Man", Helen Vendler wonders: "What would the corpse say posthumously about his own state?"[29] As an answer to this question, "The Tollund Man in Springtime" stages Tollund Man's resurrection in a dramatic monologue which reverberates both the revenant's and the poet's voices. In the first sonnet, the resurrected bog man finds himself immersed in a twenty-first century technology-driven environment, caught in an age of consumerism and surveillance. There he wanders undetected, "unregistered by scans, screens, hidden eyes". Addressing an unidentified "you", the speaker recalls his sacrifice ("when they chose to put me down / For their own good"), his burial and wait ("lost […], / out under seeding grass"), his re-awakening and confrontation with an altered world. The second sonnet evokes the bog, the materiality of peat, the buried man's predicament ("I knew that same dead-weight in joint and sinew"), his exhumation ("and the levered sod got lifted up") and rebirth. His re-creation is conjured in biblical terms:

> I was like turned turf in the breath of God,
> Bog-bodied on the sixth day, brown and bare,
> And on the last, all told, unatrophied.

In the third sonnet, the bog body recalls his exhibition in Silkeborg Museum; while the description of his head, ear, eye, lid, cheek and brow is in keeping with the *ekphrasis* in "The Tollund Man", the focus is on the persona's sensations ("My cushioned cheek and brow. My phantom /

26.   Seamus Heaney, *Stepping Stones*, Faber Audio Cassette.
27.   *Ibid.*
28.   Helen Vendler, *Seamus Heaney*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard U.P., 2000, p. 156.
29.   *Ibid.*, p. 45.

Hand and leg and arm and shoulder that felt pillowed"). The sacrificial victim remembers his body's communion with the peat and his long wake. He highlights his paradoxical status ("Faith placed in me, faithless as a stone"), before recalling past perceptions from the Danish bog ("I'd hear soft wind / And remember moony water in a rut"). In the fourth sonnet, Tollund Man challenges history and asserts the power of mind and word over matter:

> I gathered […] my staying powers,
> Told my webbed wrists to be like silver birches,
> My old uncallused hands to be young sward,
> The spade-cut skin to heal, and got restored
> By telling myself this.

As Péter Domanyos points out, Tollund Man's resurrection is "a tentative rejuvenation course based purely on the power of the word. The self-empowered *logos* ushers in the return of sensation".[30] The reborn persona perceives the pastoral quality of the environment: "Late as it was, / The early bird still sang, the meadow hay / Still buttercupped and daisied, sky was new." Yet the mood darkens as he perceives the alterations affecting both earth and air.

In the next sonnet, the Tollund Man recalls his former immersion in nature: "Cattle out in rain, their knowledgeable / Solid standing and readiness to wait, / These I learned from."). He evokes of his weird sensations after his resurrection ("My head as washy as a head of kale"), in terms reminiscent of the pagan bird-king in "Sweeney Redivivus". Tollund Man then contrasts the ecosystem of his origins and the twenty-first century urban *milieu* that he now discovers, "In check-out lines, at cash-points, in those queues / Of wired, far-faced smilers"–a world of "Newfound contrariness." The last lines of the sonnet highlight both the subject's feeling of alienation in this modern day environment, and his resolution to keep apart: "I stood off, / Bulrush, head in air, far from its lough." In the final sonnet, the resurrected man recalls his uprooting a bunch of rushes from the Tollund bog and his smuggling it "through every check and scan". Yet the transplantation fails, the rushes "bagged in their own bog-damp" having turned musty in the broom-cupboard where he had stored them. The poem ends with a dilemma, whether to "shake the dust" of the desiccated rushes and of the bogland past, or literally and metaphorically "mix it in with spit in pollen's name". Both Tollund man and the poet opt for the second stance:

---

30.   Dolmanyos, art. cit., p. 37.

> As a man would, cutting turf,
>
> I straightened, spat on my hands, felt the benefit
>
> And spirited myself into the street.

"The Tollund Man in Springtime" is a liminal poem in many respects. Through the use of the future perfect tense ("I'll have passed"), the opening line ushers in an equivocal handling of time. Just as the persona goes through the city "lapping [himself] in time", numerous time shifts occur between different layers of the past (Tollund's man former life, the time of his sacrifice, his long wait "Between when [he] was buried and unburied", his being displayed in Jutland, his resurrection and contemporary "presence"), provoking the reader's disorientation. Moreover, in the central line of the sequence, the subject asserts: "'The soul exceeds its circumstances'. Yes." The quote refers to Leon Wieselter's tribute to Czeslaw Milocz: "Miłosz's teaching was that history was no more to be granted the last word. One does not live entirely, or even mainly, for one's time. The soul exceeds its circumstances."[31] Heaney's persona supports this contest of historicism while expanding Wieselter's statement: "History not to be granted the last word / Or the first claim."

Liminality characterizes the subject himself, defined by Seamus Heaney as "a life on the side of life. […] A bit in and out of the world."[32] Tollund man presents himself as a hybrid being, "neither god nor ghost", "nor at odds nor at one", half-man half-spirit. The revenant's mention of "[his] phantom hand / And arm and leg and shoulder that felt pillowed / As fleshily as when the bog pith weighed" is ironic when one knows that the Tollund Man's body was not preserved after his exhumation in the 1950s: it was given to scientists and was later re-created in order to be displayed with his mummified head. The persona appears as both pagan– "Faith placed in me, me faithless as a stone" reads as an ironic response to Heaney's original stance–and Christian. As J. C. Pellicer observes, the last sonnet combines two biblical allusions, to "God's forming man from dust and breathing life into his nostrils" (Genesis 2:7) and to "Jesus mixing dust and spittle to anoint the blind man's eyes"[33] (John 9:6). Yet the main source of liminality lies in the superposition of the poet and his alter ego, a process reminiscent of Yeats's theory of mask and rebirth.[34] In "Seamus Heaney on Being Haunted by the Bog Man", the poet equates his fusion with the Tollund Man to a trans-fusion:

---

31. Leon Wieseltier wrote an obituary essay to Polish-Lithuanian poet Czeslaw Milosz: "Czesław Miłosz 1911-2004", *New York Times*, 12 September 2004 (https://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/12/books/review/czeslaw-milosz-19112004.html).
32. Sam Leigh, "Return of the Naturalist", interview with Seamus Heaney, *Daily Telegraph*, 2 April 2006.
33. Pellicer, art. cit., p. 132.
34. "All happiness depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other life, on a rebirth as something not one's self, something created in a moment and perpetually renewed." William Butler Yeats, *Mythologies*, New York, Macmillan, 1959, p. 334.

> I returned to a figure who had given me rare poetic strength more that 30 years earlier. I began a sequence of sonnets in the voice of the Tollund Man; this Iron Age revenant was […] 'discovered' in a new setting […]. He functioned as a kind a guardian other. […]. The convention is to call such a figure a 'persona' but in this case it reads more like a transfusion.[35]

The metaphor of the transfusion is in keeping with the ambivalence of the sequence as to the respective nature of revenant and poet. Just as the "transfusion" process occurs between a ghostly revenant and a flesh and blood writer, "The Tollund Man in Springtime" blurs the frontier between spectral creature and embodied being, shedding doubt both the extent of the revenant's re-incarnation and on the poet's physical presence. In the very last lines of the poem, the spectre strengthens himself "as a man would" while the poet "spirits himself" into the street. In this perspective, Heaney's choice to resurrect the Tollund Man responds to impulses that are both individual and global. In "Revisiting an old friend", the poet explains that Tollund Man's resurrection echoed a feeling of personal renewal. On a more intimate level, the resurrected Tollund Man also voices Heaney's feeling of alienation and homelessness when confronted to a dehumanized modern urban environment:

> Newfound contrariness.
> In check-out lines, at cash-points, in those queues
> Of wired, far-faced smilers. I stood off,
> Bulrush, head in the air, far from its long lough.

"'The Tollund Man in Springtime' imagines the Iron Age man […] coming out to walk like 'a stranger among us' in the new world of virtual reality and real pollution",[36] Heaney explains. In this poem, the Tollund Man turns into a green force: "In a 21st century of polluted air and oil-slicked seas, melting icebergs and denuded forests, Glob's slightly magical evocation of him as a green life force makes good ecological sense."[37] The bog man's resurrection thus serves an environmental agenda. Indeed the sequence juxtaposes the natural, pastoral world of the bog (with its seeding grass, kesh water, sphagnum moss, dead bracken) and of the fields (with the heavyweight cattle's "solid standing")–a world equated with patience, knowledge and intuition,–and twenty-first century environmental degradation. The resurrected Iron Man first perceives the "six-sensed threat" of pollution: "Panicked snipe offshooting into twilight, / Then going awry, larks quietened in the sun, / Clear alteration in the bog-pooled rain."

---

35. Seamus Heaney, *The Times*, March 25, 2006.
36. Seamus Heaney, *Stepping Stones*, p. 409.
37. Seamus Heaney, "Revisiting an old friend", *The Times*, August 20, 2010.

He contrasts his perception of nature at the time of his rebirth ("the meadow hay / Still buttercupped and daisied, sky was new.") with his discovery of environmental degradation (exhaust fumes, silage reek, thickened traffic, "transatlantic flights stacked in the blue"), before finding himself stranded in the technological environment of a "virtual city", in which people are registered by "scans, screens, hidden eyes" and stand in check-out lines in queues of "wired, far-faced smilers", thus encountering a new form of homelessness. Asked by Jody Allen Randolf why he writes of "a re-germinated Tollund Man moving almost from place to placelessness", the poet answers:

> Bewildering is exile into a universe with […] no internalized system of moral longitude or latitude […]. That is the larger placelessness which the Tollund Man encounters. […] He wagers his earthly creatureliness against consumerist vacuity.[38]

The poet adds: "What you have is not a documentary record–that is not what poetry delivers–what you have is a symbolic rendering of change."[39] The conclusion to Heaney's poetic "rendering of change" remains ambiguous, as the sixth sonnet navigates between defeat and defiance. Is the Tollund-Heaney persona fleeing or resisting change in the last lines of the poem?

> Dust in my palm
> And in my nostrils dust, should I shake it off
> Or mix it in with spit in pollen's name
> And my own? As a man would, cutting turf,
> I straightened, spat on my hands, felt benefit
> And spirited myself into the street.

According to Péter Dolmanyos, these lines offer "a dilemma as to the possibility of continuity."[40] For Juan Christian Pellicier, they stage a mutation, "an elemental transition from the earth and water of the body and the bog to pure air and […] spirit",[41] thus endorsing a drive towards escapism or renunciation. However, they can also be read as the expression of a resolution and a message of hope: "The ancient figure is once more resurrected to proclaim a message of springtime renewal and hope",[42] Eugene O'Brien affirms. This perspective is confirmed by the poet: "The Tollund Man in Springtime" […] is poetry, a heft of language, a lift and lay of energy, intimation of possibility in spite of the negative circumstances".[43] Asked

38. Jody Allen Randolf, *Close to the Next Moment*, Manchester, Carcanet, 2010, p. 205.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
40. Dolmanyos, art. cit., p. 37.
41. Pellicer, art. cit., p. 143.
42. Dolmanyos, art. cit., p. 37.
43. *Ibid.*

whether the changes that the Tollund Man embodies mean a world changed or a world destroyed, the poet answers:

> His world is changed but not destroyed. At the end he spits on his hands like a labourer ready to venture out on the jobs and in that way he stands for much that has been resolute in the country.[44]

In the closing sonnet of "The Tollund Man in Springtime", both the poet and his compound ghost "straighten" to face the changes brought about by modernity. Infused with the resilience of Heaney's turf-cutting ancestors, the lines resonate with the resolution ingrained in the earlier poems.

<center>*</center>

"The Tollund Man in Springtime" brings to a close the Tollund tryptic. Within three decades, the figure of the resurrected bog man, enforced as the poet's compound ghost and admonisher, comes to incarnate the resilience and the power of poetry. Asked by Dennis O'Driscoll whether "the sequence where [he] resuscitates the Tollund Man [is] primarily an environmentalist protest or lament", Seamus Heaney answers: "I think it has more to do with what is implied in your use of the verb 'resuscitate'":

> 'environmental lament' is a good way of describing it, but the charge in the actual writing came when identifying with the man as somebody who had 'gathered his staying powers'. He gets […] back into the living world by an act of will that is equally an act of imagination. Basically, he's the voice of the poet repossessing himself and his subject. At the same time, he's still the Tollund Man who was put down in the bog in order that new life would spring up. A principle of regeneration. A proffer […] made in the name of pollen and Tollund.[45]

In "The Tollund Man in Springtime", pollen and Tollund are thus brought to rhyme in a text that, just like its central figure, is both an offer and a proposal–a "proffer" in the spirit of Gerald Manley Hopkins. The arc of the Tollund poems thus culminates in a vision of poetry resonant with offering and sacrifice, challenge and dedication, exposure and consecration.

---

44.   Randolf, *op. cit.*, p. 205.
45.   Seamus Heaney, *Stepping Stones*, p. 409.

Pascale Amiot-Jouenne is a Professor of Irish literature at the University of Perpignan Via-Domitia. She is the author of a doctoral thesis on the poetry of Austin Clarke, and has published articles on Oscar Wilde, Seamus Heaney, Seamus Deane, Seumas O'Kelly, Flann O'Brien, Eavan Boland, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanain, Paula Meehan, Medbh McGuckian and Sinead Morrissey. She edited *Irlande : Insularité Singularité ?* (2001), *L'Autobiographie Irlandaise : voix communes, voix singulières* (2004), *Déclinaisons de la Voie : Avoiement, Dévoiement, Fourvoiement* (2006) and *Les Métamorphoses de Sweeney dans la littérature irlandaise contemporaine* (2011). She is a former vice president of the *Société française d'études irlandaises* and a member of the board of directors of *Études irlandaises*.

Bibliography

Primary sources

Heaney, Seamus, *Wintering Out*, London, Faber, 1972.

———, *North*, London, Faber, 1975.

———, *The Spirit Level*, London, Faber, 1996.

———, *District and Circle*, London, Faber, 2006.

———, *Preoccupations*, New York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1980.

———, "Unhappy and at Home, interview with Seamus Heaney by Seamus Deane", *The Crane Bag Book of Irish Studies (1977-1981)*, Mark P. Hederman, Richard Kearney (Eds.), Dublin, Blackwater, 1982, p. 66-72.

———, "The Man and the Bog", *Bog Bodies, Sacred Sites and Wetland Archaeology*, B. Coles. *et al.* (Eds.), Exeter, WARP, 1999, p. 3-6.

———, "Return of the Naturalist", interview by Sam Leigh, *Daily Telegraph*, 2 April, 2006.

———, "'Apt Admonishment': Wordsworth as an Example", *Hudson Review*, 61(1), 2008, p. 19-33 (https://www.jstor.org/stable/20464796).

———, *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney*, Dennis O'Driscoll, London, Faber & Faber, 2009.

———, "Seamus Heaney on Being Haunted by the Bog Man", *The Times*, August 10, 2010.

———, "Revisiting an Old Friend", *The Times*, August 20, 2010.

Secondary sources

Blanco, Maria del Pilar & Pereen Esther, *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*, London, Bloomsbury, 2013.

Carruth, Allison, "On Bog Lands and Digital Markets: Seamus Heaney's Recent Poetry", *Pacific Coast Philology*, 46(2) (Literature, Culture and the Environment), 2011 (https://www.jstor.org/stable/41851027), p. 232-244.

Corcoran, Neil, *Seamus Heaney,* London, Faber, 1986.

Dolmanyos, Péter, "District and Circles", *Eger Journal of English Studies*, 12, 2012, p. 31-40.

Glob, Peter Vilhelm, *The Bog People, Iron-Age Man Preserved*, trans. R. Bruce-Mitford, Ithaca, Cornell U.P., 1969.

Johnston, Dillon, "Violence in Seamus Heaney's Poetry", *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry*, Matthew Campbell (Ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., 2003, p. 113-132.

Kearney, Richard, *Transitions Narratives in Modern Irish Culture,* Manchester, Manchester U.P., 1998.

Longley, Edna, "'North': 'Inner Emigré' or 'Artful Voyeur'?", *The Art of Seamus Heaney*, Tony Curtis (Ed.), Chester Springs, Dufour, (1982) 1994, p. 65-95.

O'Brien, Eugene (Ed.), *"The Soul Exceeds its Circumstances"*: *The Later Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, Notre Dame, Notre Dame U.P., 2016 (doi:10.2307/j.ctvpj77d1).

O'Grady, Thomas, "Heaney's Tollund Man Revisited", *Boston Irish Reporter,* June 3, 2010

Parker, Michael, "Fallout from Thunder: Poetry and Poetics in Seamus Heaney's *District and Circle*", *Irish Studies Review,* 16(4), 2008, p. 369-384.

Pellicer, Juan Christian, "A Region in the mind: Heaney's Jutland and the circumference of Nordic literature", *Scandinavia – International Journal of Scandinavian Studies*, 56, 2017, p. 123-146 (https://www.scandinavica.net/article/12063).

Randolf, Jody Allen, *Close to the Next Moment Interviews from a Changing Ireland*, Manchester, Carcanet, 2010.

Sanders, Karin, *Bodies in the Bog and the Archeological Imagination*, Chicago, Chicago U.P., 2009.

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

VENDLER, Helen, *Seamus Heaney*, Cambridge, Harvard U.P., 2000.
VIDLER, Anthony, *The Archeological Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*, Cambridge, Harvard U.P., 1992.

Chapter seven

The Inquisition in Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820)

CHARLIE JORGE
Universidad Camilo José Cela

Abstract: The Inquisition wielded a lot of power all across the world, becoming the most feared institution in southern Europe for hundreds of years. Its members used all the tools at their hands against heretics, Protestants or any other group that threatened the papacy. Not surprisingly, all this background became the perfect setting for the novels written by some of the most renowned authors during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In this paper, I intend to analyse the image of the Inquisition reflected in *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), by Charles Robert Maturin. Beyond what many critics deem as a simple attack on Catholicism, we will see how Maturin showed the complicated nature of an Ireland controlled by an almost Inquisitorial state. The Ireland where Maturin grew up brimmed with rebels and government spies, not much unlike the familiars the Inquisition employed, while a foreign power tried to maintain its control over the country through secret manoeuvres and instilling fear in people. Maturin's Inquisition, with all its trappings and mystery, was a good reminder of that spectral medieval institution returning from the world of the dead to haunt the present.

Keywords: *Melmoth the Wanderer*, Charles Maturin, Gothic, Catholicism, Inquisition, Irish Literature

THE Inquisition has been used several times in literature to portray the worst side of humankind, as its prisons and procedures have always been hidden behind a veil of mystery, darkness and the "black legend" of corruption. The prisons of the Inquisition were manned with dark inquisitors and familiars, whose only mention made people in the countries where they wielded their power shiver, as Arturo

Pérez-Reverte's saga *Las aventuras del capitán Alatriste* (1996-2011) still reminds its 21st century readers. Pérez-Reverte's swashbuckler adventures prominently feature evil inquisitors who tirelessly plot against the main characters, and anybody who opposes their will to control Spain. Pérez-Reverte, through the voice of Íñigo, reminds his readership of such ecclesiastical atrocities, such as the immunity and abuses of the church[1] or the inquisitorial procedure and its *"temibles mazmorras secretas del Santo Oficio, en Toledo"* [feared secret dungeons of the Holy Office, in Toledo] (translation mine).[2] The *leyenda negra* ("black legend") around its buildings and manoeuvres speaks of people, and whole families, who disappear not to be seen again. This chimerical "black legend" circulated all over Europe for centuries, and reproduced each time it was told an image of Spain as a theo-political repressive country to such an extent that, as Edward Peters says, "Spain became the symbol of all forces of repression, brutality, religious and political intolerance, and intellectual and artistic backwardness".[3]

Inquisitors, and all their retinue, are probably the religious characters who accumulate the most negative characteristics of all that can be found through the darkest pages of the Gothic novel. These characters are employed to create an atmosphere of terror and to produce the dramatic effect proper to this kind of novel, as they provided invaluable material for these writers,[4] who benefit from the spectres and chimeras from a not-so-far distant past of legal injustices and corruption.[5] Gothic authors "exploit this image of the Inquisition, manipulating the familiar Gothic trappings of the Inquisition with its crosses, dark curtains and black hoods, providing a pervasive atmosphere of evil".[6] In several novels of this genre, we see individuals belonging to the Holy Office carrying out their tasks of purification in the name of the Church. In *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), considered by many a master piece of the genre, Charles Robert Maturin offers a wide choice of these individuals, such as the ones Alonzo de Monçada, one of the heroes in the novel, meets after being captured by the Inquisition. In the centuries when the real power of the Inquisition was weakening and, in some countries, even disappearing, Gothic writers brought its largest and most horrifying dimension closer to their audiences. In their novels, the myth of the Inquisition, and the terrible spectre of its "black legend", took on "an immediacy and imposing presence that greatly strengthened its other roles in religious, political, and philosophical polemic".[7]

1. Arturo Pérez-Reverte, *Limpieza de sangre*, Madrid, Alfaguara, 1997, p. 43.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
3. Edward Peters, *Inquisition*, Berkeley, California U.P., 1989, p. 131.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
5. Diane Long Hoeveler, *The Gothic Ideology: Religious Hysteria and Anti-Catholicism in British Popular Fiction, 1780-1880*, Cardiff, Wales U.P., 2014 (https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qhfdt), p. 156.
6. Beth Swan, "Radcliffe's Inquisition and Eighteenth-Century English Legal Practice", *The Eighteenth-Century Novel*, 3, 2003, p. 195-216.
7. Peters, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

Inquisitors are immersed in a kind of obscurity so much appreciated by the Irish philosopher Edmund Burke and his followers –and their theories on the sublime–, for whom this mysterious obscurity evoked ideas of wonder, horror, awe and joy. As Fred Botting points out, these are emotions that are believed to "expand or elevate the soul and the imagination with a sense of power and sensibility".[8] Therefore, according to Burke's ideas of the sublime, "whatever is obscure […] is terrifying and therefore sublime precisely because it cannot be presented to the mind in the form of a clear and distinct idea".[9] The trade of inquisitor is cloaked in the most obscure secrecy, as inquisitorial trials were sheltered by a vow of silence which concerned everyone who was part of them, no matter if they were the accused, the accusers or the very members of the tribunal. As Peters thoroughly explains, secrecy was inherent part of the Inquisition, since the central part of the inquisitorial process, the questioning itself, was carried out in private. Thus, even if the verdict of the person being questioned was later read in public, "the procedures of the inquisitors were held *in camera*".[10]

In *Melmoth the Wanderer*, Charles Maturin also makes reference to such secrecy when Alonzo de Monçada tells his story to young John Melmoth, the descendant of the eponymous hero and wanderer of the novel. After having been rescued from a shipwreck by young Melmoth, Monçada starts his long narrative "Tale of the Spaniard", the longest tale-within-tale in the novel as it contains most of the others. In his narration, the Spaniard tells about his out-of-marriage birth in one of the most powerful families of Grandees in Spain, his misfortunes as he is forced to enter a convent where he is all but brought to madness and his nightmarish experience at the hands of the Inquisition. It is then that he tells his listener, and the readers of the novel, about the oath of secrecy the prisoners of the Inquisition are forced to swear, thus forbidding them from telling what happens inside, and adding to that mystery mentioned above:

> You are aware, Sir, that the tales related in general of the interior discipline of the Inquisition, must be in nine out of ten mere fables, as the prisoners are bound by an oath never to disclose what happens within its walls; and they who could violate this oath, would certainly not scruple to violate truth in the details with which their emancipation from it indulges them. I am forbidden, by an oath which I shall never break, to disclose the circumstances of my imprisonment or examination.[11]

8. Fred Botting, *Gothic*, London, Routledge, 2014, p. 25.
9. Phillip Shaw, *The Sublime*, London, Routledge, 2006, p. 50-51.
10. Peters, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
11. Charles Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer*, Oxford, Oxford U.P., 1998, p. 227-228.

According to a system that tried to eliminate bribes and other blights of the same kind –often taking place in trials at this time–, this vow was rarely broken and gave the members of the tribunal freedom to a certain point to carry out their investigations. As Helen Rawlings says, the officials of the Inquisition were convinced that this system of oaths of secrecy precluded any bribes or unjust treatment, and that it was fairer for the prisoner. Ironically, the contemporary Protestant British, and their Anglo-Irish counterparts, would undoubtedly have felt the contrary, regarding that very same oath to secrecy as another veil of mystery prone to clerical manoeuvres, a symbol of a corrupted Catholic institution. People put to the question and held in the prisons of the Inquisition disappeared for an unknown period of time and were made to swear to secrecy in case they came in contact with other prisoners, making the whole procedure that mysterious affair that so much attracted Gothic writers and readers:[12]

> The Inquisition was under no obligation to account for those it held in its own prisons. They simply disappear from public view for the duration of their trial, reappearing once their sentence was passed a year or two later. Upon his or her release, the accused was sworn not to reveal anything about his case or that of other prisoners he came in contact with. Very rarely was this wall of secrecy breached. Inquisitors believed that secrecy and justice were interconnected: that their freedom from outside intervention enabled them to make unbiased investigations. Secrecy precluded bribery and was seen to guarantee fairness.[13]

Their prisons were even located in secret places under a very close vigilance. Officials of the Inquisition made sure that their prisoners did not have any contact with the outside world,[14] which added to this aura of mystery and secrecy that this spectral institution carried with it, as Gothic authors such as Maturin, in *Melmoth the Wanderer*, or William Godwin, in *St Leon* (1799) remind their readers. As Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh state, inmates were generally "kept in solitary confinement in chains, and allowed no contact whatever with the outside world. If they were ever released, they were required 'to take an oath not to reveal anything they had seen or experienced in the cells'".[15] It was to such dark places that they took their prisoners after being indefinitely "abducted", and where they had to wait until their judgement, under the psychological pressure of knowing to be "*in the prison of the Inquisition*"[16] [italics in original text], as

12.   Hoeveler, *op. cit.*, p. 184.
13.   Helen Rawlings, *The Spanish Inquisition*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2006, p. 35.
14.   Michael Baigent & Richard Leigh, *The Inquisition*, London, Penguin, 2000, p. 34; E. Peters, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
15.   Baigent & Leigh, *op. cit.*, p. 70.
16.   *Melmoth*, ed. cit., p. 225.

the parricide in "Tale of the Spaniard" reminds Alonzo when he wakes up in his cell.

This despairing situation prisoners were in was the chance the officials of the Inquisition took to use a figure known in Spanish as the *familiar* –an agent of the Inquisition not to be confused with the witch's close companion. Such a figure would have been easy to recognize by the Irish at the time of the publication of the novel, when Ireland found herself in the middle of the turmoil caused by two major rebellions (1798 and 1803) and the aftermath of the Act of Union (1801). These Inquisitorial agents would assist the prosecutor of the tribunal and would be granted special privileges in society. It is therefore understandable that their position was a desirable one for both spiritual and material reasons,[17] as the parricide in *Melmoth the Wanderer* shows.[18] As Rawlings points out, "each commissioner was assisted by lay agents, known as *familiares* (familiars), who principally acted as intermediaries between the tribunal and the prisoner".[19] That is a role that suits the parricide well, as for several paragraphs he tries to extract a confession of guilt from Alonzo through their adventure trying to break out from the convent and the memory of Alonzo's broken family. The parricide clings to any feeling possible to make Alonzo confess and condemn himself, breaking his spirit.[20] That spirit is ultimately, and desperately, broken when Alonzo faces grim reality at his trial and witnesses the reward a *familiar* is granted, as the parricide is even promoted to secretary of the tribunal to judge Alonzo:

> At this moment I saw a person seated at the table covered with black cloth, intensely busy as a secretary, or person employed in taking down the depositions of the accused. As I was led near the table, this person flashed a look of recognition on me, –he was my dreaded companion, – he was an official now of the Inquisition.[21]

These *familiares* were in charge of getting acquainted with the prisoner and trying to extract any kind of confession that would prove his guilt, promising him redemption through it, as the parricide does with Alonzo in the previous lines. These prisoners, once they had been thrown into such a hopeless situation, would think anyone acting "friendly" was a "true friend", an understanding soul in this barren land where darkness and injustice reigned. As was mentioned above, these *familiares* would not have passed unnoticed by the Irish contemporary to the novel. This hidden plotting to extract confessions would call to mind the network of spies and agents both from Catholic and Protestant agrarian societies in

---

17. Peters, *op. cit.*, p. 91.
18. *Melmoth*, ed. cit., p. 220, 238.
19. Rawlings, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
20. *Melmoth*, ed. cit., p. 220-225.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 238.

Ireland, and also government officials secretly sent from Dublin Castle.[22] These secret societies spread rapidly at the end of the 18th century due to unrest concerning the possession and distribution of the land, mostly in the hands of the Protestant elite.[23] Maturin's contemporary "familiars" would also infiltrate the ranks of both parties in these agrarian revolts to obtain any information that could be later used to forward any accusations, sometimes based on agents fingering their own neighbours.[24]

Alonzo, once he is in the prison of the Inquisition, takes Melmoth for one of these spies, as he can come and go as he pleases around his cell in the most impregnable place in Spain. It is Melmoth who, in one of his visits to Alonzo's cell, tells him about the special condition of these agents, and how they wander the corridors of the prison, under the pretence to be friends with the prisoners, in order to extract all the information torture could not. Familiars benefit from the prisoners' desperate need of a sympathizing soul to alleviate their suffering:

> You know, Sir, or perhaps have yet to know, that there are persons accredited in the Inquisition, who are permitted to solace the solitude of the prisoners, on the condition of obtaining, under the pretence of friendly communication, those secrets which even torture has failed to extort.[25]

However, right after Alonzo tells this to young John Melmoth, he says that the stranger could not be one of these "persons *accredited* in the Inquisition," because Melmoth's language and "his abuse of the system was too gross, his indignation too unfeigned",[26] even for a spy trying the utmost to get a confession from a supposed apostate and heretic.

As in Alonzo de Monçada's case when he thinks of the Wanderer as one of these *familiares*, these lay agents of the Inquisition pretended to be prisoners who got a special permission to walk freely the cells of other fellow inmates, feigned to understand their situations and, finally, claimed to be a "friendly" confessor. Melmoth's warning seems to remind Alonzo of that strategy used by the Inquisition, as Hoeveler states, perhaps the most diabolical one they have in store, because "a desperate and imprisoned person would be worn down and vulnerable by this time to any overture of kindness from anyone"[27], and, therefore, extract any confession that would

22. Niall Gillespie, "Irish Jacobin Gothic, c. 1796-1825", *Irish Gothics: Genres, Forms, Modes, and Traditions, 1760-1890*, Christina Morin and Niall Gillespie (Eds.), Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 58-73.
23. R. F. Foster, "Ascendancy and Union", *The Oxford History of Ireland*, R. F. Foster (Ed.), Oxford, Oxford U.P., 2001, p. 134-173.
24. Jarlath Killeen, *The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction*, Oxford, Oxford U.P., 2014, p. 66.
25. *Melmoth*, ed. cit., p. 228.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Hoeveler, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

suit their purposes. Afterwards, they would use the information obtained to bring the accused to their final perdition and punishment, which would often involve an *auto-da-fé*, as Maturin's contemporary, William Godwin, also reminds us, a source Maturin would have heavily drawn from for some of his Inquisition settings.[28] When the eponymous hero in *St Leon* finds himself in the prisons of the Inquisition for the crime of necromancy, he is frequently visited by one of these *familiares* with the purpose of leading him on to confess to his crimes, so the Inquisition can finally take him to the stake in an *auto-da-fé*: "I believed he was set upon me by these insatiable blood-suckers of the inquisition, that he might ensnare me with his questions, and treacherously inveigle me to the faggot and the stake".[29] It seems it would not be merely coincidental that Maturin's most important source for his Inquisition setting, as Alonzo's time in its prison resembles that of *St Leon*, tried to fight superstition and injustice in his Gothic masterpiece, with the Treason Trials of 1794 in the background.[30] In a similar way, one can see Maturin bringing to the fore the secret societies that plagued the Irish countryside and cities, and all the network of spies and agents from both Dublin Castle and Protestant and Catholic agrarian societies alike. Late 18th century and early 19th century Ireland was that spectral maze, impossible to escape from, that Alonzo refers to when he says that all Spain is "but one great monastery",[31] a wall-less prison where "I must be a prisoner every step that I take".[32]

The system of accusation exercised by the Inquisition was based on the policy of name-hiding, so the accusers, who could be even the very same relatives and neighbours of the accused, were sheltered by this wall of privacy.[33] As Pérez-Reverte reminds the modern reader in *Limpieza de sangre*, the worst thing for somebody in the hands of the Inquisition was that the reasons for their imprisonment or their accusers were unknown to them, while inquisitors asked them myriads of questions, not knowing whether their answers would condemn them: "*lo más terrible de estar preso en las cárceles secretas de la Inquisición era que nadie te decía cuál era el delito, ni qué pruebas o testigos había contra ti, ni nada de nada*" [the most terrible thing of being imprisoned in the secret gaol of the Inquisition was that nobody told you what your crime was, nor what evidence or witnesses they had against you, nothing at all] (translation mine).[34]

Once the trial had finished and the sentence decided –what in many cases, as mentioned above, implied an *auto-da-fé* –, everyone had to

28.   *Ibid.*, p. 180.
29.   William Godwin, *St Leon*, Peterborough, Ont., Broadview, 2006, p. 327.
30.   Ellen Lévy, "The Philosophical Gothic of St Leon", *Caliban*, 33, 1976 (doi:10.3406/calib.1996.1313), p. 56.
31.   *Melmoth*, ed. cit., p. 185.
32.   *Ibid.*
33.   Baigent & Leigh, *op. cit.*, p. 33; Swan, art. cit., p. 206.
34.   *Limpieza de sangre*, ed. cit., p. 117.

participate of the "celebration" of the hegemony of the Catholic Church: "The burning of a heretic became an occasion for celebration, a joyous event".[35] The refusal to take part, more over members of the family, close relations and friends, implied the disagreement with the dictates of the Holy Office. This was followed by a suspicion of culpability and, henceforth, a rejection on the side of society, or even investigations by an authoritative ecclesiastical regime. All of them would become outcasts, potential suspects tainted by the devil, a mirror image of what Melmoth is: "Non-participation in the celebration of Catholic hegemony implied non-conformity and withdrawal from the community of believers – a potentially offensive form of behaviour that might lead to inquisitorial investigation, social exclusion and ultimate damnation".[36] The Inquisition had taught people to spy in the name of the Church, and this, sometimes, went beyond duty: "It was a sin not to report any enemy of the Church".[37] Much like Maturin's Ireland, with its network of spies and political and religious allegiances, the population of a whole country has been turned into spies.

This part of the Inquisitorial process is much targeted by Maturin in *Melmoth the Wanderer*, as the cases of Alonzo de Monçada and Immalee show. However, this alienation of suspects and their families, as well as the encouragement to spy on family members and neighbours, alongside the whole *auto-da-fé*, is there to show a brutal imposition of a religious practice. It is the case of a state that foists its beliefs in such a manner and, with it, hegemony to control its population through terror and coercion. In this over-controlling regime, those who do not comply are targets of suspicion and, therefore, investigated. The *auto-da-fé* is nothing else but a symbol of the threat of a state-mandated faith, and the homogeneity that state aims at creating, in the figure of anybody who does not conform with the Catholic Church's dictates: "The Spanish Inquisition's *autos-de-fé* emblematize the threat of a state-mandated faith, and Spain is throughout the novel a hostile environment for non-Catholics".[38] As Melmoth rages at a naïve Immalee when, in her island, he tries to explain the ways of the world, it is all part of a patriot game.[39]

This massive participation of neighbours, community members and even relatives in *Melmoth the Wanderer* is most visible when Melmoth tries to open the eyes of young and still innocent Immalee, who is now known as Isidora. In "Tale of the Indians", Immalee recovers her Spanish name after she is rescued from the Indian island where she grew up in total freedom and is given back to her noble Catholic family in Madrid. Once she is

35.   Baigent & Leigh, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
36.   Rawlings, *op. cit.*, p. 40.
37.   Jean Plaidy, *The Growth of the Spanish Inquisition*, London, Robert Hale, 1960, p. 151.
38.   Ashley Marshall, "Melmoth Affirmed: Maturin's Defence of Sacred History", *Studies in Romanticism*, 47(2), Summer 2008, p. 121-145 (https://www.jstor.org/stable/25602138).
39.   *Melmoth*, ed. cit., p. 305.

back in Spain, Immalee, and the reader, is to learn that her family are Old Christians, one of the families of untouched Catholic stock since Visigoth times who, thus, complies with the requirements of "purity of blood": "the descendants of the Christian Visigoths, and they had heroically preserved their pure Gothic blood from contamination with the blood of inferior races that had shared the peninsula with them since the eighth century".[40] Therefore, the Aliagas are one of the purest and most powerful noble families in the country, Grandees of Spain, flagships of the Catholic faith and have an important position that has to be kept and maintained through compliance with the status quo. Lest not forget, as Hoeveler reminds us, that the Inquisition played an important role in the purification of the blood ferreting out "crypto-Muslims and Jews who had failed to convert convincingly to Catholicism",[41] as is the case of Don Fernan, the Jew who aids Alonzo in his breakout from the prison of the Inquisition.

This purity of blood, opposed to the miscegenation of New Christians, is something Immalee's parents, Donna Clara and her husband, Aliaga, remark all through the story: "an old Christian such as I […] boast myself to be".[42] To perpetuate their lineage, they want to marry their daughter to another Grandee of Spain and, therefore, also pure of Christian blood and holder of an important position both in society and the government: "as maidens should be rewarded for their chastity and reserve by being joined in wedlock with a worthy husband […] I shall bring with me one who is to be her husband, Don Gregorio Montilla, of whose qualifications I have not now leisure to speak".[43] Aliaga's words infer the high rank and nobility in Montilla's lineage, something that is later confirmed by Donna Clara, when she recalls that Montilla might be "the descendant in the right line of the Campeador",[44] one of the national heroes of the *Reconquista*[45].

Moreover, Madrid, the place where Immalee had her first and shocking experience with Catholicism, was the capital of one of the most fanatic Catholic countries of the time. Her naturalist way of conceiving life and religion clashes completely with the strict conception of Catholicism in the Spain of Counter-Reformation times, when religion was brought to extremes. She lived through a time when, as in former stages of Christianity when the ecclesiastical authorities had to deal with dissent, non-conformity with Catholicism became a crime against it, and "a crime against it became a crime against the empire –treason– as well".[46] As shown above, the over-controlling regime present in the Kingdom of

---

40. Peters, *op. cit.*, p. 84.
41. Hoeveler, *op. cit.*, p. 150.
42. *Melmoth*, ed. cit., p. 369.
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Ibid.*, p. 378.
45. The early medieval period when the Christian kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula reconquered the territories taken by the Muslims during the 8th and 9th centuries.
46. Peters, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

Spain had to maintain its religious homogeneity, and the Inquisition was there to make sure that happened.

In a passage full of dramatic quality, Melmoth tells Immalee that her ideas could take her to the stake and that, at that final moment, even the members of her family would willingly light the flames of purification. By doing so, they would show their compliance with the status quo, and their faithfulness to the Catholic cause. Her parents, brother and neighbours would sacrifice her so they would not become objects of suspicion and, thus, reaffirming their loyalty to the state:

> Yes, I remember catching a glimpse of that religion so beautiful and pure; and when they brought me to a Christian land, I thought I should have found them all Christians.' – 'And what did you find them, then, Immalee?' – 'Only Catholics.' – 'Are you aware of the danger of the words you utter? Do you know that in this country to hint a doubt of Catholicism and Christianity being the same, would consign you to the flames as a heretic incorrigible? Your mother, so lately known to you as a mother, would bind your hands when the covered litter came for its victim; and your father, though he has never yet beheld you, would buy with his last ducat the faggots that were to consume you to ashes; and all your relations in their gala robes would shout their hallelujahs to your dying screams of torture.[47]

In a way to reinforce the contrast between Immalee's ideas and those of the over-controlling state, Maturin makes her arrival in Spain, and in Madrid, coincide with the summit of the Counter-Reformation, at the time of the House of Habsburg, when Spain felt like one big prison under the control of the Inquisition.[48] As some scholars point out, the "Tale of the Indians", which tells the story of Immalee's life, from her little Indian island to her death at the hands of the Inquisition in Madrid, takes place between 1680 and 1685, at the time of the reign of Charles II of Spain.[49] One cannot forget that this was the period when the laws regarding "purity of blood" were applied with most strength.[50] These were laws that clung to the "logic of ethnic purification"[51] supported by the Inquisition and a governmental hierarchy that granted positions in the government only to those who, like the Aliagas and Montilla, could prove their lineages had not suffered from miscegenation, and were thorough Old Christians. This was also the time

---

47. *Melmoth*, ed. cit., p. 344.
48. *Melmoth*, ed. cit., p. 180.
49. Charlie Jorge, *La figura del héroe en* Melmoth the Wanderer*, de Charles Robert Maturin*, Leioa/Bilbao, TD-Arte y Humanidades, 2018, p. 150.
50. Peters, *op. cit.*, p. 131.
51. Eric Griffin, "Nationalism, the Black Legend, and the Revised 'Spanish Tragedy'", *English Literary Renaissance*, 39(2), Spring 2009, p. 336-370 (doi:10.1111/j.1475-6757.2009.01050.x).

when the *Procesiones de Semana Santa* (Holy Week Processions) began, with all their paraphernalia of dresses, *saetas* (songs to the suffering and death of Christ sung aloud as the floats pass by), flagellants, penitents, mourning and automatons made to impress a fervent Catholic audience; a tradition still in use and very popular in modern twenty-first-century Spain. However, one should not forget that the period of Immalee's return to Madrid, and fall into Inquisitorial hands, also coincides with the ascent of the Catholic James II to the throne of England and the subsequent prelude of the Williamite War in Ireland.[52] As Hoeveler reminds us, there is a strong link in the Protestant imagination "between the threatened return of the Catholic Stuarts and depictions of that most infamous of Catholic institutions, the Inquisition".[53] Coincidentally, Immalee dies in the prison of the Inquisition barely four years before the break of war, thus, highlighting a crucial landmark in Irish history.

However, what a society permanently under control of the Church feared most was the excessive power wielded by the Tribunal of the Holy Office, as has been shown so far. The General Inquisitor, head of this dreadful organization, had so much power in his hands that he was, in fact, almost second to none in government, as he was "one of the most powerful functionaries in Spain next to the king".[54] With the amount of power this person, as well as any other member of the Holy Office, could have at the time, it is beyond any doubt that such an organization could inspire so much terror in a society easily controllable through the union between religion and throne.[55] This is clearly and impressively expressed in another masterpiece of Gothic fiction, Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797), when a crowd of people in the middle of the festivities in Rome move back as the Inquisitors who carry Vivaldi, the hero of this novel, appear "in solemn silence". The crowd show their fear, and even a morbid curiosity, leaving space for the carriage of the Inquisition to pass in the direction of their prison: "But, when their office was distinguished, part of the crowd pressed back from the carriage in affright, while another advanced with curiosity; though as the majority retreated, space was left for the carriage to move on".[56]

This fear is also perfectly visible, and dreadfully represented, in the mind of Alonzo de Monçada, once he is hidden in the house of the *converso* –a people also persecuted, and threatened, by the Inquisition. The youth realizes then, after seeing terror reflected on the *converso*'s face, that

52. Nicholas Canny, "Early Modern Ireland, c. 1500-1700", *The Oxford History of Ireland*, R. F. Foster (ed.), Oxford, Oxford U.P., 2001, p. 125.
53. Hoeveler, *op. cit.*, p. 148.
54. Rawlings, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
55. Marshall, art. cit., p. 124; Sister Mary Muriel Tarr, *Catholicism in Gothic Fiction: A Study of the Nature and Function of Catholic Materials in Gothic Fiction in England (1762-1820)*, Whitefish, MT, Kessinger, 2010, p. 104-105.
56. Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian*, Oxford, Oxford U.P., 1971, p. 195.

the Inquisition controls the whole country to such an extent that he will never be safe in Spain. In fact, the Holy Office threatened with severe penalties, even more for a Catholic at the time, those who would aid any fugitive: "On pain of their own excommunication, other people were forbidden to provide him [the fugitive] with food, shelter or sanctuary".[57] As seen above, Spain, much like Maturin's Ireland, has been turned into a convent, a wall-less prison. What Alonzo sees beyond his forced host's doorstep is a wide and never-ending landscape full of devastation and despair. His life has been made barren by the power of the Inquisition, which has left him without family or friends; like Melmoth himself, he has become an outcast:

> [T]he Inquisition had laid waste the whole track of life, as with fire and sword. I had no spot to stand on, a meal to earn, a hand to grasp, a voice to greet, a roof to crouch under, in the whole realm of Spain.
>
> 'You are not to learn, Sir, that the power of the Inquisition, like that of death, separates you from, by its single touch, from all mortal relations. From the moment its grasp has seized you, all human hands unlock their hold of yours, –you have no longer father, mother, sister, or child.[58]

A great deal of this terror and distrust towards the officials of the Inquisition, and, ironically, a great reason to become part of it, was based on the immunity they obtained. This fact shocked British readers greatly at the time, and most likely their Anglo-Irish counterparts too, as is shown at the beginning of Radcliffe's *The Italian*, when an Englishman is shocked at how the church would thus conceal among its ranks a former assassin.[59] This helped writers and readers of the time to create a myth that would be used by political reformers and philosophers to attack oppressive and authoritarian governments, or even civil power being held in the hands of organized religion:

> The myth was originally devised to serve variously the political purposes of a number of early modern political regimes, as well as Protestant reformers, proponents of religious and civil toleration, philosophical enemies of the civil power of organized religions, and progressive modernists.[60]

The members of this organization were beyond the reach of civil justice. In fact, it could be argued that they were even beyond and over any

57.   Baigent & Leigh, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
58.   *Melmoth*, ed. cit., p. 250.
59.   *The Italian*, ed. cit., p. 2.
60.   Peters, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

kind of justice, as one of these privileges was being almost untouchable: "The most important of these [privileges] rendered the office holder […] untouchable by the secular authorities".[61] No matter what the crime committed by them had been during their civil life, once they were into the Church establishment, the shadow of any previous offence was totally erased, as no common civil tribunal could prosecute them:

> Clerical privileges and responsibilities were extensively defined and quite distinct from other contemporary forms, for example, of holding and transmitting property, of determining personal inquiry, of being subject to litigation, and of other aspects of full social participation.[62]

Maturin was well acquainted with this special status that members of the Catholic Church in general, and Inquisitors in particular, had, common to any privileged class within an abusive government.[63] In *Melmoth the Wanderer*, as young Alonzo de Monçada tries to escape from the convent where he was committed, he gets acquainted with a lay monk who is his only help and connection with his brother. This monk entered this religious institution running away from justice, after having killed his father and been charged with parricide: "There is a wretch in your convent, who took sanctuary from *parricide*, and consented to become a monk, to escape the vengeance of heaven in this life at least. […] On the crimes of this wretch I build all my hopes".[64] Alonzo finds this, and the monk himself, repugnant, however, he decides to trust in him, partially at least, as he is his only hope of escaping the convent and the imprisonment he had been forced into.

On their way out of the convent they have to go through several calamities, including the parricide telling the terrifying stories of his crimes. In one of them Alonzo's companion tells in a mad dream how he murdered his father in a fit of passion and hatred, whereas in the other Alonzo listens in horror to the story of the two lovers imprisoned in the dungeon where they have to spend a night. The lay monk himself confesses how he betrayed them when they tried to run away from the hands of the Church, a fact that turns out to be an uncanny mirroring flashback of what is about to unfold. After they were locked in this dungeon, the unrepentant lay monk asked permission to keep guard at the door and see how they moved from the purest love to extreme cannibalism, until their death:

61.   Rawlings, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
62.   Peters, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
63.   *Ibid.*, p. 214.
64.   *Melmoth*, ed. cit., p. 178.

> 'I do not quite like to go through the details by which this wretched pair were deluded into the hope of effecting their escape from the convent. It is enough that I was the principal agent, - that the Superior connived at it, - that I led them through the very passages you have traversed to-night, they trembling and blessing me at every step,'
>
> […]
>
> The first day they clung together, and every moment I felt was like that of one person. The next the man alone struggled, and the woman moaned in helplessness. The third night, […] the disunion of every tie of the heart, of passion, of nature, had commenced. […] It was on the fourth night that I heard the shriek of the wretched female, - her lover, in the agony of hunger, had fastened his teeth in her shoulder; - that bosom on which he had so often luxuriated, became a meal to him now.'[65]

After such a horrific story, at which Alonzo starts in disgust, they come out of the vaults, where Alonzo finally meets his brother Juan. This short moment of happiness and safety felt by the two brothers is the chance taken by the parricide monk to murder Juan and hand Alonzo over to the Inquisition, according to a plan devised with the religious authorities to get rid of such a load as Alonzo's case: "'*He is safe*,' cried Juan, following me [Alonzo]. '*But are you?*' answered a voice of thunder. Juan staggered back from the step of the carriage, - he fell. I sprung out, I fell too - on his body. I was bathed in his blood, - he was no more'".[66]

When young Monçada wakes up in one of the secret cells of the Holy Office, he discovers that not only has the treason and murder carried out by the lay monk not been punished, but, instead of paying for his crimes, he has been rewarded with a position of great responsibility within the Inquisition. As was shown above, when Alonzo is lead to the tribunal that is about to look into his case, he sees the lay monk acting as secretary. The complete realisation that the former parricide and murderer of his brother, among his other crimes, has become an official of the Holy Office makes Alonzo fall in momentary despair at seeing his case, and all hope, lost:

> I saw a person seated at the table covered with black cloth, intensely busy as a secretary, or person employed in taking down the depositions of the accused. As I was led near the table, this person flashed a look of recognition on me, - he was my dreaded companion, - *he was now an official of the Inquisition. I gave all up the moment I saw his*

---

65.   *Melmoth*, ed. cit., p. 208-213.
66.   *Ibid*., p. 215.

> *ferocious and lurking scowl, like that of the tiger before he springs from his jungle, or the wolf from his den.*[67] [Italics mine]

This is a factual proof of the kind of members that were accepted within the doors of the Holy Inquisition. This proof of the corruption present in Catholic institutions would undoubtedly have fuelled the suspicions and chimerical terrors of the Protestant Anglo-Irish of Maturin's times, who saw, with what they thought cause for worry, the dawn of Daniel O'Connell's Catholic Emancipation movement.[68] The lay monk is not seized by a single doubt at any moment after he betrays the couple of lovers and, later, Alonzo de Monçada and his brother Juan, as far as he gets promoted, first in the monastery and later in the Holy Inquisition. The lay monk comes to showcase what some people would do to gain promotion in an abusive regime, and also what tools these governments would resort to, whichever faith that regime allied to. As Melmoth himself would put it: all religions are the same.[69]

The Inquisition would use all the means at their disposal to inspire and create an intense dramatic effect in real life with the intention of extracting confessions in an easier way. Their methods and the black legend that surrounded them were used by writers, politicians, philosophers and pamphleteers to attack abusive governments and institutions, as Godwin did. These political activists would highlight the Inquisition readiness to use any tools, including their mysterious settings and dark reputation, to extract any confession, as would the governments and abusive institutions they tried to attack.[70] Maturin's contemporaries used the Inquisition as a model for all kinds of "implacable secret tribunals", as Peters states: "During the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first few decades of the nineteenth, the Inquisition-model served in the depiction of other kinds of tribunals as well".[71] This was so common to the point that both writers and readers conceived the Inquisition and these abusive tribunals as exchangeable in their minds and writings. These secret tribunals had been so much on the minds of late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries readers and writers that "where one could not place an Inquisition, one could as easily place a similar institution".[72] Gothic writers also used the Inquisition for their own means, both aesthetic and beyond, and drew on the ambiguous popularity it had at the time, creating an intensity that attracted readers craving to devour pages full of such morbid scenes.[73]

---

67. *Ibid.*, p. 238.
68. Hoeveler, *op. cit.*, p. 180.
69. *Melmoth*, ed. cit., p. 389.
70. Swan, art. cit., p. 209-210.
71. Peters, *op. cit.*, p. 214.
72. *Ibid.*
73. Robert Miles, "The 1790s: The Effulgence of Gothic", *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, Jerrold E. Hogle (Ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., 2006, p. 41-62.

In this respect, it seems that Charles Robert Maturin used the Inquisition motif to its full potential, combining the theo-political discourse of his time with the aesthetic use of this sublime religious institution, so much in vogue amongst his potential readers.[74] Maturin's attacks on theocracy set him apart from the purest religious rant against Catholicism,[75] and place him in the role of the writer as political activist, following closely the steps of his friend Walter Scott, or William Godwin. The Inquisition's vow of secrecy, the usage of familiars to obtain confessions, the whole system of accusation and trials with their terrible *autos-da-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 oppressive atmosphere with which he cast a hard critique on oppressive, overpowering institutions. These were tearing apart his beloved motherland, as later eighteenth century and early nineteenth century Ireland was plagued with spies and agents from both sides of the religious and political fence, and the whole country had become a prison without walls, but equally suffocating. Through the figure of the Inquisition in Catholic Spain, Maturin denounces the abuses and injustices of these institutions in countries where they exercise unreined power.

Dr Charlie Jorge holds a PhD in Comparative Literature and Literary Studies from the University of the Basque Country. The topic of his thesis was a study in depth of the figure of the hero in Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*, a novel that forms the core of his research. He specializes in Gothic literature, Archetypal Studies and Irish Studies, and has been working for some years on the novels of Gothic authors such as Charles Maturin, Ann Radcliffe or Matthew Gregory Lewis. He has recently published some articles on the archetypes of the Terrible Mother in Irish Literature and the Scapegoat and on the image of the Catholic Church in *Melmoth the Wanderer*. He is also working on a new scholarly edition of Maturin's *The Milesian Chief* for the University of Wales project Gothic Originals, and lectures on Comparative Literature at Universidad Camilo José Cela.

Bibliography

Baigent, Michael & Richard Leigh, *The Inquisition*, London, Penguin, 2000.

Botting, Fred, *Gothic*, London, Routledge, 2014.

Canny, Nicholas, "Early Modern Ireland, c. 1500-1700", *The Oxford History of Ireland*, R. F. Foster (Ed.), Oxford, Oxford U.P., 2001.

Foster, R. F., "Ascendancy and Union", *The Oxford History of Ireland*, R. F. Foster (Ed.), Oxford, Oxford U.P., 2001.

Gillespie, Niall, "Irish Jacobin Gothic, c. 1796-1825", *Irish Gothics: Genres, Forms, Modes, and Traditions, 1760-1890*, Christina Morin and Niall Gillespie (Eds.), Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

---

74.   Hoeveler, *op. cit.*, p. 149.
75.   Marshall, art. cit., p. 139.

Godwin, William, *St Leon*, Peterborough, Ont., Broadview, 2006.

Griffin, Eric, "Nationalism, the Black Legend, and the Revised 'Spanish Tragedy'", *English Literary Renaissance*, 39 (2), Spring 2009, p. 336-370 (doi:10.1111/j.1475-6757.2009.01050.x).

Hoeveler, Diane Long, *The Gothic Ideology: Religious Hysteria and Anti-Catholicism in British Popular Fiction 1780-1880*, Cardiff, Wales U.P., 2014 (https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qhfdt).

Jorge, Charlie, *La figura del héroe en* Melmoth the Wanderer*, de Charles Robert Maturin*, Leioa/Bilbao, TD-Arte y Humanidades, 2018.

Killeen, Jarlath, *The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction*, Oxford, Oxford U.P., 2014.

Lévy, Ellen, "The Philosophical Gothic of *St Leon*", *Caliban*, 33, 1976 (doi:10.3406/calib.1996.1313).

Marshall, Ashley, "Melmoth Affirmed: Maturin's Defence of Sacred History", *Studies in Romanticism*, 47(2), Summer 2008, p. 121-145 (https://www.jstor.org/stable/25602138).

Maturin, Charles, *Melmoth the Wanderer*, Oxford, Oxford U.P., 1998.

Miles, Robert, "The 1790s: The Effulgence of Gothic", *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, Jerrold E. Hogle (Ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., 2006.

Pérez-Reverte, Arturo, *Limpieza de sangre*, Madrid, Alfaguara, 1997.

Peters, Edward, *Inquisition*, Berkeley, California U.P., 1989.

Plaidy, Jean, *The Growth of the Spanish Inquisition*, London, Robert Hale, 1960.

Radcliffe, Ann, *The Italian*, Oxford, Oxford U.P., 1971.

Rawlings, Helen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2006.

Swan, Beth, "Radcliffe's Inquisition and Eighteenth-Century English Legal Practice", *The Eighteenth-Century Novel*, 3, 2003.

Shaw, Phillip, *The Sublime*, London, Routledge, 2006.

Tarr, Sister Mary Muriel, *Catholicism in Gothic Fiction: A Study of the Nature and Function of Catholic Materials in Gothic Fiction in England (1762-1820)*, Whitefish, MT, Kessinger, 2010.

Chapter eight

Permanence and transgression of the revenge tragedy motif in Stuart Neville's *The Twelve* (2009)

A hauntological reading of a Northern-Irish thriller

///////////

THIERRY ROBIN
Université d'Orléans

Abstract: The concept of "hauntology" - a word combining both haunting and ontology – was coined by Jacques Derrida to characterise a situation where an ideology that is no longer operative continues to haunt a place, informing its ongoing representations, its latent conflicts. The term refers to a temporal disjunction where the past persists in the present through the paradoxical observation that something has been lost but persists in the spirit of the place.

Northern Ireland embodies this concept, as its history, geography and institutions are marked by a radical political schizophrenia stemming from a troubled past that even the peace process has not managed to erase.

In The twelve (2009), Stuart Neville questions the feasibility and consequences of coming to terms with one's past when confronted with this haunting. Gerry Fegan, an IRA hitman, drowned in alcohol and depression, is shown to be obsessed, haunted by the ghosts of his twelve victims.

This article assesses the extent to which the book simultaneously renews the usual codes of thrillers and takes up the hackneyed classical tropes of the Elizabethan revenge tragedy, in a move that echoes the postmodern concept of differential repetition.

Keywords: Stuart Neville, Revenge tragedy, Hauntology, Derrida, Troubles, Belfast, Ghosts, Thriller, Postmodernism, Repetition

CRIME fiction in general reveals a deeply contradictory tension that feeds on an aspiration to restore order, which includes itself the possibility of transgression and disorder to do so. It is worth

noting that this paradoxical dynamic process also happens to be typical of Elizabethan revenge tragedies, whose archetype is probably to be found in *Hamlet* (1599) by William Shakespeare. This unexpected parallel between two seemingly radically different times and literary genres was powerfully analysed by Esme Miskimmin who boldly understood *Hamlet* as a piece of proto-crime-fiction, taking after Todorov's typology:

> Aside from its detective protagonist, *Hamlet* can also be defined as a 'whodunit' using the guidelines set out by Todorov in his chapter 'The Typology of *Detective Fiction*' in *The Poetics of Prose*: 'At the base of a whodunit, we find a duality and it is this duality which will guide our description. This novel [or play] contains not one but two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation. […] The first story that of the crime, ends before the second begins.[1]

This analogy between Elizabethan drama on the one hand and crime fiction on the other is neatly encapsulated by Peter James' provocative rhetorical question: "If Shakespeare was writing now, would he see his work on prize shortlists or in a buy-one-get-one-free slot in WH Smith?"[2]

Now, *The Twelve*,[3] originally published in Europe under that name in 2009, is a Northern Irish thriller written by Stuart Neville, a Protestant crime novelist born in Armagh, in 1972. This masterpiece of his was marketed in the USA under the eye-catching title *The Ghosts of Belfast*. According to James Ellroy, a prominent figure amongst American crime writers, "*The Twelve* is the best first novel I've read in years. It crackles. It grabs you by the throat. This is some guy to watch out for in a dark alley."[4] On Stuart Neville's website, the acclaimed author of *L.A. Confidential*, *The Black Dahlia*, *American Tabloid*, is also quoted saying: "*The Twelve* is 'The best first novel I've read in years. It's a flat out terror trip'".[5] What the American title of the book actually emphasizes though, is how much the past weighs upon the present times in Northern Ireland precisely through the trope of ghosts. As Brian Cliff aptly analyses in his recent book on *Irish Crime fiction*, much crime fiction originating from Northern Ireland is situated within a context which clearly has the past and the present colliding with each other as a staple theme of Northern Irish culture, turning this chronological merger into an almost hackneyed predictable feature :

1. Esme Miskimmin, "The Act of Murder, The Renaissance Tragedy and the Detective Novel", *Reinventing the Renaissance: Shakespeare and his Contemporaries in Adaptation and Performance*, Brown, Sarah Robert Lublin, Linsey McCulloch (Eds.), London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 289.
2. Peter James, "If Shakespeare was writing today, he'd be a crime writer", *The Guardian*, April 23 2016 (https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/23/shakespeare-crime-writer-today-roy-grace-peter-james).
3. Stuart Neville, *The Twelve*, (or *Ghosts of Belfast* [USA]), London, Vintage, 2009.
4. *Ibid.*, blurb, back cover.
5. See http://www.stuartneville.com/the-twelve-the-ghosts-of-belfast.html (last accessed 25.07.2020).

> *Northern Irish crime fiction often blurs the lines between present and past*, taking place in a kind of grey zone that highlights the complex relationship between an enduring past and contemporary society and culture […]. At the same time, although much literature from Northern Ireland during the Troubles engaged to varying degrees with that conflict, even when it did not clearly do so critics nonetheless found persistent ways to frame literary meaning with reference to the Troubles.[6]

It is precisely that intricate combination of past and present which inspired the whole concept of hauntology to Derrida. One immediately identifies the sort of wordplay which has since become the hallmark of Derrida's peculiar forging of concepts. The very word "hauntology" is a portmanteau word combining the notion of haunting with that of *being* – in Greek, ὄντος, *ontos*, refers to "being" or "that which is"–, through the whole near-homophonous concept of ontology. Hauntology proper lies at the core of Derrida's 1993 seminal book entitled *Spectres of Marx*, which deals with history and enduring ideologies, even long after their demise. Peter Buse and Andrew Stott, discussing Derrida's notion of hauntology, in their 1999 book entitled *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History* explain the paradoxical temporality or sense of chronology inherent in ghosts in general and hence, in hauntology into the same bargain. To them, ghosts are hybrid entities actually belonging to both past and present, as they expatiate:

> Ghosts arrive from the past and appear in the present. However, the ghost cannot be properly said to belong to the past[...] Does then the 'historical' person, who is identified with the ghost, properly belong to the present? Surely not, as the idea of a return from death fractures all traditional conceptions of temporality. The temporality to which the ghost is subject is therefore paradoxical, at once they 'return' and make their apparitional debut [...] any attempt to isolate the origin of language will find its inaugural moment already dependent upon a system of linguistic differences that have been installed prior to the 'originary' moment.[7]

This fractured temporality is yet again clearly reminiscent of the often quoted phrase derived from Hamlet's expository sense that "Time is out of joint"[8] (Act I, conclusion of scene 5) in a tragedy. Precisely that disruption of time in the play follows the appearance of Hamlet's father's ghost, and it goes hand in hand with the very notion of "revenge" repeated

---

6.   Brian Cliff, *Irish Crime Fiction*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 26. My emphasis.
7.   Peter De Buse, Andrew Stott, *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, p. 11.
8.   William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Stanley Wells, London/Oxford, Oxford U.P., 1994, p. 196.

three times in a dozen lines by both the dead father and his living son. In Neville's book, ghosts find their presence and conjuring further justified by the need for revenge. Yet more light is shed on their presence or apparition so to speak by the ambivalent not to say problematic epigraph by the Methodist, socialist-leaning Belfast-born – often caricatured not to say vilified as a unionist curmudgeon – poet John Hewitt [1907-1987]. That epigraph opening Neville's book reads: "The place that lacks its ghosts is a barren place", which triggers ambivalent expectations as regards the text to come and its reinscription within a particular geography ("place") and historical background. This indeed is a line extracted from Hewitt's famous dramatic poem entitled "The Bloody Brae" where a grandmother addresses her guilty grandson in these terms, underlining the paramount importance of enduring memory through ghosts:

> Fear is a wholesome thing for a proud young man.
> The Devil would never have fallen if he'd been afeared.
> These freets are useful. We'd forget the past,
> and only live in the minute, without their presence.
> *The place that lacks its ghosts is a barren place.*
> Your father'd get such stooks of corn,
> or fill the long pits with praties, or pull strong lint,
> if ghosts, that were men once hadn't given the earth
> the shape and pattern of use, of sowing and harvest?
> *Our own best* use may be as ghosts ourselves,
> not little mischievous freets but kindly spirits.[9]

This 15-page-long dramatic poem is problematic in that it tells of a legendary and largely fictitious massacre of Roman Catholics by English Protestant troops in Islandmagee, County Antrim, in 1641-42. This massacre is supposed to have foreshadowed the bloodsoaked reconquest of Ireland by Oliver Cromwell [1599-1658] in 1649. In the poem, John Hill, one of the soldiers who has been racked by guilt since he participated in the slaughter, returns many years later to beg forgiveness. He eventually receives forgiveness from the ghost of one of his victims. But this gesture does not entirely condone his past crimes since it also conveys some sense of condemnation of his self-indulgence, and guilt rather than taking practical action to fight bigotry. In the very same poem, one also runs into the bold assertion of the right of Hewitt's people (descendants of Protestant Scottish dissenters, as the Anglo-Scottish dialect used in the poem attests to) to live in Northern Ireland. That right is described as being deeply

---

9. John Hewitt, "*The Bloody Brae*", *Irish Poetry: An Interpretive Anthology from Before Swift to Yeats and After*, W. J. McCormack (Ed.), New York, New York U.P., 2000, p. 232. My emphasis. Note: In Scottish English a brae is a steep bank or hillside.

rooted into their stereotypically Protestant not to say Weberian[10] hard work and commitment to it, as explained in the following lines:

> This is my country; my grandfather came here
> and raised his walls and fenced the tangled waste
> and gave his years and strength into the earth[11]

In that sense, this epigraph identifies Neville with a specific community, that of Northern Irish Protestants of Scottish ancestry. It incidentally deals with history in general, and anamnesis in particular in the Six Counties. This theme correlating guilt to identity is strongly proleptic as regards the rest of *The Twelve* in that it foreshadows a whole narrative which happens to be the contemporary equivalent of the same guilt-ridden soldier's tale, this time involving Fegan, a Catholic fighter with blood on his hands, whereas John Hill in Hewitt's poem is a Protestant soldier.

As a matter of fact, *The Twelve* centres on Gerry Fegan, a former IRA hardman with a scary reputation who has been recently released under the terms of the cross-community Good Friday Agreement brokered and struck in 1998. The book opens in 2007, two months after the elections in which the province's voters finally chose a government of their own. Fegan embodies the usual trope of the guilt-ridden, drink-sodden protagonist who nonetheless has retained skills just beneath the surface of semi-permanent intoxication. The fragmented disjointed temporality is scrutinized by Nicola Barr, in her review of the book entitled "The haunting of Gerry Fegan". Fegan is haunted to the point of insanity by the ghosts of twelve people for whose deaths he has some measure of responsibility. As shown in the following incipit:

> Maybe if he had one more drink [the ghosts would] leave him alone. Gerry Fegan told himself that lie before every swallow. He chased the whiskey's burn with a cool black mouthful of Guinness […] He was good and drunk now. When his stomach couldn't hold any more he would let Tom the barman show him to the door, and the twelve would follow Fegan through the streets of Belfast, into his house, up his stairs and into his bed. If he was lucky, and drunk enough, he might pass out before their screaming got too loud to bear. That was the only time they made a sound, when he was alone and on the edge of sleep. When the baby started crying, that was the worst of it.[…] Fegan was still a respected man in West Belfast, despite the drink.[12]

---

10.   See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 1905 .
11.   Hewitt, "*The Bloody Brae*", art. cit., p. 236.
12.   Neville, *The Twelve, op. cit.*, p. 3-4.

In the extract, one immediately recognizes a sectarian geography stereotypically associated with the largest city in Northern Ireland. This bolsters the manichean atmosphere which pervades the whole incipit. To cut a long story short, West Belfast (and the adjacent neighbourhood known as The Falls, contrary to Shankill and East Belfast which are overwhelmingly Protestant) has historically been the most nationalist or pro-Republican of Belfast's four constituencies, even if it is only in the relatively recent decades that the votes for Unionist parties have plummeted to ridiculous levels.

Gradually, the *twelve* ghosts mentioned in the extract force Gerry Fegan to kill the people responsible for their deaths. These revenge killings are central to the novel's narrative made more complex since Fegan also seeks to protect Mary McKenna, a local Catholic woman and her daughter Ellen, whom he met as they got caught up in a web of corruption involving local Sinn Féin politicians, paramilitaries, criminals, government spies... As the novel unfolds, Davey Campbell –a British agent infiltrated into Republican paramilitary groups earlier in the novel– is set on Fegan's trail to stop the murders in the short-term interest of both the Republican political leadership and the British government, in a pattern that sounds like a full-blown conspiracy theory, which incidentally echoes the usual post-Good-Friday Agreement cross-party philosophy.

As mentioned earlier in this essay, *The Twelve* perfectly sticks to the principle according to which crime fiction in general, and sectarian thrillers in particular, reveal a contradictory tension that feeds on an aspiration to restore and guarantee peace and order while preserving the necessary resort to transgression, disorder, violence through the logic of retribution (to do so). This paradoxical dynamic process has been observable for a long time now in literature and goes a long way back in time, as far back as to ancient Greek mythology involving characters such as Medea or Phaedra and also ever so slightly more recently and aptly as regards this paper, work by Elizabethan playwrights, keeping in mind Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* (1587), Thomas Middleton's *Revenger's Tragedy* (1606) or Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* (1601), in addition to *Hamlet* (1599) by William Shakespeare.

Hamlet itself reveals a far more ancient Latin and Greek intertext, notably *Hercules Furens* by Seneca. In such a plot, one identifies an original situation where an element of corruption or moral decadence prevails as a dramatic engine that irrevocably propels the plot forward. To sum this up, one can think of no better quote than "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" uttered by Marcellus towards the very end of Act 1, scene 4

in *Hamlet*.[13] In these plays, the avenger – an eminently Fegan-like ambivalent figure – often dies along with his accomplices or partners in addition to the villain in the play. Thus the final act usually displays a pile of dead bodies synonymous with a moral dead-end, or impossible resolution, as in Hamlet… What is more, the supernatural agency illustrated by the appearance of ghosts looms large at the level of the forces that preside over the plot, just like insanity, be it faked or not.

In all these classical plays, you find traces of the common legacy left by Aristotle's *Poetics*, where plot, the tragic knot, twists and turns before the final denouement and catharsis make up a predictable structure. Accordingly, at the end of *The Twelve*, which reads like a revenge tragedy to the power of twelve, where Fegan is the avenger of the twelve victims of sectarian violence perpetrated by himself, a sense of final peace and mercy is achieved. The final narrative countdown starting from twelve eventually reaches the last culprit that is Fegan himself, and to complete the vicious circle of vengeance and retribution encapuslated by *Lex Talionis*, Fegan should commit suicide. But instead of forcing Fegan to commit suicide, the final twelfth ghost of the woman Fegan killed when he planted a bomb in a shop[14], eventually forgives Fegan repeating the word "Mercy"[15] while dissolving into nothingness, leaving Fegan wording the sentence "I can have a life", "I can have a life"[16]. Here the significance of the natural number twelve takes on its usual biblical dimension that may be equated –after the trope made up by the twelve[17] apostles– with final redemption, whatever the earthly sins committed. The Christian twofold promise of redemption and resurrection is finally kept.

In essence, *The Twelve* is a Hamlet-like revenge tragedy based on a similar plot pattern resorting to similar supernatural agency – namely the ghosts of people murdered calling for vengeance – but also two major differences. The first one is that a proletarian figure like Fegan has replaced a prince and representative of the aristocratic order that is Hamlet, which is in keeping with our Western contemporary democratic though still frail

---

13. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* [1602], ed. G. R. Hibbard, Oxford, Oxford U.P., 1998, p. 184 (I, 4, v. 65).

14. Let us note in passing this is strongly reminiscent of the Omagh bombing which took place on 15 August 1998, when a car bomb loaded with about 500 pounds of fertiliser-based explosives planted just outside shops exploded in Omagh, killing 29 people (including a woman pregnant with twins) and injured some 220 others. This tragic bombing caused outrage both locally and internationally, and ironically reinforced the momentum in favour of the Northern Ireland peace process. Ultimately this act of atrociously random violence dealt a severe blow to the dissident Irish republican campaign. The Real IRA denied that the bomb was intended to kill civilians and apologised; shortly after, the group declared a ceasefire paving the way for the actual peace process to endure.

15. Neville, *The Twelve*, *op. cit.*, p. 458, 459, 460.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 458.

17. No wonder Neville should have gone for the number twelve. It is a superior highly composite number, divisible by 2, 3, 4, and 6, which stands out symbolically and mathematically. Hence its frequent appearance in the world's major religions. For more information on this topic, read Gilbert Durand's *Les Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire*, Paris, Dunod, 1992, p. 327-328.

aspirations. Secondly, provisional resolution seems to be achieved in chapter 61 when all of the ghosts have eventually disappeared. In a final scene full of macho heroic bravado, Fegan the survivor is seen alone and purified and washed by the cooling rain, about to embark on an entirely new life in America, probably full of thrilling adventures. In this instance, catharsis is actuated internally, by affecting the protagonist himself instead of being – normally and extradiegetically – directed at the reader as is the case in standard Elizabethan revenge plays:

> He […] picked up his bag, and turned to walk towards the boat. As he left the warehouse, gulls quarrelled, and rolled in the sky. Rain washed and cooled his skin. No shadow followed but his own.[18]

The standard synecdoche of "shadow" here refers to the whole class of spectres but it follows a blunt negative quantifier "No" frontfocusing their final departure.

Here we probably reach and hit the crux blatantly plaguing *The Twelve* and more generally Neville's thrillers – in both the Jack Lennon[19] and the Serena Flanagan series[20], even if in the latter, the introduction of a female detective may hint at an ever so subtle sense of innovation or renewal of the detective genre. But neither is this feminizing process wholly original: Brian McGilloway's Lucy Black series, Claire McGowan's Paula McGuire's series, Tana French's brilliant Dublin Murder Squad series, to mention but a few recent examples, already feature their fair share of female investigators who make up the distant empowered offspring of Agatha Christie's Miss Marple. Anyway, it is a fact that *The Ghosts of Belfast* has been critiqued and criticized –and righly so, one may feel entitled to say – by a wealth of reviewers for an overabundance of clichés without much actual irony or tongue-in-cheek-humour, contrary to what one may observe in Adrian McKinty's work for instance – especially in the Sean Duffy series. The Italian academic Laura Pelaschiar has, arguably but sensibly, perfectly summed up the paradox embodied by the whole book, namely:

> Neville's first novel parades without shame *all the most practised clichés and stereotypes of the genre* — the psychopathic killer, crooked British politicians, double-dealers, freedom-fighters, secret agents, innocent women, in a mix that has not kept up with the times but seems a *rehash of films already seen, books already shelved*. Just as Fegan thinks, at a certain moment in the novel that "the cause he once killed for was long gone", and reflects at the close that "all he knew

---

18.   *Ibid.*, p. 464.
19.   The Jack Lennon series includes *The Twelve*, London, Vintage, 2009; *Collusion*, London, Vintage, 2010 and *Stolen Souls*, London, Vintage, 2012.
20.   The Serena Flanagan series by Stuart Neville comprises *The Final Silence*, London, Vintage, 2014, *Those We Left Behind,* London, Vintage, 2015, *So Say the Fallen*, 2016.

> was this place had no more thirst for war. That had been quenched long ago. Men like him no longer belonged here. Exhaustion washed over him in a heavy grey wave", we too might conclude that given that the conditions that provided the context and justification for the Northern Ireland Troubles thriller, with all their political permutations, have now changed so radically, so too should the genre itself. But then again literature is an unpredictable organism and the future of the troubles thriller in the North is still to be decided.[21]

In a word, Gerry Fegan is the superlative quintessence of the maverick tough guy, as the following quote shows: "He looked like a killer, the *purest* kind, the kind who killed more out of want than need".[22] And since these Trumpian Covid 19-Brexit-laden days remain erratic, Fegan and his likes may well haunt the future of Northern Ireland, not just its past, offering an unexpected revival of an overhauled version of the infamous "Troubles trash" genre as identified by Brian Cliff.[23] Elizabeth Mannion characterizes Troubles trash as "sensationalistic" and trading in "reductive tropes of the conflict".[24] The only problem is the potential litany of clichés Neville's Fegan may contribute to maintaining alive. First his stereotypically Catholic surname "Fegan" reminiscent of the ambivalent political label "Fenian" never ever conjures up the ghosts of any precise political agenda or fair cause worth fighting for. The IRA remains but an empty acronym. In the book, there is no such thing as past discrimination against Catholics in housing, employment, civil rights. The very notion of partition is taken for granted and plainly fair. All the victims are essentially characterized as Protestants. The icing on top of the cake is the presence of two Ulster Freedom Fighters (the fascist-leaning paramilitary branch of the Ulster Defence Association) amongst the twelve. Let us run through the list of the twelve ghosts:

> Of the five soldiers three were Brits and two were Ulster Defence Regiment. Another of the followers was a cop, his Royal Ulster Constabulary uniform neat and stiff, and two more were Loyalists, both Ulster Freedom Fighters. The remaining four were civilians who had been in the wrong place at the wrong time. He remembered doing all of them […].[25]

---

21. Laura Pelaschiar, [Review of] "*The Twelve* by Stuart Neville", *Estudios Irlandeses*, 5, 2009 (https://www.estudiosirlandeses.org/reviews/the-twelve, last accessed 27.07.2020), p. 195.
22. Neville *The Twelve*, *op. cit.*, p. 144, my emphasis.
23. Cliff, *op. cit.*, p. 27. Let us quote: "The term 'Troubles trash' most often encompasses novels that depict political commitment as inimical to democratic society, that attribute the violence to the incurably atavistic inhabitants of the island, or that show scant regard for local differences and particular histories."
24. Elizabeth Mannion, *The Contemporary Irish Detective Novel*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p. 95.
25. Neville, *The Twelve*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

The general picture drawn here is in black and white with a manichean death toll and rather one-sided perspective on events, so it seems. The victims are deliberately portrayed as Protestants and the executioner is Catholic – i.e. Fegan –, whereas one knows for a fact that the consequences of political violence were usually far more indiscriminate than this neat clear-cut sectarian binary. Death tolls on each side included victims and colateral damage from both communities – if only two communities are to be considered – which is a questionable assertion *per se*. Even the infamous Shankill Butchers never stuck to or wreaked havoc among Catholic victims only. According to Malcom Sutton's *Index of Deaths from the Conflict database*, at least a third of their victims happened to be Protestants or even members of the UDA and UFF, falling victims of internal strife and settling of scores.[26] The narrator in *The Twelve* seems to be indirectly oblivious of or impervious to the simple fact that there is no such thing as a clean or pure civil war.

Precisely here, the main literal ghost screaming in the reader's face is that of mere historical facts.

In his monograph *The Thriller and Northern Ireland Since 1969* : subtitled *Utterly Resigned Terror* (2005)[27], as well as in his cogent essay "The Troubles with the Thriller : Political Violence and the Peace Process" (2012)[28], Aaron Kelly contends that, in the early stages of the Troubles, the connection between representations and the readership for which crime fiction was and still is produced in Northern Ireland cemented a lasting association between that genre, the Six Counties and regressive not to say reactionary, essentialist aesthetics.

> *At its most mechanistic, the thriller* is certainly a form which attempts to suggest that there are no classes, no gender, no community or women's groups, no human agency, or collective projects of collective emancipation, in short, nothing beyond the cyclical iteration of two tribalized, allochronic monoliths. [I ultimately wish to argue otherwise].[29]

In that aesthetics, ideological patterns are teeming with clichés. Notably the image of the backwards Irish, mired in an atavistic violence that is outside history. This patronizing view which heavily focuses on the Catholic population associated with an archaic religion, prevents any

26.   See https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/sutton/chron/1982.html (last accessed 27.07.2020).
27.   Aaron Kelly, *The Thriller and Northern Ireland since 1969*, London, Routledge, 2005, 224 p.
28.   Aaron Kelly, "The Troubles with the Thriller: Northern Ireland, Political Violence and the Peace Process", *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century British and American War Literature*, M. Rawlinson, A. Piette (Eds.), Edinburgh, Edinburgh U.P., 2012, p. 508-515
29.   Kelly, *The Thriller and Northern Ireland since 1969*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

effective political intervention. Fegan's brutal instinct is the epitome of that literary tendency and legacy.

It comes as no surprise then that crime fiction may be regarded as conservative and also in keeping with an ancient tradition stretching as far back as Elizabethan revenge tragedies not to mention Aeschylus. In that sense, ghosts –especially those haunting Neville's thrillers, are traces of or hints at a deep reluctance to delve into the real complex web of interwoven social ideological reasons for violence, be it the offshoot of imperialism or latter-day capitalism. Kelly quotes from Raymond Williams' marxist analysis and Fredric Jameson's postmodernist criticism to account for that oversimplifying process.[30] As Brian Cliff himself acknowledges, quoting extensively from Elmer Kennedy-Andrews'research, crime fiction is a place where political engagement is often too easily shunned or dismissed for the wrong reasons, depoliticizing a literary corpus that ultimately proves to be archpolitical all the same:

> Absent more substantial explorations, that is, fiction about the Troubles has too readily resulted in texts in which 'terrorist violence is treated *metaphysically*, as the manifestation of evil and madness', or texts that seemed 'to confine their explanations to psychosexual motives.' Such metaphysical and 'psychosexual' narrative patterns frequently relied on more than a hint of dark, pre-rational atavism, which served not just as atmosphere but as a substitute for explanation, as something that foreclosed further engagement.[31]

To conclude, one may venture that, instead of shedding light on the complex genesis or engineering of identity, community healing and political binaries, Neville actually recycles terribly effective voyeuristic narrative strategies at work in the so-called Troubles trash genre, where violence both elicits fascination *and* repulsion, which incidentally largely accounts for the genre's perennial massive commercial success. The final assessment of the literary worth of Neville's work depends on whether or not one thinks they can spot an ambivalent postmodernist, post-political, entropic vision of Northern Irish society therein. Brian Cliff and Elizabeth Mannion think that work by writers like Stuart Neville in Northern Ireland or Claire McGowan (in her book *Dead Ground* for instance) in the Republic, transcend, what they call "half-baked clichés" and a fake sense of restored order. To them, they preserve and illustrate the ambiguities and ambivalences of a dynamic complex society.

The Republican mafioso-style Bull O'Kane in *The Twelve* may then point to the last stages of metastasized old-school local sectarianism. It

---

30.   *Ibid.*, p. 4-26.
31.   Cliff, *op. cit.*, p. 28-29. My emphasis.

is graphically portrayed by Neville the moment when it crashes into the newfangled walls of neo-jingoism and transnational capitalism embodied by Brexit post-truth politics. This is fittingly summed up by McGinty, yet another dubious agent in the *The Twelve* ending up caught up in a massive shoot-out on a farm close to an everproblematic border separating the North from the South. The following quote reveals what he thinks at the prospect of a heap of dead bodies discovered by the police forces:

> It was only a matter of time before the bodies were found at O'Kane's farm. [...] The politicians and the media would convulse, accusations would be hurled, recriminations threatened. Stormont might collapse again, or perhaps more concessions would be given by the British and Irish governments to keep the Assembly afloat. The European Union might throw more money into community grants to quiet the streets of Belfast. Maybe the British would blame it on the dissidents; they were friendless anyway.[32]

But yet again this seemingly contemporary chaos spanning from Westminster and the Dáil to the EU, beyond the unmistakable whiff of conspiracy theory it may elicit, is quite redolent of very ancient lines, which show, if need be, the permanence and transgression of old motifs haunting the anomalous territory known as Northern Ireland.

> So shall you hear
> Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
> Of accidental judgements, casual slaughters,
> Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause;
> And, in this upshot, purposes mistook
> Fallen on the inventors' heads. (*Hamlet*, V, 2)[33]

What remains to assess now is whether or not, as Jacques Derrida famously posited: "The ghosts belong to the future.",[34] which may turn out to be an ominous hypothesis, within the context of Northern Ireland, depending on their degree of obsession with revenge translating into a potential equation between ghosts and enduring binary sectarianism. It is the very motif of that danger of History repeating itself in Northern Ireland that lies at the heart of Neville's work. That repetition (already observable in the recurring narrative mechanism on twelve occasions through twelve murders and twelve potential revenges in the book) turns out to be both Deleuzian[35] in that it is differential -murder is repeated but the victim is different - and Marxist in that it has History locked up in

---

32.   Neville, *The Twelve*, *op. cit.*, p. 462.
33.   Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. cit., p. 354, V, 2, 333-337.
34.   Jacques Derrida (1991), *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington, Chicago, Chicago U.P., p. 359.
35.   Read Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et répétition*, Paris, PUF, 1968.

a loop, tragic in essence and grotesque not to say absurd in its nihilistic repetitiveness.[36] It is that hateful cycle to the power of twelve that propels forward the book. the plot only ends when this absurd cycle is brought to a halt by forgiveness.

Thierry Robin is a professor of anglophone studies at the University of Orléans. His research focuses on contemporary Irish literature and the connections between ideology, epistemology and the concept of reality, notably through the genre of satire. He has written numerous articles about Irish writers including Flann O'Brien, Samuel Beckett, Anne Enright, Dermot Healy and John Banville, amongst others. He has also published a book devoted to the study of Flann O'Brien's novels, entitled *Flann O'Brien, Un voyageur au bout du langage* (2008) and coedited a collection of essays bearing on political ideology, *Political Ideology in Ireland from the Enlightenment to the Present*, (2009). He is currently completing a monograph on Irish crime fiction, which should be published by late 2022.

---

36. In his 1885 essay entitled *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, Karl Marx posits: "Hegel remarks somewhere that all the events and personalities of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce." (https://web.archive.org/web/20170303190424/http://www.marx2mao.com/M&E/EBLB52.html).

Chapter nine

"Curiously mundane hallucinations"

Monstrous nightmares and spectral fears in John Banville's *The Sea* and Anne Enright's *The Gathering*

Héloïse Lecomte
ENS Lyon

Abstract: John Banville's *The Sea* and Anne Enright's *The Gathering* are bereavement stories in which the death of a loved one reactivates memories of painful events. Since it cannot be rationalized by a traumatized mind, the haunting presence of the past can be articulated into ghosts, monstrous shapes and mythical creatures. In the imagery of both Banville's and Enright's novels, spectres can turn into uncanny narrative monsters or fear-inspiring oneirical figures. As memories turn into spectral or mythical manifestations, at once real and imagined, present and absent, undercurrents of Gothic fiction seep through both novels. Drawing on the interpenetrations between trauma theory, bereavement theory, Derridean hauntology and memory studies, I suggest that Enright and Banville subvert the codes of traditional ghost stories, giving a psychological turn to their (sometimes) mock-Gothic novels. It appears that the only way of liberating the mind from the terrifying hold of those ghostly shadows might be to give a concrete form to these threatening shapes. The narrators' ghostly testimonies or confessions, with their faint religious undertones and (dark) humour, thus constitute an attempt to ward off the evil spell of painful, uncertain memory. Both novels fashion unsettling fictions in an attempt to verbalize anguish, thus questioning the possibility that ghostly dread might be tamed by those creations.

Keywords: Mourning, Banville, Enright, Trauma, Monster, Gothic, Laughter, Spectre, Chimera

Introduction

////////////////////

In his grief memoir *A Grief Observed*, C.S. Lewis writes: "no one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness".[1] By equating grief with the physical discomfort that comes with dread, Lewis argues, paradoxically, that the sense of anxiety that comes with mourning, even when the world has already been turned upside-down and the worst has arguably happened, is akin to an "anxious anticipation of danger",[2] which imprints a lingering sense of impending doom into the mourners' psyches. In John Banville's *The Sea* (2005) and Anne Enright's *The Gathering* (2007), the literary articulation of this intimate, fearful grief comes in a wider social context of agonizing loss and religious skepticism. It has long been acknowledged by critics that *The Gathering* in particular is a literary expression of cultural trauma, a "probing of national identity through an invocation of the child abuse in post-Independence Ireland, which fractured the country's self-understanding during the economic boom",[3] in Carol Dell'Amico's words. In both novels, on top of their private losses, the protagonists are mourning the loss of comforting religious beliefs and ideals: when Max Morden jokingly asserts that "it would be an impiety against God to believe in him".[4] in *The Gathering*, "God [is] smashed in the grate".[5] With their protagonists Max Morden and Veronica Hegarty poised on the brink of melancholy mourning, both writers strive to find an adequate narrative discourse to account for the uncertainty of a world robbed of its traditional structures of belief.

C.S. Lewis, though writing about his own deeply Christian experience of grief in the United Kingdom (and in the early 1960s), probes the depths of mourning in a way that finds an echo in Enright's and Banville's secularized early 21st century Ireland. He asks the same question as both novelists: "what's left?" What is left indeed, in the wake of painful dispossession, when no solace is available in traditional structures? Lewis's answer is threefold: "a corpse, a memory, and a ghost. All mockeries or horrors".[6] All three concepts (corpse, memory and ghost) are intricately connected, and participate in blurring the edges between past and present,

---

1. C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, London, Faber, 1961, p. 1.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Carol Dell'Amico, "*The Gathering*: Trauma, Testimony, Memory", *New Hibernia Review*, 14(3), 2010, p. 59-73 (doi:10.1353/nhr.2010.0014), p. 59.
4. John Banville, *The Sea*, London, Picador, 2005, p. 185.
5. Anne Enright, *The Gathering*, London, Vintage, 2007, p. 139. In Enright's novel, religion is not just facing the consequences of modern secularization. According to Ralf Haekel, "the novel mistrusts the mechanisms of collective identity by questioning the pillars typical of Irish national identity, the church and the family […], represented as the very source of violence and abuse – and therefore as the cause for the disintegration of identity" p. 170 (Ralf Haekel, "Un-writing the Self: Anne Enright's *The Gathering*", *Anglistik*, 27(2), 2016, p. 165-178, https://angl.winter-verlag.de/article/ANGL/2016/2/12).
6. Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

the material and the immaterial, life and death. Banville and Enright choose to focus on the impalpable memory and ghost more than the tangible corpse,[7] but all three notions share a comparable horrific potential, as the corpse and the ghost are staples of the Gothic.[8] As the concrete corpse gives way to the ethereal ghost, a sense of uncertainty emerges. I would argue that C.S. Lewis's alternative "mockeries or horrors" can be re-articulated into interdependence (mock-horror, or the mockery of horror) in both of these contemporary novels. Drawing from Sylvie Mikowski's claim that, "contrary to the theory of trauma narrative as being necessarily avant-garde", some Irish narratives of trauma and mourning "rely on well-established traditions and themes, such as the Gothic",[9] my aim here is to analyse both the fantastic potential of literary ghosts and the transformation of spectres into hallucinations in Banville's and Enright's contemporary appropriation of the "tradition of mourning as a Gothic practice".[10]

Many a horror story or legend comes with a monster that needs be vanquished – be it the Minotaur hidden in the dark recesses of the maze or the chimera with its hybrid beastly status that combines parts of a lion, a goat and a snake. But in a variety of Gothic tales, the monster is not to be defeated, as it takes on a ghostly quality, and releases a chill that seeps through the narrative. The meanings of the two Latin words from which the terms "monster" and "spectre" are derived are closely connected, the former being taken from "*demonstrare*: to show, to reveal, to disclose"[11] and the latter from *spectare*, "to look". Etymologically speaking, both terms are thus firmly rooted in the realm of vision and revelation, thus articulating monstrous and spectral fears in Banville's and Enright's novels with the dialectic interaction between seeing and not-seeing, concealment and revelation. An uncertain visual thread is exploited to carve semi-fantastic narratives of grief, which expand on "the ghost of a ghost",[12] a reversal or furthering of traditional takes on spectrality. In order to explore the fearful proximity of spectres and chimeras in those

---

7. Although Liam's corpse does feature in *The Gathering*, it is mostly upstaged by the ghostly suggestion of Liam's impromptu and repeated irruptions within the protagonist's mind. There are no corpses in *The Sea*: Chloe and Myles simply disappear into the sea, and Anna's post-mortem fate is never revealed.

8. 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).

9. Sylvie Mikowski, "Gothic and Noir: The Genres of the Irish Contemporary Fiction of 'Containment'", *Études irlandaises*, 42(2), 2017, p. 93-104 (doi:10.4000/etudesirlandaises.5332).

10. Joanne Watkiss, *Gothic Contemporaries, The Haunted Text*, Cardiff, Wales U.P., 2012, p. 5.

11. Dani Cavallaro, *The Gothic Vision: Three Centuries of Horror, Terror and Fear*, London, Continuum, 2002, p. 172.

12. Banville, *op. cit.*, p. 142. As Gisèle Vanhese argues, the term *phantasia* (or fantasy), the root of the word "phantom", is close to the term *phantasma*, which designates a spectre, a ghost, also linking imagination and the spectral, as is done in fantastic literature (Gisèle Vanhese, "Thématique fantomale et spectralisation du récit dans *Biserica neagra* d'Anatol E. Baconsky", *Caietele Echinox*, 21, 2011, p. 248-261 (https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=173009), p. 248).

Irish cultural narratives of mourning, I will focus on the way spectres are portrayed as traditional agents of fright, before moving on to the rationalization of ghosts as hallucinations or residues from the past, as if Banville and Enright were trying to twist the Gothic tradition. I will finally analyse the way both novels work at warding off the evil spell of melancholy grief through an incorporation of mock-Gothic laughter into the narrativization of trauma.

Night terrors: uncanny ghosts and liminal monsters

⫽⫽⫽⫽⫽⫽⫽⫽⫽⫽⫽⫽

If in Lewis's definition of grief, the corpse and the ghost are both "horrors", their varying degrees of corporeality colour the fear they inspire in mourners. According to Dani Cavallaro, while horror is conventionally "linked […] to fear occasioned by the visible gore" (which one could relate to the corpse), terror is a liminal sort of fear, "triggered by indeterminate agents"[13] (such as ghosts). In both novels, the porosity of the limit between reality and imagination, past and present, but also the light of day and the dead of night infiltrates the narratives, which ties in with Max Morden's depiction of grief in *The Sea* as "the *vague*, slow fright, which is perpetual with me now"[14] (italics mine). The mourner is put in a never-ending state of abeyance by his wife's death, and seems to be living his life in slow motion. From the moment Max finds out about his wife's illness, his speech is riddled with figures of liminal anxiety: "in the ashen weeks of daytime dread and nightly terror before Anna was forced at last to acknowledge the inevitability of Mr Todd […], I seemed to inhabit a twilit netherworld in which it was scarcely possible to distinguish dream from waking".[15] The indistinctness of anticipated mourning is equated with death-related "ash" and correlated with fright, through the near-synonyms "dread" and "terror". Even before Anna's death, fear is inescapable and "perpetual" (see previous quote), invading both "daytime" and "night", which become indistinct themselves ("twilit"), as binaries are blurred and certainties are thoroughly undermined. A parallel oscillation between memory and imagination features in both novels through a paratactic balancing act: "a memory of mine, a dream of mine"[16] (in *The Sea*) or an uncertain conflation: "this memory or dream of mine"[17] (in *The Gathering*). This syntactic and semantic wavering is reminiscent of salient attributes of the "fantastic", a

---

13. Cavallaro, *op. cit.*, p. vii. There is a scene in *The Gathering* where a young Veronica faces her grandfather Charlie's corpse, and the visual confrontation with the concrete incarnation of death is shrouded in the language of horror: "maybe she wanted the whole world to witness, and be horrified" (p. 64). The correlation between "witness" and "be horrified", underlined by the conjunction "and", suggests that seeing the corpse is the cause of horror. The comma before "and" marks a short pause to incorporate the viewer's gasp within the text.
14. Banville, *op. cit.*, p. 128.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
17. Anne Enright, *The Gathering*, London, Vintage, 2007, p. 222.

subgenre or mode with which dark fiction can be closely intertwined, and which Todorov defines as a frontier region poised between the "uncanny" and the "marvellous".[18] However, these fantastic irruptions appear to be mostly due to the hauntological vein that runs through the texts, following Colin Davis's definition of Derridean hauntology, which "supplants its near-homonym ontology, replacing the priority of being and presence with the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive […] making established certainties vacillate".[19] In stories of mourning, where the protagonists inhabit the limit between life and death, the hauntological version of the fantastic bolsters the liminality inherent to the narrative situation, and provides adequate expression for the characters' experience of in-betweenness.

In the wake of traumatic loss, the "dreams" of the past are, ultimately, peopled with indeterminate, nightmarish creatures, or ghostly chimeras. In *The Sea*, Max remembers the "Medusa-head"[20] of a hospital patient photographed by Anna, but also the presence of a "minatory"[21] stranger in the past, a term whose phonetic pronunciation carries faint echoes of the term "Minotaur", conjuring up the mythical monster at the heart of the grief narrative. Even in Max's memories of Anna's dying days, she turns into a hybrid, part-human, part-animal frightening creature with her "claw-like, monkeyish grasp".[22] The suffix *-ish* reinforces the sense of indeterminacy that creeps in this fear-inspiring depiction of a haunting memory. It is no coincidence that for Cavallaro, the Gothic articulation of monstrosity should lie in its liminal status: "monstrosity eludes conclusive categorization insofar as it embodies the transgression of dividing lines meant to separate one body from another, one psyche from another, the pure from the impure, the delightful from the gruesome, virtue from vice, good from

---

18.   Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell U.P., 1975. The "uncanny" itself is a liminal concept, which for Romain Van Nguyen "lies somewhere between the known and the unknown, the not-fully-known and the not-absolutely-repressed" (p. 485), Romain Nguyen Van, "'According to All the Authorities': The Uncanny in John Banville's *The Sea*", *Études anglaises*, 65(4), 2012, p. 480-499 (doi:10.3917/etan.654.0480).

19.   Colin Davis, *Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis and the Return of the Dead,* New York, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 9, 11. Christine Berthin assures us: "hauntology is the dark double of ontology. It deconstructs and empties out ontology, being and presence. Neither alive nor dead, the Derridean spectre hovers between presence and absence, making it impossible to assign definite meanings to things. […] It is in the nature of ghosts to stand in defiance of the binary oppositions (life or death, inside or outside as well as present or past) that constitute our symbolic system" (Christine Berthin, *Gothic Hauntings: Melancholy Crypts and Textual Ghosts*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 3). The ghost signifies 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 (Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx* [1994], trans. Peggy Kamuf, New York, Routledge, 2006, p. 5).

20.   Banville, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

21.   *Ibid.*, p. 68.

22.   *Ibid.*, p. 238.

evil".[23] As such, it matches spectrality's uncanny liminality, from which emerges the nightmare-tale of terror and grief.

The traditional Gothic monsters of fantastic literature assume new shapes in *The Gathering*, as their (omni)presence metaphorizes the inescapability of grief and trauma that pervades the narrative. As Enright argues in an interview with Boyd Tonkin, "there is often a dark secret in books […] There is often a gathering sense of dread, a gap sometimes in the text from which all kinds of monsters can emerge".[24] When discussing her writing of *The Gathering*, the novelist herself equates the darkness of secrecy with the threat of lurking monsters. Contrary to the Irish nation's history of containment of horrific child abuse underlined by Sylvie Mikowski in her 2017 article "Gothic and Noir: the Genres of the Irish Contemporary Fiction of 'Containment'", Veronica represents the abuser's ghost as "a slick of horror",[25] which cannot be contained, "oozing sly intent",[26] and infecting the atmosphere all around him: "it was the air he breathed that did for us".[27] By giving both a liquid and aerial quality to Lambert Nugent's nefarious influence, Enright emphasizes his alarming ubiquity. Strikingly, this ever-expanding threat is associated with immanent spectral immateriality: "I think he would have had it from the start, this trick of not existing much".[28] Lambert Nugent's human status is subtly questioned here, and the term "trick" conjures up images of dark magic, as if this semi-ghostly quality were the disguise of a threatening creature.

If Lambert Nugent is not physically deformed, his depravity is infinitely more worrying, and seems to epitomize Jarlath Killeen's claim that "there is something uncanny about the human monster that looks completely normal. They resemble that which is long known and familiar, but they are actually hollowed-out shells containing a terrifying otherness […] These people are not biologically impure but are, rather, psychological deviants".[29] Veronica constructs Lambert Nugent's ghost as an uncanny evil presence which makes reason falter and induces physical and oppressive dis-ease: "I am sickened by the evil of him […], I am sweltering in it" and "I do not believe in evil […], and yet I experience the slow turn of his face towards the door as evil".[30] It is no coincidence that Veronica should also depict her vision of ghosts as a concrete and

---

23. Cavallaro, *op. cit.*, p. 174.
24. Anne Enright & Boyd Tonkin, "Interview: The Fearless Wit of Man Booker Winner Anne Enright", *The Independent*, 19 October 2007 (https://www.independent.co.uk/interview-the-fearless-wit-of-man-booker-winner-anne-enright-394987.html, last accessed on 3 October 2019).
25. Enright, *op. cit.*, p. 215.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 215.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 224.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
29. Jarlath Killeen, *The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction: History, Origins, Theories*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh U.P., 2014 (https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt9qdrh2), p. 148.
30. Enright, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

malevolent procession of obstacles when they materialize on the house's stairs, a typically liminal space, during Liam's wake: "these are my nightmares. This is what I have to walk through to get downstairs".[31] The nightmarish apparition of the threatening ghosts of the Hegarty family's past is unmistakably the product of Veronica's mind, a creation of her feverish imagination, as she acknowledges they are "*my* nightmares" (italics mine). Gothic undertones are often used to articulate overwhelming trauma in contemporary fiction, the gap in the understanding of an experience, since in modern Gothic, for Colin Davis: "the ghosts are now inside our heads rather than roaming the outside world",[32] as Enright's choice of vocabulary in *The Gathering* implies.

Gothic reversals: from ghost to hallucination

In narratives that intertwine trauma and grief, the ghosts are confined to the characters' minds, in the shape of "curiously mundane"[33] hallucinations, deceptive incarnations of one's worst fears. The oxymoron "curiously mundane" encapsulates the uncanny quality of this inner haunting, in which the fantastic nature of haunting is drawn back to everyday experiences. In *The Gathering*, the threatening ghosts are always lurking: "here come the dead. They hunker around the walls".[34] When Veronica describes ghostly intrusions into her existence, the syntactic structures "here come", "these are" are recurrent, emphasizing the inescapable presence of the departed, who lurk in the darkness, around the corners of the protagonist's consciousness like prowling beasts ("hunker"). The hallucinated presence of Liam's ghost on the plane also conveys a paradoxical "slumbrous menace".[35] When in Brighton, Veronica thus acknowledges her anxiety to the undertaker: "I can't take the flight with him. It's just too…".[36] Here the aposiopesis conveys a vague sense of dread, as Liam's corpse becomes the embodiment of Veronica's repressed fears, which cannot be put into words. As Christine Berthin argues, "since the Reformation, ghosts have ceased to inhabit an improbable purgatory, a non-place between life and death. They have been relegated to the 'nightside of life', 'the world of dreams and of the repressed guilts and fears that motivate them'".[37] The "slumbrous menace" and nightmarish quality of Liam's ghostly presence in the narrator's mind perfectly illustrate Berthin's words, as it is suggested that Veronica experiences guilt over her protracted

---

31. *Ibid.*, p. 215.
32. Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
33. Banville, *op. cit.*, p. 237.
34. Enright, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
37. Berthin, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

silence in the matter of her brother's childhood abuse. So when she hallucinates a "headrest ghost"[38] while driving around Dublin, the irrational interpretation is quickly dismissed, as Gerardine Meaney remarks, while quoting from Enright's text: "'he is always there (it is always a he), a slumped figure in the front seat', it begins madly, 'who turns out, on examination, to be the tilting headrest' (132), it ends sanely".[39] The narrator's rationality thus prevails in the end, when Veronica also admits that she does not see ghosts, but "sees" them, between inverted commas: "I 'saw' the ghosts".[40] The quotation marks indicate an ironical perspective that questions the reality of the character's vision.

However, more often than not, the protagonists of *The Sea* and *The Gathering* are frustrated by the lack of actual ghostly apparitions and by the dismantling of common Gothic tropes, which leaves them without landmarks or traditional means of expression. Max's desperate injunction takes on a metatextual quality in *The Sea* when he admonishes his late wife: "send back your ghost. Torment me, if you like. Rattle your chains, drag your cerements across the floor, keen like a banshee, anything".[41] The accumulation of Gothic stereotypes is combined with a threatening alliterative accumulation of [r] sounds, in an attempt to recreate the aural effect of aggressive haunting, as Max strives to bring a sensory dimension to ghostly apparition. While this new kind of haunting departs from the traditions of Gothic and Irish mythology alike, Max's hyperbolic prayer, slightly comic in its exaggeration, also highlights the disorienting frustration of contemporary mourning, robbed of its folklore. In *The Gathering*, Veronica feels Liam's "absence laughing at [her]"[42] when she realizes that her brother's corpse is not accompanied by any ghost: "there are no ghosts with Liam's body, not even his own".[43] This partial absence appears to constitute the modern kind of haunting, replacing actual apparitions with liminal shapes: "he is completely there, and not there at all".[44] It is possible to be haunted by the absence of a ghost, which is the epitome of spectrality. When the tomb of grieving imagination is open, releasing the ghost, the vault's emptiness invites the worst nightmarish chimeras instead, as Enright argues in an interview: "the nightmare logic […] is also the logic of mental breakdown. It is all about rupture and repetition, not progression, growth and change".[45] In both texts, the experience of frightening

---

38. Enright, *op. cit.*, p. 148.
39. Gerardine Meaney, "Waking the Dead: Antigone, Ismene and Anne Enright's Narrators in Mourning", *Anne Enright*, Claire Bracken & Susan Cahill (Eds.), Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 2011 (hdl:10197/6014), p. 148.
40. Enright, *op. cit.*, p. 217.
41. Banville, *op. cit.*, p. 248. In Irish mythology, a banshee is a fairy whose laments anticipate the passing of a person.
42. Enright, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
45. In Deborah Treisman, "Anne Enright on Rupture and Repetition", *The New Yorker*, March 2, 2020 (https://www.newyorker.com/books/this-week-in-fiction/anne-enright-03-09-20, last accessed on 5 March 2020).

nightmares is strongly correlated with mental breakdown and an endless traumatic or melancholy reiteration of the past.

In the absence of actual ghosts, the mourners appear to be losing substance themselves,[46] thus turning into liminal creatures. In *The Sea*, Max's leitmotiv is: "I am becoming my own ghost", "a phantom version of me",[47] "I was there and not there, myself and revenant, immured in the moment and yet hovering somehow on the point of departure".[48] Once contaminated by spectrality, he starts inspiring fear to his fellow lodger, Colonel Blunden: "he grew anxious in my company – I did not blame him, I grow anxious in it myself".[49].As Joanne Watkiss argues: "Banville's postmodern 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".[50] The mourners thus become the monsters they fear and complete the experience of dread. When Max remembers his own past self, he depicts himself as monstrous in terms that remain similar to his aforementioned description of the dying Anna: "I dug my claw […] into his flesh".[51] While Max sees himself as a hybrid creature, Veronica also experiences a strange sense of defamiliarization, by comparing herself to a disproportionate, "mislaid giant".[52] The deformity of the monstrous past and the spectral creatures that populate it is thus reversed and applied to the mourners, highlighting the internalization of ghostly figures and anxiety.

Monstrous cures? Laughing off mock-Gothic spectres

///////////////////

The imagining of a monstrous spectre helps narrativize terror and make visible the mental ghosts of the inherently unrepresentable traumatic event, thus tying in with the etymological meaning of the verb *spectare*, to see. In *The Gathering*, the monstrous chimera (or the skeleton in

---

46.   Strikingly, in *The Gathering*, Veronica's mother is so "vague" (p. 4, 86, 197, 223) she almost becomes a ghost, as Mulhall remarks: "the mother is the unspeakable phantom, the gap enclaved within the novel's genealogy. Enright works to make this absence present, to answer to its uncanny insistence" (Anne Mulhall, "Now the Blood is in the Room: the Spectral Feminine in the Work of Anne Enright", *Anne Enright*, Bracken & Cahill (Eds.), *op. cit.*, 2011, p. 68).
47.   Banville, *op. cit.*, p. 137.
48.   *Ibid.*, p. 96.
49.   *Ibid.*, p. 200.
50.   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, p. 55-71 (https://irishgothichorror.files.wordpress.com/2018/03/joanne-watkiss.pdf), p. 55.
51.   Max pictures himself as a dead man walking, someone who tells his story from beyond the grave: "someone had just walked over my grave" (p. 4), "these days whole churchyardsful of mourners traipse back and forth unfeelingly over my grave" (p. 64), a major Gothic trope whose interpretation remains uncertain here: is the narrator buried alive (locked in the labyrinth of his own memory, with minotaurs aplenty) or is he anticipating his future death, furthering the disruption of time brought about by hauntology and spectrality?
52.   Enright, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

the closet) is the spectre of Liam's assault at the hands of Lambert Nugent, an oppressive memory which spills into the present in the shape of its direct consequence: Liam's suicide. Veronica's recounting of the long-repressed event oneirically conjures up monsters:

> It was as if Mr Nugent's penis, which was sticking straight out of his flies, had grown strangely, and flowered at the tip to produce the large and unwieldy shape of a boy, that boy being my brother Liam, who, I finally saw, was *not an extension of the man's member*, set down mysteriously on the ground in front of him, but a shocked (of course, he was shocked, I had opened the door) boy of nine. [...] They *were not one thing*, joined from open groin to shoulder, they were two people that I knew. (italics mine)[53]

If for Ulrike Tancke, "the naïve perception of the little girl clearly registers the wrongness of the scene, and attenuates its violent impact as it coats the image in the reassuring terms of a kind of fairy tale",[54] this particular snippet of a monstrous tale evinces an uncomfortable sense of uncertainty, potently expressed by the adverbs "strangely" and "mysteriously". The hypothetical dream-logic of metaphorical monsters (introduced by the comparative clause "as if") is here defeated by rational explanation, as the past perfect subjunctive "had grown" is replaced with the negative indicative verbs "was not" and "were not", which shatter the chilling illusion. As the haunting presence of the traumatic past cannot be rationalized by the overwhelmed mind it turns into a nightmarish world of monstrous creatures, in which the reconstruction of meaning can only be achieved after a delay. Enright stylistically reproduces the little girl's confusion, and the asyndetic rhythm of the scene captures the lack of coherence and the narrator's failure to immediately grasp the shocking reality of what she is witnessing. She recognizes a "shape", and then "a boy" before identifying her own brother "Liam". As Bridget English reminds us, "the narrative is written in a style that resembles psychotherapy".[55] The monster being a culturally-recognized way of addressing anxiety, the ghostly confession thus becomes a way of warding off the evil spell, and keeping the nightmare at bay by giving a concrete shape to the ghostly shadows of past trauma. Verbalizing this vague terror is akin to turning on the light to rid oneself of nightmarish shadows. The monstrous chimera is therefore designed to cure evil with evil, in order to properly articulate unrepresentable anguish. When Veronica reveals her truth to the reader, she professes: "it is time to *put an end* to the waking dreams. It is *time to call an end* to romance and just say what happened in Ada's house, the year that I was

---

53. *Ibid.*, p. 143, 144.
54. Ulrike Tancke, *Deceptive Fictions: Narrating Trauma and Violence in Contemporary Writing,* Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars, 2015, p. 115.
55. Bridget English, *Laying Out the Bones: Death and Dying in the Modern Irish Novel*, Syracuse, Syracuse U.P., 2017, p. 151, 153.

eight" (italics mine).[56] The syntactical parallelism emphasizes the narrator's determination to come to terms with her fears and wake up from her spectral nightmares.

In *The Sea*, Max also presents Anna's cancer as a form of monstrous pregnancy, a malignant growth (in both senses of the adjective): "there it was, squatting in her lap, the bulge that was big baby De'Ath, burgeoning inside her, biding its time".[57] It is striking that Enright and Banville should use the same kind of flowery and organic vocabulary to depict horrific visions: abuse and cancer are "flowering" and "burgeoning" into monstrous flowers of flesh. The ironical image of natural rebirth underlines the Gothic transformation that plants the seeds of death long in advance, and condemns the living to become liminal, living-dead creatures. As those tentative references to mythical monstrosity help make sense of overwhelming realities and represent them, the teratological interpretation seems to open a potential way out of the Minotaur's maze of uncertain and tortured memory.

The comic potential of the absurd pregnancy metaphor in *The Sea* seems to open up possibilities of thwarting spectral terror and defeating the threatening chimera. Banville overdoes his own horrific repertoire of hackneyed personifications in the scene that follows the visit to Mr. Todd, who hands in Anna's death sentence: "I found the brandy bottle and tremblingly poured a measure into a tumbler, the bottle-neck and the rim of the glass chattering against each other like teeth"[58]. The sounds produced by the glass are turned into grotesque objective correlatives of Max's own fear. On his way to *The Cedars*, Max also casually passes a "ridiculously grand mock-Gothic gateway",[59] whose architectural depiction doubles as a metatextual comment. For Elke d'Hoker, in Banville's work, "the gothic references to ghosts, devils and haunted houses are often exaggerated to the point of self-deflating parody".[60] This release of fear and tension partakes of Bakhtin's famous definition of laughter: "laughter has the remarkable power of making an object come up close. […] Laughter is a vital factor in laying down that prerequisite for fearlessness without which it would be impossible to approach the world realistically".[61] The dark humour that comes from mock-Gothic references therefore acts a pressure valve that allows the characters to release a build-up of anguish. This principle is crucial to a famous scene in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, where the heroes face a magical shape-shifting creature called

---

56. Enright, *op. cit.*, p. 142.
57. Banville, *op. cit.*, p. 96.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
60. Elke D'Hoker, *Visions of Alterity: Representation in the Works of John Banville*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2004, p. 183.
61. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* [1981], Austin, Texas U.P., 1996, p. 23.

the "boggart" (or the aptly-named "épouvantard" in the French version), which automatically takes the appearance of its opponent's innermost fear. In the Harry Potter series, the only way of neutralizing the Boggart is to cast a spell (the no less aptly-entitled "Riddikulus") that will turn it into a laughter-inducing shape (a huge spider with roller-shoes at the end of each leg, for instance).[62] A similar process is at work in some scenes of Banville's and Enright's novels. In *The Gathering*, the headrest ghost, a slightly ridiculous emblem of "a thousand mechanical friends in a thousand cartoons"[63], is also robbed of its terrifying potential by the narrator's sarcastic mind. The Disneyfied ghost is here reduced to a commodity, a source of children's entertainment, thereby robbing it of its dread-inspiring quality[64]. For Lisa Colletta, "dark humor celebrates the protective capacity of the individual by its insistence on making comic sense out of overwhelming non-sense. It takes on our greatest fears and makes a joke out of powerlessness, loneliness, chaos, nihilism, and death, allowing them to be mastered for a moment".[65] The laughter that arises in the midst of trauma and grief serves as a temporary shield. In both *The Gathering* and *The Sea*, however, dark humour is often equated with self-pity or ironical despair, and acts as a means of covering up the characters' emotions, but it does release the stronghold of the irrational over Gothic traditions, and relieve the symptoms of fearful haunting in contemporary tales of grief.

Conclusion

///////////////

As I have argued, Enright and Banville articulate Gothic and mock-Gothic features in order to outline the anxieties of grief and trauma and attempt to cure them. But the monsters and ghosts, be they internal or external, are not just fearful, liminal hallucinations. Their presence becomes revelatory instead, as Jarlath Killeen argues: "'monster' is derived from, or at least connected, to the Latin word "*monstrum*", meaning to show, to reveal, or warn. Monsters tell us something – warn us to watch

---

62. J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, London, Bloomsbury, 1999. The character who teaches the class tellingly declares: "what really finishes a boggart is laughter. You need to force it to assume a shape you find truly amusing" (Chapter 7).

63. Enright, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

64. This ties in with Christian Gutleben and Marie-Luise Kohkle's assessment of neo-Victorian ghost stories, and what they call "Disneygothic": "ghosts in general in neo-Victorian fiction are treated with an ironical distance that dispels their frightening power and their supernatural ontology" (Christian Gutleben & Marie-Luise Kohkle, *Neo-Victorian Gothic: Horror, Violence and Degeneration in the Re-Imagined Nineteenth Century*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2012, p. 312).

65. Lisa Colletta, *Dark Humor and Social Satire in the Modern British Novel*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. 7. Strikingly, dark humour exhibits some of the same characteristics as trauma and Gothic fiction, according to Lisa Colletta: "dark humor is […] generally defined by ambivalence, confused chronology, plots that seem to go nowhere, and a conflicting or even unreliable, narrative stance. It presents violent or traumatic events and questions the values and perceptions of its readers as it represents, simultaneously, the horrifying and the humorous" (p. 2).

out".[66] Indeed, in this case, monstrous chimeras have a crucial cultural impact, as indicators of a diseased society or disquieted psyche.[67] If in *The Sea*, the results of Max's sometimes ironical treatment of dread remain uncertain, in *The Gathering*, Veronica's ability to embrace the liminality of memory enables her to bear witness to her past, own it and potentially recover from it.[68]

Héloïse Lecomte is an alumna of the ENS de Lyon and a PhD candidate at the École Normale Supérieure de Lyon, under the supervision of Professor Vanessa Guignery. Her research focuses on the narrative poetics of mourning in contemporary British and Irish fiction, and more particularly the metaphor of the tomb in novels by John Banville, Anne Enright, Penelope Lively, Ian McEwan, Ali Smith and Graham Swift.

Bibliography

Bakhtin, Mikhail, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* [1981], Austin, Texas U.P., 1996.

Banville, John, *The Sea*, London, Picador, 2005.

Berthin, Christine, *Gothic Hauntings: Melancholy Crypts and Textual Ghosts*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Cavallaro, Dani, *The Gothic Vision: Three Centuries of Horror, Terror and Fear*, London, Continuum, 2002.

Colletta, Lisa, *Dark Humor and Social Satire in the Modern British Novel*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Davis, Colin, *Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis and the Return of the Dead,* New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Dell'Amico, Carol, "*The Gathering*: Trauma, Testimony, Memory", *New Hibernia Review*, 14(3), 2010, p. 59-73 (doi:10.1353/nhr.2010.0014).

Derrida, Jacques, *Spectres of Marx* [1994], trans. Peggy Kamuf, New York, Routledge, 2006.

D'Hoker, Elke, *Visions of Alterity: Representation in the Works of John Banville*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2004.

English, Bridget, *Laying Out the Bones: Death and Dying in the Modern Irish Novel*. Syracuse, Syracuse U.P., 2017.

Enright, Anne, *The Gathering*, London, Vintage, 2007.

——— & Boyd Tonkin, "Interview: The Fearless Wit of Man Booker Winner Anne Enright", *The Independent*, 19 October 2007 (https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/interview-the-fearless-wit-of-man-booker-winner-anne-enright-394987.html, last accessed on 3 October 2019).

Haekel, Ralf, "Un-writing the Self: Anne Enright's *The Gathering*", *Anglistik*, 27(2), 2016, p. 165-178 (https://angl.winter-verlag.de/article/ANGL/2016/2/12).

Harte, Liam, "Mourning Remains Unresolved: Trauma and Survival in Anne Enright's *The Gathering*", *Literature, Interpretation, Theory*, 21(3), 2010, p. 187-204 (doi:10.1080/10436928.2010.500590).

Killeen, Jarlath, *The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction: History, Origins, Theories*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh U.P., 2014 (https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt9qdrh2).

Lewis, C.S., *A Grief Observed*, London, Faber, 1961.

---

66. Killeen, *op. cit.*, p. 146.
67. 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., p. 259)
68. Andrew Smith also remarks: "how to represent the past is one of the central concerns and the figure of the ghost is used to raise questions about making visible that which a culture has lost or has been forced to forget […] Ghosts are never just ghosts; they provide us with an insight into what haunts our culture" (152-3). Andrew Smith, "Hauntings", *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, Catherine Spooner & Emma McEvoy (Eds.), London, Routledge, 2007, p. 153. In Gutleben & Kohkle, *op. cit.*, p. 313.

Meaney, Gerardine, "Waking the Dead: Antigone, Ismene and Anne Enright's Narrators in Mourning", *Anne Enright*, Claire Bracken & Susan Cahill (Eds.), Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 2011 (hdl:10197/6014).

Mikowski, Sylvie, "Gothic and Noir: the Genres of the Irish Contemporary Fiction of 'Containment'", *Études irlandaises*, 42(2), 2017, p. 93-104 (doi:10.4000/etudesirlandaises.5332).

Morin, Christina & Niall Gillespie, *Irish Gothics: Genres, Forms, Modes, and Traditions, 1760-1890*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Mulhall, Anne, "Now the Blood is in the Room: the Spectral Feminine in the Work of Anne Enright", *Anne Enright*, Claire Bracken & Susan Cahill (Eds.), Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 2011.

Nguyen Van, Romain, "'According to All the Authorities': The Uncanny in John Banville's *The Sea*", *Études anglaises*, 65 (4), 2012, p. 480-499 (doi:10.3917/etan.654.0480).

Patten, Eve, "Contemporary Irish Fiction", *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel*, John Wilson Foster (Ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., p. 259-275.

Rowling, J.K., *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, London, Bloomsbury, 1999.

Schwall, Hedwig, "Trauma and Narrative Techniques in Contemporary Irish Fiction", *Narrating Ireland in Different Genres and Media* (*Irish Studies in Europe*, 7), K. Rennhak (Ed.), Trier, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft Trier, 2016, p. 45-59.

Tancke, Ulrike, *Deceptive Fictions: Narrating Trauma and Violence in Contemporary Writing*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars, 2015.

Todorov, Tzvetan, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell U.P., 1975.

Treisman, Deborah, "Anne Enright on Rupture and Repetition", *The New Yorker*, March 2, 2020 (https://www.newyorker.com/books/this-week-in-fiction/anne-enright-03-09-20, last accessed on 5 March 2020).

Vanhese, Gisèle, "Thématique fantomale et spectralisation du récit dans *Biserica neagra* d'Anatol E. Baconsky", *Caietele Echinox*, 21, 2011, p. 248-261 (https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=173009).

Watkiss, Joanne, "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, p. 55-71 (https://irishgothichorror.files.wordpress.com/2018/03/joanne-watkiss.pdf).

———, *Gothic Contemporaries, The Haunted Text*, Cardiff, Wales U.P., 2012.

Chapter ten

Spectral voices in "Thirteen Ways of Looking"

(Colum McCann, 2015)

Marion Bourdeau

Université Caen Normandie / Université Jean Moulin – Lyon 3

Abstract: Colum McCann's 2015 novella "Thirteen Ways of Looking" is haunted by a vast spectrum of questions, realities and possibilities but, perhaps most importantly, by a multiplicity of voices – a term which is used with a broad definition here. This paper focuses on these voices, trying to work out their natures, specificities and functions in the production and the reception of the text. Memories and references to Irish culture, geography and language, as well as the echoes they find in other traditions, are subterranean elements that regularly surface in the narrative, as do intertextual references; close attention is therefore paid to the links between what is intertextual and what is spectral. This article analyses the repercussions of these intrusions of spectral elements on the narrative and the narrative voice, all the while considering whether this ghost-like presence is stifling or invigorating for the reader's reception of this text, but also for the writer, his novella, and his contribution to the Irish literary scene.

Keywords: Irish contemporary literature, Colum McCann, spectrality, intertextuality, narrative voice, stylistics, narratology

Introduction

Colum McCann's 2015 novella "Thirteen Ways of Looking" is a detective story centred on Peter Mendelssohn's murder one winter day in New York City. He is an old man with little control over his body anymore and a mind which, while still agile, is starting to fail him too. The investigation that forms the main narrative frame is haunted by a secondary

storyline, following the victim's last hours from his own point of view. The text as a whole is haunted, diegetically and narratively, by spectral elements and above all voices.

This paper will tackle the forms and consequences of such spectrality on the production and the reception of the text, from the point of view of the reader but also from that of the observer trying to understand in what way(s) it can be considered as part of the Irish literary lineage. Reviewing the modes and roles of spectrality eventually raises the issue of whether these omnipresent spectral voices and elements turn out to be stifling or invigorating for the novella, its general reception and its author.

Haunted Stories

The Mendelssohn Storyline

At the beginning of the novella, Peter Mendelssohn is an old man who is prone to reminiscing. As someone who was born in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century, it is no surprise that memories of his life-story should find echoes in history and indeed, many historical events are entangled in the memories which re-emerge throughout the text. The character, who is Jewish, for instance remembers leaving Lithuania at the time of World War Two (see page 31); 20th century phenomena such as (de)colonisation, globalisation and im/emigration are also often alluded to, as the protagonist and his family (his Irish-born wife, his daughter who lives abroad) experience them personally.

The character-focaliser's memories, whether they are related to historical or to more intimate matters, resurface most of the time through the numerous – and sometimes circumvoluted – associations his mind makes between a present situation and a past one, as is the case in the following passage in which the protagonist is at the restaurant:

> Another glass of Sancerre, please, my dear, then cut me off. Alexander the Great knew when and where to stop. It used to be, long ago long ago, that he could put away five, six glasses, but those days are gone, and his army has long since retreated. In his early years there was the curious practice of the three-martini lunch.[1]

---

1.   Colum McCann, *Thirteen Ways of Looking*, London/New York, Bloomsbury, 2015, p. 98.

As shown by the embedded passing reference to Alexander the Great – which creates a third layer of reality on top of the present and past of the character, and opens up not only to the Greek leader but also to his role and rewritings in our collective imagination –, the memories which are stirred up by random present situations are rarely univocal and one-dimensional. On the contrary, the reader is confronted with a text in which the protagonist's psyche swarms with personal recollections often including inter- and extra-textual elements, creating a multi-layered narrative:

> And how is it that the deep past is littered with the characters, while the present is so housebroken and flat? Wasn't it Faulkner who said that the past is not dead, it's not even past? Funny thing, the present tense. Technically it cannot exist at all. Once you're aware of it, it's gone, no longer present. We dwell, then, in the constant past, even when we're dreaming of the future.[2]

The elderly character seems obsessed with the passing of time, especially as the lines between past, present and even future seem increasingly blurred to him, which is translated by the fluidity with which his thoughts flow back and forth. This resonates with the strange game of mirrors between his father, himself and his son, one which will be detailed in the following paragraph.

The spectre – and spectrum – of generations is indeed an omnipresent one, be it through references to history and the changes at work throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, or through complex father-son (un)likeness and relationships. Mendelssohn acknowledges his ageing bodily appearance by remembering how he could now be mistaken for the ghost of his paternal grandfather ("He caught a glimpse in the mirror the other day, and how in tarnation did I acquire the face of my father's father?").[3] Later, the confusion – which results in his death – is between him and his son Elliot, leaving him genuinely, one might even say philosophically, puzzled:

> – Elliot Mendelssohn.
> Yes. No. Of course not. Question or statement? […] Was that my name? Am I my son? Surely not. Not in this lifetime at least. […] Am I the son of my son? A better question. Though not one I'd like to answer right now.[4]

The protagonist's line of descent and in particular his paternity regularly resurface as problematic topics which fuel the regrets he admits to

---

2.   *Ibid.*, p. 101.
3.   *Ibid.*, p. 9.
4.   *Ibid.*, p. 130-131.

having. The following extract takes place while he is waiting for his son – with whom he has a rather conflictual relationship – to join him at the restaurant:

> Really what I want to talk to you about is those old days with your mother, when we were all together […] but here we are, listening to you prattle about the *bitcharita* and yet another excuse for being late, and surely there's something else, son? Should I have another try at my memoirs? Should I give Sally James [Mendelssohn's caregiver] a raise? Would you like another glass of Cabernet? […] No, no, tell me this and tell me no more: Do you miss your mother, son? Or tell me this: Do you recall the days we spent at the beach in Oyster Bay? Or tell me this: Do you ever return to the thought of her with the hint of a sigh?[5]

As shown here, besides the voice of regrets which seeps through the focaliser's thoughts, another phantom element can be distinguished: the spectre of other, (im)possible scenarios. Throughout the Mendelssohn chapters, such spectrality is brought about by the creation of subworlds.[6] In literary texts, a subworld "embodies a change in spatio-temporal factors compared with the matrix world it is connected to".[7] Such a change is embodied in the text by a number of markers, such as "clauses that include modals and that are used by characters (or anyone belonging to the Discourse World)[8] who thereby refer to imaginary or hypothetical worlds. Negation can also create epistemic subworlds".[9] Narrative choices such as the repeated use of 'should' (in the latest quotation)[10] and other modal auxiliaries, of the negative and/or interrogative mode ("No, no, tell me this and tell me no more",[11] "Where in the world did I go wrong, did I ruin his childhood, did I neglect him, did I not read the right books to him?")[12] and of linking words or phrases opening onto other (im)possibilities, or subworlds ("but", "or", "Really what I want to talk to you about is")[13] all contribute to building up this complex spectrum of potential realities which seem to haunt the focaliser. This narrative strategy can also be noticed in the second plotline, the one which involves the detectives who investigate Mendelssohn's murder.

---

5. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
6. As conceptualized and defined in Text World Theory in Paul Werth, *Text worlds: representing conceptual space in discourse*, London, Longman, 1999, and Joanna Gavins, *Text World Theory: an Introduction*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh U.P., 2007.
7. Sandrine Sorlin, *La stylistique anglaise. Théories et pratiques*, Rennes, PU Rennes, 2014, p. 177 (my translation).
8. In Text World Theory, the Discourse World is the real, extra-textual world.
9. Sorlin, *op. cit.*, p. 177 (my translation).
10. See also for example McCann, *op. cit.*, p. 5-7.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 87-88.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

The Investigation Storyline

Since the novella is a detective story, it is only natural that those who try to piece together who killed the old man should examine various leads and consider different hypotheses. Their guesses, second-guesses and considerations open up as many different potential subworlds. The following extract takes places after the detectives have noticed initials on the suspect's hat while watching the surveillance tape:

> Perhaps it is not a Boston College hat at all, but it could have any number of meanings, British Columbia, or a rock band, or the comic strip, and endless litany of B.C.'s, maybe even personal initials, but it could also possibly be the Brooklyn Cyclones […] and yes of course it must be the Cyclones, given that it's closer to home, and perhaps then the killer is from Brooklyn.[14]

The same mechanisms (using modals and linking words such as "perhaps" or "maybe", as well as summoning up the semantic field of possibility) are used in multiple other instances, for example when the detectives contemplate whether the victim's son could be a suspect:

> Could it be that Elliot himself wanted to hurry up the inheritance? Perhaps he has some financial problems? […] Perhaps he was upset at something his father said to him? It is not beyond possibility that the anger built up inside him and he snapped.[15]

In these chapters too, negation (in the extract above, or in "There is a pipe on the desk but no tobacco box, matches, or ashtray")[16] is regularly used to create subworlds. Some are more developed than others, as is the case here, where it is produced by the preterit and "would":

> If it had been another day – without the snow, the wind, the early dark – they would have seen him fall like a character out of an old epic, all hat and history. It would have been captured from the traffic cam atop the ornate limbs of the lightpole on Eighty-Sixth Street.[17]

The proliferation of hypotheses is tantalizing, all the more so as it is exacerbated by the numerous instruments which further expand the scope of possibilities.

---

14. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

The text is punctuated by mentions of surveillance cameras, which seem to proliferate: the closing sentence of the novella is "More cameras in the city than birds in the sky".[18] In the restaurant where Peter and Elliot Mendelssohn have lunch, there are no fewer than twelve ("a twelve-camera matrix"),[19] and a thirteenth is located just outside.[20] While this gives an impression of overbearing intrusiveness, the detectives remain at a standstill for a very long time as their investigation is crippled by blind spots, both figurative and literal:

> On any day it might complement the restaurant footage […] but today it is obscured by snow blowing directly onto the lens, […] a gathering curtain of white […] At the time of the murder the only thing that can be seen through the granules of snow are the headlights of the approaching cars […] No figures. No faces. No men in baseball caps. No images of an assailant running down the street.[21]

The spectre of the invisible – what was there but cannot be distinguished, what could have been *if* – therefore haunts the detectives and overshadows their work, much in the same way as the mysterious blackbird from the poem by Wallace Stevens[22] which gives the novella its name casts its enigmatic shadow on the text. Traditionally, blackbirds are associated with mystery, bad omens and death (as a matter of fact, they are often linked with the number 13).[23] The blackbird thus represents another spectral, potentially ominous presence, at the same time as it acts as a golden thread for the text since a stanza from the poem opens each of the thirteen sections of the novella. The many references to birds' eyes and to vision in the text reinforce this cohesive role, as does the author's choice to regularly borrow words from the poem to integrate them in his own text: "A recurring phenomenon is that words used by Stevens in such or such stanza are taken up [by McCann] in the section [of the novella] that directly follows the epigraph".[24] The eleventh section of the text is a striking example of such a process, which creates linguistic spectral echoes.

Besides cameras, mirrors also contribute to opening up new dimensions; as objects, they are frequently referred to in the text; on a more symbolic note, they are also to be found in the numerous – sometimes explicit – parallels which emerge between different situations or agents, for instance between detectives and poets:

---

18.   *Ibid.*, p. 143.
19.   *Ibid.*, p. 67.
20.   See *ibid.*, 71.
21.   *Ibid.*, p. 72.
22.   The full name of the poem is "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" (1917).
23.   See Bertrand Cardin, *Colum McCann : intertextes et interactions*, Rennes, PU Rennes, 2016 (doi:10.4000/books.pur.54818, also published in English as *Colum McCann's Intertexts: 'Books Talk to One Another'*, Cork, Cork U.P., 2016), p. 221.
24.   Cardin, *op. cit.*, p. 220 (my translation).

> Poets, like detectives, know the truth is laborious; it doesn't occur by accident, rather it is chiseled and worked into being, the product of time and distance and graft. The poet must be open to the possibility that she has to go a long way before a word rises, or a sentence holds, or a rhythm opens, and even then nothing is assured […] Sometimes it happens at the most unexpected moment, and the poet has to enter the mystery, rebuild the poem from there.[25]

It is not only with poets that detectives can find echoes; another, implicit parallel can be noticed between detectives and readers:

> They play it again in their minds, in light of everything they already know. It is their hope that each moment, when ground down and sifted through, examined and prodded, read and re-read, will yield a little more of the killer and the world he, or she, has created. They go forward metrically, and then break time again. They return, judge, reconfigure. […] The breakthrough is there somewhere in the rhythmic disjunctions, in the small resuscitations of language, in the fractured framework.[26]

The task described here is the detectives', but it is easy to notice the similarities with the readers' role as decoding agents whose mission it is to solve the riddle of a text – more specifically of a detective story. They can therefore be perceived as the detectives' doubles, hovering almost like ghosts over the elements of the puzzle, lingering on details to try and solve it.

Metatextual questioning is thereby encouraged, as is reader involvement in general, in order to make sense of such a multi-layered – and, as such, haunted – text: while spectrality is a major thematic motif and a driving element for the plot, it is also intrinsically woven into the narrative structure of the novella.

Textual spectres, spectral readers

A Multi-layered Narration

First and foremost, the two storylines which make up the novella – the one following Mendelssohn's last hours and the one focusing on the

---

25. McCann, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

investigation – echo each other as the mysteries and questions raised by one are usually answered by the other. It can therefore be argued that they haunt each other, much in the same way as doubts regarding some characters' involvement in the old man's death haunt both detectives and readers. The indeterminacy which characterises the nature of voices and perspectives put forwards in both the Mendelssohn and the investigation storylines is a further indication that the novella is a profoundly haunted narrative.

In the chapters where the old man acts as the focaliser, the narration almost always involves his stream of consciousness. However, this inner voice is in no way simple as readers seem to witness a fission in the character's self, one which is translated through randomly alternating subject pronouns (I/he):

> Still and all, she has enough, his Katya, and how in the world did I get here anyway? Alzheimer's. That's the thing. Don't have it now, probably never will. Would forget about it if I did. Isn't that right, Eileen? What an awful thing it would be to forget your own wife, though. Though, there are times when he opens a door, or wakes in the morning, and he's sure she's still there. Good morning, *mo chroí*.[27] What am I doing out here on my own?[28]

Such a phenomenon can be observed almost systematically. Perhaps it can be explained by the man's old age; perhaps this duality reflects the conflict between his past and present self, or between what was and what he wishes could have been. Be it as it may, the reader is under the impression that Mendelssohn is haunted by himself.

Perhaps more surprisingly, something similar occurs in the chapters focused on the detectives: voices and perspectives are even more complicated to identify unequivocally,[29] especially because of the significant porosity between different types of speech[30] (direct, indirect, free direct, free indirect):

> The detectives stop to whisper in English and then Pedro tells her that he understands perfectly, he'd be happy to do the interrogation in either language. She says that, yes, Rick, her partner, is a bit rusty. We appreciate it, Pedro, she says, we really do. Still, she maintains

---

27. An affectionate phrase in Irish Gaelic, literally "my heart".
28. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
29. A significant part of the analyses in this section are borrowed from Marion Bourdeau, "Spaces and interstices in Colum McCann's works of fiction: ethics and aesthetics of balance", University of Caen Normandy Library, 2019 (PhD Thesis, unpublished).
30. See Geoffrey Leech & Mick Short, *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*, Harlow/New York, Pearson Longman, 2007 (first published in 1981).

> a lilt to her questions, as if her English has just swum through the Caribbean. She is interested in clean states, she says. She avoids the word *murder*. It is an assault, a serious assault, a tragedy really. Is he aware of what happened? Yes. Has he heard anything come along the grapevine? No. Some people just lose it, you know? I suppose so. Did you ever lose it yourself, Pedro? No, I'm a quiet man, I live a quiet life.[31]

Within the main frame of the narrator's tale, indirect speech ("he understands perfectly, he'd be happy to do the interrogation in either language"; "her partner"; "She is interested in clean states, she says") alternates with direct speech. The latter, unconventionally, does not use quotation marks, but can still be defined as such since there is no shift in pronouns and since there are reporting-speech verbs ("We appreciate it, Pedro, she says, we really do"). The authorship of some segments ("Still, she maintains a lilt to her questions, as if her English has just swum through the Caribbean"; "She avoids the word *murder*") remains unclear: they could be the female character's free indirect thoughts or they could be the heterodiegetic narrator's,[32] punctually taking over the narrative. The end of the extract also includes the detectives' and the suspect's free direct speech ("It is an assault, a serious assault, a tragedy really"; "Yes"; "No"; "Some people just lose it, you know? I suppose so. Did you ever lose it yourself, Pedro? No, I'm a quiet man, I live a quiet life") and indirect speech ("Is he aware of what happened?"; "Has he heard anything come along the grapevine?"). In this extract, however, even if the voices are mingled, it is still possible to identify them. It is not always the case:

> Together, brother and sister step toward the funeral home and are soon engulfed by others who have arrived almost simultaneously in a polite wave: judges, office workers, neighbors […] Among them, too, the restaurant manager, Christopher Eagleton, and the busboy, Dandinho, who, upon his appearance, is marked as a person of significant suspicion: why in the world would the busboy arrive at the funeral?
>
> The detectives return again to the restaurant footage, but Dandinho never leaves the building, not once, he simply has his animated conversation with Pedro Jiménez by the dishwashing station, and he is most certainly located on the footage by the bar when the punch is thrown outside the restaurant. Dandinho is, in fact, one of the first to go to Mendelssohn's aid when he falls. He is calm and controlled when questioned, not a hint of guilt about him, keen to point out that M was one of his favourite customers, that he always took home

---

31. McCann, *op. cit.*, p. 118.
32. See Gérard Genette, *Figures III*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1972.

> his leftovers for his housekeeper, tipped well, was old-world, polite, a hint of a twinkle still in his eye. He did not witness the actual punch, although he heard the thump of the old man's head on the pavement, he thought at first that maybe M had just slipped on the ice, but knew immediately he was dead, he felt very sorry for him, a terrible way to go, he went to the funeral to pay his respects, it was the Christian thing to do. […]
>
> And so, like the snow, or the latter point in a poem, the theories drift across the screen, opposition and conflict, so many possibilities available to the detectives, all of them intersecting in various ways, a Venn diagram of intent, the real world presenting itself with all its mystery.[33]

Different types of speech are used here: the less frequent are what is in all likelihood the detectives' free direct thoughts ("why in the world would the busboy arrive at the funeral?"; "not a hint of guilt about him"), Dandinho's free indirect speech ("M was one of his favourite customers", "he always took home his leftovers […] it was the Christian thing to do") and perhaps even his free direct speech ("a terrible way to go"). As for the rest, the problem lies in determining whether it consists in the omniscient narrator's voice or the detectives' free indirect thoughts. The confusion arises due to the evaluating remarks that punctuate the excerpt. They clearly stem from a precise consciousness and denote a form of subjectivity ("polite"; "too"; "simply"; "most certainly"; "calm and controlled"; "keen"; "not once") – the question is whose. Some elements of distancing seem to signal a return to the narrator's consciousness ("who, upon his appearance, is marked as a person of significant suspicion"; "The detectives return again to the restaurant foot"; "He is calm and controlled when questioned"). This is all the more noticeable at the end of the extract ("And so, like the snow […] mystery"), which seems characterised by a deictic pop[34] that can be identified thanks to the use of "the detectives" and to a way of formulating things which has a more lyrical quality than other passages. Yet, in the vast majority of the excerpt, the emphasis laid on the detectives' subjectivity and logic, as well as the phrasing of the segments that underline the logical links in reasoning ("so"; "but"; "in fact"), cast doubt on whose perspective is adopted, especially since the phrasing often bears traces of orality – all of which would tend to point to free indirect

33. McCann, *op. cit.*, p. 92-93.
34. A "deictic pop" is what happens when the omniscient narrator stops adopting a character's perspective (as if the narrative were an internal focalisation) and returns to the main narrative frame, which is organized around the narrator's (and not the character's) deictic centre. The reverse phenomenon is called a "deictic push". See Mary Galbraith, "Deictic shift theory and the poetics of involvement in narrative", *Deixis in Narrative: A Cognitive Science Perspective*, Judith F. Duchan, Gail A. Bruder & Lynne E. Hewitt (Eds.), Hillsdale, NJ, Lawrence Erlbaum, 1995, p. 19–59; see also Lesley Jeffries & Dan McIntyre, *Stylistics*, Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., 2010, p. 160.

thought. However, it seems impossible to settle the matter for sure. Such porosity and lack of absolute certainty are not inherently problematic in the sense that they are part of a narrative strategy obviously aimed at creating the *whodunnit* suspense; doubt continues to haunt the readers' minds, much in the same way as the narrator's spectre remains an omnipresent element. The multi-layered narrative voice resulting from these mingling perspectives hints at polyphony, a phenomenon which plays a key role in another process making the text a spectral one: intertextuality.

Intertextuality and spectrality[35]

While this section focuses on references to textual works only, it is necessary to mention that numerous extra-textual references to other forms and works of art are to be found in the novella. Mendelssohn's surname is an obvious nod to the German music composer; various other musical references can be listed, from allusions to political pieces (such as "My Country Tis of Thee" through the line "Let freedom ring, Sally, from the hilltops" page 127; in turn, this song evokes the spectre of "God Save the Queen" since they share the same arrangements) to the folk songs Eileen used to sing. Numerous paintings are also mentioned, which creates a wide artistic spectrum reinforcing the multi-layered nature of a text that is characterised by a proliferation of embedded – and, as such, one might argue spectral – references and, thereby, artistic voices. Still, to better answer the set of questions raised by this article, this section will subsequently focus on the literary voices whose spectres are invoked.

Several spectral literary voices filter through the novella, the most prominent being Joyce's. McCann's novella also borrows many elements from *Ulysses*; this will be developed in the ultimate subsection of this article, which focuses on the impact of the Joycean intertext. Besides, two references to *Dubliners* are particularly salient. The first is an evocation of *Eveline*:

> He glanced backwards through the rear window and there she was, Eileen Daly, all eleven years of her – or was she ten? – waving to him from the window of her living room. The white curtains bracketing her face. Her head slightly tilted. A few wisps of dark hair around her shoulders. He wanted to turn to wave to her again, but the hackney

---

35. This section by no means pretends to be a comprehensive listing of all the intertextual references in the novella; it simply aims to evoke the examples which are the most striking and significant as regards the issues raised in this paper. For a detailed studied of the intertextual references in the novella – and in McCann's work in general –, see Cardin, *op. cit.*

> had already reached the corner and he waved instead at a dirty brick wall.[36]

As indicated by the phonetic similarities in their names, Eileen can be seen as Eveline's double, especially since this extract mirrors the Joycean text ("She sat at the window watching the evening invade the avenue. Her head was leaned against the window curtains")[37] with mentions of a young female character by a window, of curtains, and with the phonetic echo between "Eileen" and "leaned". Even more striking is the almost *verbatim* reference to *The Dead* (which is hinted at earlier in the novella, page 54: "The dead are with us"). Here is the text from Joyce's short story:

> A few light taps upon the pane made him [Gabriel] turn to the window. It had begun to snow again. He watched sleepily the flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight. The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward. Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general in Ireland […] It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the know falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.[38]

And here is McCann's rewriting in "Thirteen Ways of Looking":

> All life slowed down to this. The drip. The drop. The snow white feet.[39] Slowly falling, falling slowly. Out of the window now. Big white flurries against the glass. That was a story she loved so much, too, snow general all over Ireland, Michael Furey singing at the window, poor Gabriel left alone, the descent of his last end.[40]

A second, crucial figure of authority whose spectre steers the text is, obviously, Wallace Stevens, through the title of the novella and the verbatim quotations which punctuate McCann's text.

---

36. McCann, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
37. James Joyce, *Dubliners*, London, Grant Richards, 1914, p. 29.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
39. This phrase creates further spectrality as it may be a reference to W.B. Yeats' poem *Down by the Salley Gardens*, or *Gort na Saileán*, which he reconstructed from a traditional song he heard a peasant woman sing (see M.H. Abrams & Stephen Greenblatt (Eds.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol. 2, New York, Norton, 2005, p. 2024). Mendelssohn's caregiver is called Sally, which could be another nod to this poem – which, incidentally, is about an old man's regrets – especially as it stems from a song and Sally is always associated with a song (Mendelssohn never gives its title but keeps repeating the lines "lovely once and always, with moonlight in her hair").
40. McCann, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

These come on top of mythological and biblical references, which is anything but surprising especially since Joyce's and Stevens' texts themselves are infused with such allusions. Mythological elements are borrowed from Greek (Elliot having an unwilling hand in his father's death is reminiscent of Sophocles' tragedy) as well as from Gaelic culture (the legend of Cuchulain is evoked through the reverted image of a father unwillingly killing his children).[41] Biblical references take the form of parodic references to well-known episodes or figures which are slightly subverted – one could say ironically undermined – due to their juxtaposition with trivial, contemporary elements:

> Oh, for crying out loud, Elliot, get off the phone and stop embarrassing me, please. The temptation of the Apple, the glory of Eve, the confusion of Adam, and what is it with me and the Garden of Eden today? Let me remain with my BlackBerry, dangling on the vine, and did they have any blackberries in Eden, I wonder, to complement the apple trees, and where is it, by the way, the phone?[42]

As illustrated by the extract above, they often occur in relation to the father/son relationship; ironic allusions to the prodigal son and to Cain can be identified: Elliot, like Abel's brother, has a dark mark on his forehead, signalling him as guilty – at least by association – of murder.[43] The detectives' investigation involves another biblical reference: Pedro (Peter, in Spanish), while interrogated, denies the charges against him three times in a row ("I didn't punch no one"; "I didn't punch no one"; "I told you, I didn't touch him")[44] although he is in all likelihood indeed guilty, evoking the denial of Peter – which, ironically, also happens to be the victim's name, giving the impression that Mendelssohn[45] died at the hands of his double with both fathers having been dragged into this situation because of their offspring's faulty behaviour.[46]

The reason why it is relevant to link intertextuality to spectrality is to be found in Gérard Genette's definition of intertextuality as "a relationship of copresence"[47] between two texts. It is based on the idea that "any dis-

---

41. See Cardin, *op. cit.*, p. 224-225.
42. McCann, *op. cit.*, p. 76.
43. Cardin, *op. cit.*, p. 224.
44. McCann, *op. cit.*, p. 122.
45. Mendelssohn – the composer – wrote a famous oratorio called *Elijah*, in reference to the prophet who happens to be known for bringing people back from the dead. McCann has not explained why he chose to name his protagonist after the musician but this might be an explanation, one which would contribute to make spectral elements key features of the novella.
46. It appears that Peter Mendelssohn dies at the hands of Pedro Jimenez who thought he was attacking Elliot Mendelssohn to avenge his own daughter, Maria, whom Elliot had wronged following the end of their affair.
47. Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes : la littérature au second degré*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1982, p. 8 (my translation).

course necessarily involves two subjects, and thus a potential dialogue".[48] Expanding upon Mikhail Bakhtin's definition of dialogism,[49] Todorov argues that intertextuality means that "whatever is being said or discussed has, in one way or another, already been said; and it is impossible to avoid coming across the discourses that have already been enunciated on this particular topic".[50] Such a vast array of embedded spectral authorial voices is not without consequences: Linda Hutcheon argues that "[a]mong the many things that postmodern intertextuality challenges are both closure and single, centralized meaning".[51] The narrative quality of the text and the message it conveys are kaleidoscopic,[52] which implies increased depth, texture and complexity, but also more blind spots. This points to spectrality since intertextuality thereby helps build a text that is haunted by presences and possibilities, some of which are difficult or impossible to notice by the reader.

Effects on the reading process

The multiplicity of layers and possibilities may seem like a hindrance to the reading process as it forces the readers to always doubt the existence of the "single, centralized meaning" mentioned by Hutcheon. At the opening of the first of the Mendelssohn-focused chapters, the old man comes up with the following statement: *"I was born in the middle of my very first argument"*.[53] The readers naturally take this at face value but then, several alternative versions are given by the same reflector: *"I was born in the middle of my first public failure"*; *"I was born the first time I made love to Eileen. I was born when I touched the hand of my baby son Eliott. I was born when I sat in the cockpit of a Curtiss SOC-3"*; *"I was born in the middle of my first jury argument and I came out onto Court Street with a spring in my step"*; *"I was born in the middle of my first jury argument though sometimes I feel I've been born at other times too"*.[54] Faced with this proliferation of seemingly contradicting elements, the readers have to pause. Being

48. Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhaïl Bakhtine : le principe dialogique, suivi de : Écrits du Cercle de Bakhtine*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1981, p. 98 (my translation).
49. See *ibid*., p. 95.
50. *Ibid*, p. 98.
51. Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, London/New York, Routledge, 1988, p. 127.
52. While according to Todorov (*op. cit.*, p. 102), "for Bakhtin, the novel, as a genre, is the epitome of prose, which is why it constitutes the most fertile ground for intertextuality" (my translation), Cardin (*op. cit.*, p. 40) argues that in the Irish tradition, and in McCann's corpus in particular, novellas and short stories have a high intertextual potential precisely due to their association with the notions of fragmentation and dislocation: "In McCann's work, the genre [of the short form, be it short story or novella] is all the more fragmentary as typically, the writer's short story is a kaleidoscope of quotes reinforced by scattered references to other writers' names and to titles of literary works. The intertextual process translates a phenomenon of dislocation at the literary level: inserting an alien text into one's own amounts to fracturing, interrupting and fragmenting both." (my translation).
53. McCann, *op. cit.*, p. 5 (italicised in the original text).
54. *Ibid*., p. 6, 6, 8 and 22 (all quotations are italicised in the original text).

suspended and constantly shunted around from one version to the next, or from one to the until-then-unsuspected scenario might even make them feel paralysed in their understanding of the text – in a way, this is a case of suspension of *belief* rather than of disbelief. This persisting span of explicit and implicit possibilities reinforces the spectral, potentially opaque nature of the text while also helping the suspense last until the very end. The reading process is also constantly haunted by the implicit, by what can be felt but not read – much in the same way as the detectives cannot see what happened on the surveillance tapes. That is the case from the first line of the novella ("The first is hidden in a high mahogany bookcase")[55] as it is an *in medias res* beginning, forcing the readers into an active role right away as they have to infer what the mysterious "the first" refers to (it turns out to be a camera).

Consequently, the reader becomes a spectral but essential, structuring presence whose in(ter)ferences prove crucial as they are what allows the reader to make sense of the multi-layered, multi-dimensional text:

> Conversational inference (or 'implicature') involves taking the meaning of the sentence uttered, in conjunction with background knowledge, inference rules, and the above set of general pragmatic maxims, to work out what the speaker might have meant.[56]

This mechanism is made even more necessary by the intertextual dimension since "intertextuality replaces the challenged author-text relationship with one between reader and text, one that situates the locus of textual meaning within the history of discourse itself".[57] The reader's spectre thus becomes a key element by playing the role of the revealing agent, processing the information and trying to recompose the puzzle of each of the two storylines, as well as attempting to understand how they are interwoven. Such a serpentine process means that the readers, who have gradually become haunted by the uncertainty born out of the vast spectrum of possibilities, voices and perspectives, are forced to voice variable hypotheses and opinions – including regarding the empathy and sympathy they may or may not feel towards the characters –, adding their views to the pre-existing ones.

---

55. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
56. Raymond W. Gibbs Jr, "Mutual Knowledge and the Psychology of Conversational Inference", *Journal of Pragmatics*, 11, 1987, p. 563; see also Paul H. Grice, "Logic and conversation", *Syntax and Semantics*, Vol. 3, *Speech Acts*, Peter Cole & Jerry L. Morgan (Eds.), New York, Academic Press, 1975, p. 41-58. David Bordwell differentiates between interpretation and inference as follows: "I shall use the term *interpretation* to denote only certain kinds of inferences about meaning. […] Introducing the concept of inference enables us to flesh out a common conceptual distinction. Most critics distinguish between *comprehending* a film and *interpreting* it […] Comprehension is concerned with apparent, manifest, or direct meanings, while interpretation is concerned with revealing hidden, nonobvious meanings" (David Bordwell, *Making Meaning. Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*, Cambridge, Harvard U.P., 1991, p. 2-3).
57. Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism, op. cit.*, p. 126.

While it may seem like an obstacle at first, spectrality therefore turns out to constitute a dynamic factor in the reception as well as in the production of the text. Is it also the case regarding the role and status of the text as part of a specific literary lineage on today's Irish cultural stage, or is this spectral dimension a paralysing factor?

Spectrality and the Irish Literary and Cultural Spectrum

///////////////////

Ireland's Spectral Call

///////////

While the novella is entirely located in Manhattan, Ireland's presence can be felt throughout the Mendelssohn chapters. It permeates the old man's memories, as illustrated by the long analepsis which runs from page 33 to page 35 and which takes the reader back to the two summers he spent in Dublin as a child. He also married into the Irish culture through Eileen. Ireland's spectral omnipresence, which is exemplified by the fact that his last thoughts bring him back to Dublin ("The canal was easily the best place to cannonball"),[58] therefore acts as a leitmotiv. The musicality of Ireland is evoked by references to Irish folk songs, such as "Marie's Wedding",[59] by the inclusion of Irish Gaelic words and phrases (for instance the affectionate "*A chuisle mo chroí*" Mendelssohn uses to address his late wife), but also by frequent references to the sonorities of the Irish accent, which remain part of the protagonist's sound environment: "They thought of him as Hibernian Jew: his accent still had a faint hint of the Dublin days and of course there was Eileen, reading aloud to him, putting what she called the *rozziner* in his language".[60] The Irish and Gaelic literary and mythological intertextual references also contribute to making Ireland an essential piece in the puzzle of Mendelssohn's identity, all the more so when these references are explicit: "[Eileen] always said that his early court performances in Brooklyn were full of patience, guile, and cunning. A literary reference somehow – she was a fan of Joyce. Silence and exile";[61] "He can remember Heaney at the Waldorf, Muldoon too".[62] Ireland's spectral call thus pervades the old man's memories and, thereby, the text, which can also be read as a commentary on today's Irish literary and cultural spectrum.

---

58. McCann, *op. cit.*, p. 133.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 56; see also Cardin, *op. cit.*, p. 223-224.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Impact of the Intertextual Spectre on the Irish Literary and Cultural Spectrum

Indeed, the novella explores the spectrum of possibilities as to what Irishness means today, presenting a version that is multifaceted and inclusive. This might seem paradoxical at first, notably given the huge shadow cast by Joyce, as was explained earlier. His spectre is often deemed paralysing for the following generations of Irish writers, who might feel they will never be able to rival this overwhelming, some might say overbearing father figure.[63] Moreover, Joyce is an artist with a modernist, western-centric, Catholic Dublin identity, whose most famous novel is based on the parody of classical Greek myths; in 21st century terms, this does not amount to a particularly inclusive version of national identity. However, it would be misleading to limit the scope of his work and of his take on Irishness to such a vision.

Rather, it seems that McCann is invoking Joyce's shadow precisely as the sworn enemy of paralysis. The Joycean connection has already been described, but what needs emphasising here is the fact that in the novella, intertextuality in general and allusions to the Joycean intertext in particular are in no way stifled nods; on the contrary, they bring dynamism to the Irish (literary) identity, much in the same way as the source material, through the parodic process, which is defined by Linda Hutcheon as follows: "This parodic reprise of the past of art is not nostalgic; […] Through a double process of installing and ironizing, parody signals how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference".[64] The distance thus taken was part of Joyce's strategy, just as it is now part of McCann's, in keeping with postmodernist politics: "Postmodernist parody is a value-problematizing, de-naturalizing form of acknowledging the history (and through irony, the politics) of representations".[65] Through intertextuality and parody, these representations underlie the text, but their spectre is a dynamic rather than a paralysing one. The very concept of *paralysis* actually needs to be re-examined: besides its commonly-used meaning, it can also denote "an idea of dissolution, of an un-binding (*para-lyein*, 'to release, to unbind')",[66] as when Mendelssohn is murdered :

> What in the world has gotten into this man, someone help me now, what's he saying, the snow blowing hard around us, a cyclorama,

63. See Cardin, *op. cit.*, and Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland – The Literature of the Modern Nation*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard U.P., 1995.
64. Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, London/New York, Routledge, 1989, p. 89.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
66. Jean-Michel Rabaté, *James Joyce: Authorized Reader*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins U.P., 1991, p. 29.

> and it's impossible to hear what the man is shouting, spittle coming from his mouth, […] I can't hear a word in the thunderous roar, calm yourself down, hold on one second, you don't look a bit like Tony at all, who are you, where are you from, where have I seen you before, and oh the leftovers are shifting that's my son's name you're shouting my treacherous son you are unaproned and oh all over the street that white coming down not even the snow can stand up straight and oh – The canal was easily the best place to cannonball.[67]

While a snowstorm is paralysing Manhattan, the protagonist's reflexes and senses are also slowed down, so much so that he cannot fully understand the situation, nor defend himself. This is paralysis in the usual sense, but the second intervenes when the character lets go and loses consciousness; the syntax actually mimics this "release", this "unbinding" ("and oh –") which accompanies the protagonist's death. Including this little-known dimension contributes to McCann's re-dynamizing of the Joycean motif, showing again that his forefather's shadow is not a suffocating one.

Above all, what plays a fundamental role in expanding the spectrum of Irish identity is McCann's choice to invoke Joyce's spectre through the prism of the Mendelssohns. Writing a text prominently driven by an ageing male character's ramblings and favouring a parodic and/or ironic tone turns the protagonist of "TWoL" into a possible avatar of Leopold Bloom's, but while the latter's identity is a complex one, Mendelssohn's is even more kaleidoscopic. This allows McCann to transcend the mere intertextual reference to Bloom and to further widen the scope of Irish identity. Mendelssohn indeed embodies McCann's "international mongrel" ("a peculiarly 20th and 21st century condition – [a] person who wanders through different geographies and cultures, somewhat lost, and yet invigorated by curiosity"):[68] a Jewish Lithuanian exile named after a German musician, he moved through Europe as a child before going to New York where he married an Irishwoman, and does not seem to be particularly interested in nationality, following his parents' example: "His mother had dropped early all tradition behind her. It didn't interest her to be Lithuanian, or Polish, or Russian or anything else for that matter, not even Jewish. His father, too, was a stern atheist".[69] His is therefore a multifaceted – and unproblematic – identity:

> He had married a Catholic woman, and the children were raised between religions, and Mendelssohn himself had confessed to being

---

67.   McCann, *op. cit.*, 132-133.
68.   Colum McCann, "*Everything in This Country Must* interview", published on C. McCann's website, 2000.
69.   McCann, *Thirteen…*, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

> Jewish when he wanted to be, and Lithuanian most of the time, but Polish if he needed to be, a touch of Russian if so charged, an American in most respects, an occasional European, even Irish every once in a while by virtue of his wife. A mongrel really, a true New Yorker […].[70]

Using such a character as a rewriting of one of Irish literature's most famous protagonists effectively opens the horizon of Irish identity and literature,[71] especially as Mendelssohn's mobile life experience is further diffracted by his daughter's, who works in the Middle East, and his Irish wife's, whose cultural environment is also multiple:

> Eileen read the Russian poet [Pasternak]'s books aloud many nights, with her Irish lilt and a blanket pulled up around her neck, soft wool, Avoca, where the rivers met, or so she told him. She was a fount of Irish knowledge at times, a Helicon indeed, with some Greek thrown in and a smidge of Latin.[72]

Eileen is the embodiment of a cultural and a linguistic converging point, one which is also suggested by the similarities between the sonorities of Mendelssohn's name in each of the three (English, Lithuanian and Gaelic) languages that are part of his environment ("my real name is Peter, Petras, Peadar".[73]). Such linguistic echoes point to resonances between the experiences thereby translated, hinting at connections between different countries and cultures:

> Poor Eileen hated to see any news of Northern Ireland. […] Over there blowing the heads off one another for no sane reason either […] All war, any war, the vast human stupidity, Israel, Ireland, Iran, Iraq, all the *I*'s come to think of it, although at least in Iceland they got it right.[74]

By implying that as suggested by the same initial, Irish history might be similar to other countries', the author spins a web of connectedness and opens up the spectrum of the Irish experience. Language is his tool to do so, as the span of connections and possibilities created by language is a key part of his strategy. This is particularly noticeable in the Mendelssohn sections:

---

70.   *Ibid.*, p. 89-90.
71.   Furthermore, it is not as though Joyce were the only author whose spectre is present in the text. On the contrary, the latter includes other, non-Irish intertextual references such as Dante, Pasternak, Burroughs and Shakespeare.
72.   *Ibid.*, p. 36.
73.   *Ibid.*, p. 21
74.   *Ibid.*, p. 30.

> He [Mendelssohn] can hear Sally, already up and at it in the kitchen. […] The juice. Sally says he should call it a smoothie, but he doesn't like the word, simple as that, nothing smooth about it. He was on a shuffle in the park the other day – no other word, every day a shuffle now – and he saw a young woman at the park benches near the reservoir with the word *Juicy* scrawled in pink across her rear end, and he had to admit, even at his age, that it wasn't far from the truth. With all apologies to Eileen, of course, and Sally too, and Rachel, and Riva, and Denise, and MaryBeth, and Ava, no doubt, and Oprah, and Brigitte, and even Simone de Beauvoir, why not, and all the other women of the world, sorry all but it was indeed rather juicy, the way it bounced, with the little boundary of dark skin above, and the territory of shake below, and there was a time, long ago, when he could've squeezed a thing or two out of that, oh don't talk to me of smoothies. He had a reputation, but it was nothing but harmless fun. He never strayed, though he had to admit he leaned a little. Sorry, Eileen, I leaned, I leaned, l leaned. It was his more conservative colleagues in the court who gave him the evil eye. […] What did they think, that a man must hide his life in the judge shroud? […] No, no, no, it was all about taking the rind of life. Extract the liquid. Forget the pulp. Juice it up. The Jew's Juice. A smoothie.[75]

This importance given to puns, the playfulness and the plasticity of language as well as its musicality, together with the fact that random associations – thematic or phonetic – are the only driving force behind the flow of thoughts, testify to Joyce's dynamic influence on this text in particular. Indeed, it is the first of McCann's texts in which this can be noticed, especially this frequently. While metalinguistic remarks can be found in his earlier works, the phenomenon is exemplified in this novella:

> [Elliot] shuts the phone and says: Jesus H.
> And why in the world is the *H* always thrown in here? *Our Father, who art in Heaven, Harold be thy name.* Eileen once said: Why not A for Art? *Our Father, who is Art in Heaven.* Or sling them both together? Jesus H. A. Christ.

This invokes the spectre of religious, cultural and textual legacy at the same time as it expands its spectrum. This is the basic functioning principle of rewriting and intertextuality, yet it is still worth highlighting here precisely because "Thirteen Ways of Looking" stands out in McCann's corpus due to its genre and to the importance given to the impression of freedom and fluidity given to thoughts through language. While most of his texts are characterised by internal focalisations and some do contain

---

75.   *Ibid.*, p. 36.

inner monologues (Victor's section in *Dancer* for instance), only in this one is the character's flow of consciousness generalised to such lengths, and only in this one is such a flow spurred by language itself rather than by plot-centric elements.

<div style="background:black; color:white; text-align:center; font-weight:bold;">Conclusion</div>

////////////////////

It is therefore possible to argue that from spectre to spectrum, spectrality in "Thirteen Ways of Looking" is a factor of depth and scope in terms of diegesis, production and reception: while spectres coming from the past and echoes between the two main storylines give the reader the impression of a text that is haunted both in terms of plot and of production, the narrative strategy also compels the reader to invade and appropriate the text in order to recreate its full meaning. Its reception is all the more characterised by spectrality as the reader is encouraged to recognize inter- (and extra-)textual sources and expand their understanding of the text in the light of these other works.

For the author, through the possibly surprising prism of the detective story, the novella is also a means of going back to his roots as an Irish author and to Joyce's spectral figure of authority, playfully exploring this lineage and widening its horizon by internationalising it – the choice of the genre of the novella itself can be understood as a literal expanding of the short form that is so closely associated with the Irish tradition. He thereby produces a text which is as Irish as it is global, in keeping with contemporary authors such as Colm Tóibín, Joseph O'Connor or Donal Ryan, contributing to opening the Irish cultural and literary scene to transnational experiences while acknowledging their particular national legacy. I would argue that this has had a revitalizing effect on McCann's writing and that *Thirteen Ways of Looking*, and more particularly the eponymous novella, is a shifting point in his trajectory. It was written following *TransAtlantic*, which can be called a "major mode" novel aiming to tackle serious historical issues involving real-life characters and which was symmetrically divided into two parts, each subdivided into three. "Thirteen Ways of Looking", while it is also fractured, is divided in an uneven number of chapters, giving it a less balanced, one might argue less clinical structure, and unfolds on a much smaller scale with more trivial matters and characters – Mendelssohn's main problem at the opening of the novella is not remembering when his caregiver put him in a diaper. This renewed focus on minor, human details, coupled with the rediscovery of the playful potential of language, and with the use of association of words and ideas as a powerful driving force for the text, point to McCann's reappropriation of Joyce – among others –'s spectre. This does not coincide with a dead end:

one might argue that the novella experimented with these tools, preparing the ground for McCann's next work, a novel entitled *Apeirogon* (2020) which conjugates them with the wide scope that characterises the author's novels to manage to produce a text which finds its balance, despite invoking the spectres of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Marion Bourdeau, *agrégée* in English studies, teaches at the University of Lyon 3. She completed a PhD in Irish Studies at the University of Caen Normandy under the supervision of Professor Bertrand Cardin. Her research focuses on contemporary Irish literature and stylistics, and in particular on the writing of space and ethics in Colum McCann's fiction. ✉ marion.bourdeau@univ-lyon3.fr

The author wishes to thank Christopher Mole for his musical input.

Sources

Literary texts

McCann, Colum, *Thirteen Ways of Looking*, London/New York, Bloomsbury, 2015.
Joyce, James, *Dubliners*, London, Grant Richards, 1914.
———, *Ulysses*, Paris, Sylvia Beach, 1922.
———, *Finnegans Wake*, London, Faber & Faber, 1939.

Academic works

Abrams, M.H & Stephen Greenblatt (Eds.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Vol. 2*, New York, Norton, 2005.
Attridge, Derek (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*, Cambridge, MA, Cambridge U.P., 1990.
Bakhtin, Mikhaïl. M., *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson, Austin, Texas U.P., 1981.
Bonafous-Murat, Carle, *Dubliners, Joyce : logique de l'impossible*, Paris, Ellipses, 1999.
Bordwell, David, *Making Meaning. Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard U.P., 1991.
Bourdeau, Marion, "Spaces and interstices in Colum McCann's works of fiction: ethics and aesthetics of balance", Caen, University of Caen Normandy Library, 2019 (PhD Thesis, unpublished).
Cardin, Bertrand, *Colum McCann : intertextes et interactions*, Rennes, PU Rennes, 2016 (doi:10.4000/books.pur.54818).
Gavins, Joanna, *Text World Theory: an Introduction*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh U.P., 2007.
Galbraith, Mary, "Deictic shift theory and the poetics of involvement in narrative", *Deixis in Narrative: A Cognitive Science Perspective*, Duchan Judith F., Gail A. Bruder & Lynne E. Hewitt (Eds.), Hillsdale, NJ, Lawrence Erlbaum, 1995, p. 19–59.
Genette, Gérard, *Figures III*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1972.
———, *Palimpsestes : la littérature au second degré*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1982.
Gibbs, Raymond W. Jr, "Mutual Knowledge and the Psychology of Conversational Inference", *Journal of Pragmatics*, vol. 11, 1987, p. 561-588.
Hutcheon, Linda, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, London/New York, Routledge, 1988.
———, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, London/New York, Routledge, 1989.
Kiberd, Declan, *Inventing Ireland – The Literature of the Modern Nation*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard U.P., 1995.
Jeffries, Lesley & Dan McIntyre, *Stylistics*, Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., 2010.
Rabaté, Jean-Michel, *James Joyce: Authorized Reader*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins U.P., 1991.
Sorlin, Sandrine, *La stylistique anglaise. Théories et pratiques*, Rennes, PU Rennes, 2014.
Todorov, Tzvetan, *Mikhaïl Bakhtine : le principe dialogique, suivi de : Écrits du Cercle de Bakhtine*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1981.
Werth, Paul, *Text Worlds: Representing Conceptual Space in Discourse*, London, Longman, 1999.

Chapter eleven

A Tale of Two Ghosts

Autofiction, Film and the Spectral in Mark Cousins' *I Am Belfast*

Tom Hedley
Trinity College Dublin

Abstract: Since Serge Doubrovsky coined the term *autofiction* in 1977, it has taken on a wide variety of meanings, and recent scholarship has framed autofiction as the inability of the reader to interpret a text within either a fictional or factual framework alone. Often this is expressed by an integration of the Spectral into the narrative, for the ghost inhabits the murky space between the ontological poles of fiction and referentiality. Despite this broader conception, scholarly discussion of autofiction has considered only literary sources, and it has not yet been associated with other forms, such as film. This paper takes autofiction as a point of departure and suggests that it provides a neat framework with which to analyse Mark Cousins' genre-blurring film of 2015 *I Am Belfast*, in which he attempts to tell the story of his home city, with particular focus on the presence of the Spectral as a means to articulate the traumatic history of Northern Ireland's capital city. Although a tale of one city, the film is a tale of two ghosts. Firstly, while Cousins is ever-present in a documentary-like voice-over, he communicates with a ghostly 10,000-year-old woman called "Belfast" who guides the viewer through the city and narrates its traumatic story, and secondly, the spectre of Belfast's ill-fated ocean liner, the Titanic, stalks the cinematography, as if the Titanic's tragic demise prefigured the political crisis. In short, this paper suggests that the interplay between the fictional and the real in the process of traumatic testimony, led by the inclusion of the spectral, renders *I Am Belfast* a fitting example of autofictional film.

Keywords: Autofiction, The Troubles, Narratology, Film, Documentary, Titanic, Walter Benjamin, Trauma.

ADDRESSING the supposedly irreconcilable opposition of fiction and non-fiction, Virginia Woolf asserts in her essay *The New Biography*: "Let it be fact one feels, or let it be fiction; the

imagination will not serve under two masters simultaneously."[1] Fact and fiction, according to Woolf, do not exist on a loose spectrum, rather they are mutually exclusive states. How then can the blurring of these lines that came with the postmodernism or indeed the phenomenon of *autofiction* that emerged in French literature in the 1970s and remains in vogue to this day across many different languages and cultures be negotiated? When Serge Doubrovsky coined the term "autofiction" in 1977, he defined it rather imprecisely as the "fiction of strictly real events."[2] Autofiction was thus understood as the insertion of the author into her or his text, leading to a hybrid form of autobiography and fiction. In an attempt to address the vagueness of this initial definition, more recent theoretical debates have called for a reorientation of the concept from a link to an extratextual being – the author in the real world – to an intratextual question of what Philippe Lejeune calls "reader pacts."[3] According to Lejeune, the terms *autobiography* and *novel* (and thus non-fiction and fiction) should be thought of as categories that the reader uses to interpret a certain text.[4]

On the back of Lejeune's theory of reader-pacts, autofiction has since been redefined by theorists like Frank Zipfel to be the inability of the reader to interpret a text within either an autobiographical (and thus referential[5]) or fictional framework alone: neither pact can be adopted throughout.[6] Instead the reader is pulled backwards and forwards between two very different modes, between the supposedly factual and the supposedly fictional. This new line of thinking rather ironically confirms Virginia Woolf's statement to some extent: autofiction is not the blurring of the lines between fact and fiction, as would perhaps be expected, but rather the sharpening of these lines, the tension between them, the irritation of the reader who is – in Woolf's terms – trying to serve two masters at one but ultimately cannot. Ambiguity on the side of the reader thus becomes a core aspect of autofiction, which is why, as some have pointed

1. Virgina Woolf, "The New Biography", *Selected Essays*, D. Bradshaw (Ed.), New York, Oxford U.P., 2009, p. 100.
2. Serge Doubrovsky, *Fils*, Paris, Galilée, 1977. Hywel Dix discusses the shortcomings of this definition "on a stylistic basis", noting how it leaves no real distinction between autofiction, a stylised autobiography and an autobiographical novel. Hywel Dix (Ed.), *Autofiction in English: Palgrave Studies in Life-Writing*, Cham, Springer, 2018, p. 3.
3. Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography: Volume 52 of Theory and History of Literature*, ed. P. Eakin, trans. K. Leary, Portland, Minnesota U.P., 1989, p. 13.
4. Developing Michel Foucault's discussion of authorship and proper names in his 1969 essay "What is an Author", Lejeune determines that an "autobiographical pact" is achieved when the name of the narrator-protagonist is the same as that of the "author-function", the name on the title page, and a "fictional pact" is achieved when these names diverge. The reader, having settled upon either pact, reads the text accordingly. Lejeune acknowledges, however, the "indeterminate" state between these pacts, where one could situate autofiction. *Ibid*., p. 16f.
5. Lejeune discusses how the "autobiographical pact" is a subcategory of the "referential pact", which more broadly defines non-fictional writing. *Ibid*., p. 22.
6. Zipfel bases the "Ambiguität" (ambiguity) of autofictional texts on the reader's experience of being pulled "Hin und Her" (from pillar to post) between two opposing pacts. Frank Zipfel, "Autofiktion", *Grenzen der Literatur: Zu Begriff und Phänomen des Literarischen*, S. Winko, F. Jannidis, G. Lauer (Eds.), Berlin/New York, De Gruyter, 2009, p. 306.

out, autofictional texts often intersect with the discourse around trauma and memory.[7]

The following question, however, naturally arises: what does this ambiguity look like? Of course, there are many texts that juxtapose referenced, archival materials into the narrative, hindering the reader from settling on a clearly fictional pact.[8] As Zipfel points out, the integration of fictional elements into otherwise referential texts is a regular feature of autofiction, and the Spectral, as he argues, can fulfil this role well.[9] "The modern ghost," as US-American narratologist Elana Gomel describes, "is a figure of doubt. Unmoored from its foundations in religion, disowned by science, the ghost exists on the borderlands between knowledge and belief."[10] For Zipfel, it is a clear indication of fictionality that would undermine any attempt to interpret a work solely within a referential pact, causing the reader to oscillate between the ontological poles of fiction and non-fiction.[11]

To this day, autofiction has only ever been discussed with reference to textual materials. Yet these theoretical developments and thematic links allow for the connection of autofiction to a medium with which it has not yet been associated, namely film. Indeed, film does have its own version of referential or autobiographical storytelling in the form of the documentary. The conflict between the literary forms of autobiography and novel could theoretically be replicated by a conflict between the documentary and the fictional film. In this vein, this paper will propose that Mark Cousins' genre-blurring film of 2016 *I Am Belfast*, in which he attempts to tell the story of his home city, is a fitting example of this phenomenon. While very little scholarship on *I Am Belfast* exists, it has been descried as a strange, essayistic work that befits neither fiction nor documentary.[12] In light of the above theoretical discussion, this paper suggests that the more recent theoretical conception of autofiction provides an expedient framework with which to analyse this film, and that the presence of the Spectral as a means to articulate the traumatic history of Northern Ireland's capital is key to this determination.

While *I Am Belfast* is a tale of one city, it is a tale of two ghosts. Firstly, while Cousins is only present in a voice-over, lending an autobiographical,

7.   Dix, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
8.   One could consider W.G. Sebald's integration of black and white photographs, diagrams and maps into his narratives in *Die Ausgewanderten* (1992), *Die Ringe des Saturn* (1998) and *Austerlitz* (2001).
9.   FZipfel, *op. cit.*, p. 304f.
10.   Elana Gomel, *Narrative Space and Time: Representing Impossible Topologies in Literature,* New York, Routledge, 2014, p. 63.
11.   Zipfel, *op. cit.*, p. 308.
12.   Seán Crosson, "Re-imagining an Irish City: *I Am Belfast* (Mark Cousins, 2016)", *Estudios Irlandeses*, 12, 2017 ([doi:10.24162/EI2017-7365](doi:10.24162/EI2017-7365)), p. 263.

Fig. 1: 'Belfast' personified as a woman (*I Am Belfast*, Dir. Mark Cousins, Northern Ireland, Canderblinks Film & Music and Hopscotch Films, 2016, 00:08:42)

documentary tone to the film,[13] he communicates with an on-screen, ghostly 10,000-year-old woman who predominantly narrates the film **(Fig. 1)**. There is, however, another ghost that haunts the Troubled city in *I Am Belfast*: "that sunken ship, which holds us all captive from the ocean floor," as Belfast novelist Jan Carson puts it in *The Fire Starters*.[14] The ship in question is, of course, Belfast's fabled ocean liner, the Titanic. In this paper, these manifestations will be discussed separately, but the second – the ghostly representation of the Titanic – will form the larger part of the analysis.

Considering the first of the two ghostly elements, it is necessary to highlight the connection between the spectral and anthropological place. "Ghosts," as Gomel claims, "are always tied to a particular place,"[15] which in the case of this film is pushed to the extreme, for the old woman, with whom the director talks, is quick to clarify her identity: "I am the landscape. When I say that I'm Belfast, I don't just mean that I lived there, or feel that I'm the place. I am the place. I'm 10,000 years old. I'm from the time before."[16] The viewer is left to wonder: the time before what, exactly? The archaic understanding of linear time is beginning to unravel, and it seems that history may be layered here, like layers of earth and sediment, with Belfast (the person) much lower down, much older. Her identity claim alone is enough to eliminate the possibility of viewing the film through the referential lens alone: Belfast cannot be understood as a simple comparison with a city, rather she is the voice of the city because she

---

13. One could investigate whether, in Lejeune's terms, the listing of the director's name, Mark Cousins, in the credits as a voice-over corresponds to the autobiographical pact in film version, like the name of the author on the title page of a text.
14. Jan Carson, *The Fire Starters*, Dublin, Penguin, 2019, p. 8.
15. Gomel, *op. cit.*, p. 64.
16. *I Am Belfast*, *op. cit.*, 00:04:18 – 00:04:41.

is the city.[17] Any attempt to assimilate the narrative situation into mere documentary necessarily fails: the viewer is pulled across into the more uncertain and unstable realm of fiction, for only fiction could accommodate such a dissonant collision of temporalities.

Following this, it is Belfast who appears on the screen and guides the viewer through the city, narrating its traumatic story – *her* story. The specific aspects of her testimony will be dealt with in more detail in the next section, but for now it is sufficient to state that this structure of narration remains for the entirety of the film, until Belfast somewhat unceremoniously disappears. As the director in his voiceover: "And with that she was gone. I looked for her, but I couldn't find her. Maybe she ran out of stories".[18] The film from the beginning to end becomes nothing less than a ghost story not just about ghosts but told by one. The two voices represent both ontological poles here: the voice of the director Mark Cousins, which underscores the non-fiction documentary, and the voice of the 10,000-year-old Belfast personified, whose origins in time and space are very uncertain, and who functions as a clear signpost of fictionality.

How, then, does this affect the overarching question of autofiction? If trauma is always inaccessible to the referential language associated with non-fiction and documentary, a different approach is surely needed. In her assessment of Paul de Man's theories of language, trauma theorist Cathy Caruth notes that phenomenal reference to the world in the case of trauma is more complicated and only attainable in the *crisis* of representation.[19] Direct reference to the world means, paradoxically, the "production of a fiction".[20] Historical truth is not accessed by referential language, but by a "truer" kind of reference that is grounded in fiction. Therefore, the ghostly Belfast is the "production of a fiction" that pulls the viewer away from a referential, documentary pact, but she is also, in an ironic twist, the vehicle for a higher referentiality in the crisis of representation. Access to a historical truth based on fictionalisation by means of the spectral is thus made possible.

---

17. The association of Ireland as a whole with the feminine is an established and contested trope. Here it is hard to overlook the 1912 poem "Mise Éire" ("I Am Ireland") by the Irish revolutionary leader Pádraig Pearse, in which Ireland is personified as an elderly woman cast aside by her children, which has often been discussed in the context of Irish identity in post-Partition Northern Ireland. Laura McAtackney, *An Archaeology of the Troubles: The Dark Heritage of Long Kesh/Maze Prison*, Oxford, Oxford U.P., 2014, p. 68. The poem was rewritten by Eavan Boland in 1944 with the same title. In her version Ireland is again cast as a sorrowful elderly female, but Boland counters Pearse's use of the female body as a nationalistic emblem with an Ireland rooted in the female experience of oppression and suffering. Stefanie John, "Contesting and Continuing the Romantic Lyric: Eavan Boland and Kathleen Jamie", *Poetry Unlimited: New Perspectives on Poetry and Genre*, D. Kerler & T. Müller (Eds.), Berlin, De Gruyter, 2019, p. 36f.
18. *I Am Belfast*, *op. cit.*, 01:21:15 – 01:21:24.
19. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, Baltimore, John Hopkins U.P., 1996, p. 78.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

*Fig. 2: 'Belfast' and the salt hill (*I Am Belfast*, op. cit., 00:07:24)*

Turning to the second ghostly element of this analysis, to the ocean liner that was built between 1909 and 1912 in Belfast's shipyard Harland & Wolff and sank on its maiden voyage to New York in April 1912 after colliding with an iceberg – a disaster that cost over 1500 lives. The first oblique reference to the Belfast's ill-fated ocean liner can be found at the beginning of the film, when Belfast and the director (again, only present as a voice behind the camera) "fall to earth", as she puts it.[21] They land in what initially looks like the icy terrain of the North Pole, and Belfast remarks somewhat flippantly: "Are we […] on an ice-planet? This place could sink a ship."[22] The spectre of the Titanic becomes a rude intrusion here at the very beginning. As the camera zooms out, however, it becomes clear that this icescape is not ice at all, but a salt mound at the Shore Road Mill in the city itself **(Fig. 2)**. The narrator continues: "Belfast is hiding behind this hill. A salt hill."[23] Despite the reveal, the association of the salt hill with a deadly iceberg still lingers: The water on the ground creates an image that echoes that of an iceberg floating on the ocean, ready to sink a passing ship that fails to turn in time. The viewer is left to wonder, therefore, if Belfast is really hiding figuratively behind an iceberg – *the* iceberg – that sank the city's unsinkable ship in 1912. The film's very opening thus sets up a tension between the thing in itself, on one hand, and its representation on the other, with the ghostly associations of the Titanic at the epicentre. As the film progresses, this tension becomes all the more elaborate.

The opening half hour of the film showcases several historical sights of the city, such as the City Hall which was built on top of the old Linen Hall Library (a hotbed of radical political and intellectual thought that was almost closed down for its associations with Wolfe Tone in the 1798

---

21.   *I Am Belfast*, *op. cit.*, 00:05:06 – 00:05:07.
22.   *Ibid.*, 00:06:11 – 00:06:21.
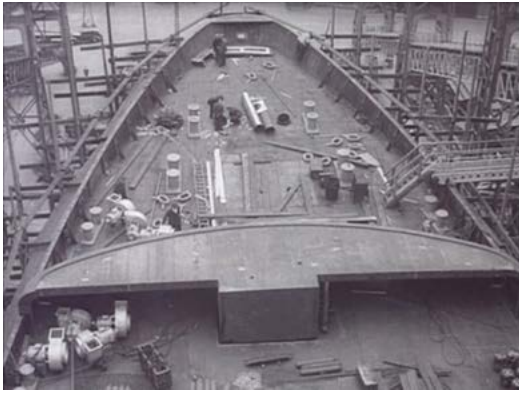23.   *Ibid.*, 00:07:00 – 00:07:05.

Fig. 3: Archival footage of Harland & Woolf's ship construction (*I Am Belfast*, *op. cit.*, 00:31:46)

rebellion) [24] and the Belfast Cooperative Society (a social cooperative and credit union of local traders that was established in 1888).[25] These elements are not coincidental, for they represent historical instances of cooperation between Protestants and Catholics in the region: "we knew how to cooperate," remarks Belfast lightly while describing the latter.[26] Following this, there is a five-minute montage of mostly black and white archival footage of the city, its people and daily life spanning the first five decades of the 20th century, followed by present-day footage of the cityscape from above. Several decades are of course notable by their absence: the 1960s to the 1990s, which demarcates the rough timeline of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.[27]

They do not, however, stay absent. With an ominous tone Belfast remarks: "And time passed, and the earth turned in this centre and nowhere. And the rain came. And then shadows."[28] As she finishes her sentence, the camera rests from a distance upon Harland & Wolff shipyard, the birthplace of the Titanic, and once again the spectre of the doomed ship emerges just as Belfast begins her testimony of the sectarian violence that engulfed the region in the 1960s:

> And then like a tracking shot, the iceberg hit. We fought each other. Is now a good time to talk about it? Is ever a good time? […] Did we judder to the Troubles? To our latest war that still troubles us. Or do we glide there, over decades or days, for good reasons and bad? We peered over the top of things and down into the depths. Salt and sweet; Nationalist and Unionist. The two sides in our war went wild.[29]

The tension between the real and the representation has thus been made much more transparent: although Belfast does later address the violence more directly, the testimony is initially framed in the language of the Titanic's demise, as is shown above, while the viewer observes archival footage of construction at Harland & Wolff **(Fig. 3)**.[30]

---

24. John Tyrell, *Weather and Warfare: A Climatic History of the 1798 Rebellion*, Cork, Collins, 2001, p. 9.
25. Christopher Loughlin, *Labour and the Politics of Disloyalty in Belfast, 1921-1939*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 3.
26. *I Am Belfast*, *op. cit.*, 00:27:32 – 00:27:35.
27. The Northern Irish conflict has, of course, been well documented. For a concise history of the period and its causes, see Marc Mulholland, *Northern Ireland: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford U.P., 2003.
28. *I Am Belfast*, *op. cit.*, 00:30:32 – 00:31:01.
29. *Ibid.*, 00:31:45 – 00:32:35.
30. While the integration of archival footage could entice the viewer towards a referential pact, in Lejeune's terms, the layered, metaphorical comparison between the Titanic's sinking

One might, however, pause here and ask: why is the construction of the ship foregrounded, rather than its disastrous sinking? Surely it is the nature of catastrophe that facilitates the comparison here. While this is, of course, the primary link, a more subtle comment on the Troubles can be teased out with the presence of Harland & Wolff. The shipyard remains to this day a symbol of systemic discrimination against the Catholic population by the Protestant ruling state since Irish partition in the 1920s, for although it was the largest employer in a very industrial city, Catholics were not permitted to work there. The Troubles, as is known and ought to be accepted, did not come out of nowhere, rather they represent a violent turn after decades of discrimination (in work, housing and political representation) against one religious/political group in Northern Ireland following the dismantling of Britain's colonial control in Ireland and the partition of the island into its two contested territories.

Many well-meaning attempts to represent Northern Ireland in fiction (especially those written from British Unionist perspectives) have a tendency to romanticise the period before the Troubles erupted in the late 1960s, and portray pre-Troubles Belfast as just another normal city, but this was not, of course, the case, and *I Am Belfast* seems to distance itself from this trend. Consider again Belfast's narration of the traumatic period. She questions whether Northern Ireland "judder[ed]" towards the conflict or glided there, like a ship over deceptively calm waters, over many decades, and she remarks that violence broke out "for good reasons and bad." Perhaps this is ultimately why the ghostly metaphor of the Titanic and the iceberg is so fitting: as with the Troubles, it is a mistake to ignore underlying factors and consequential decisions that led to the disaster. Belfast's ocean liner did not suddenly malfunction and slip under the waves; the iceberg was lying waiting in its path, accumulating mass over a long period of time, and there *were* warnings – ice warnings from nearby boats. Nevertheless, the Titanic advanced at full speed into a deadly catastrophe that could have been avoided. Things could have been different; it did *not* have to be this way.

Late in the film, it becomes clear, however, that the disaster of the Titanic is no mere substitution for the political conflict, and that the two are linked by the structure of memory and the writing of history. Looking at a mural depicting the Titanic and the shipyard alongside the famous Giant's Causeway on the Northern Irish coastline, Belfast remarks: "Can we flash back? When you're old that's how your mind works: something now reminds you of something then." The Titanic is thus used as a parameter with which to refer to the trauma of the Troubles by association, comparing one calamity to another. History becomes an accumulation of

and the Troubles complicates this, which chimes with the characterisation of autofiction as pulling the reader "from pillar to post" between two opposing pacts.

catastrophes: The spectre of the Titanic stalks the cinematography, and the film frames the more recent sectarian violence as just another disaster in the city's tragic history, almost as if the Titanic's demise prefigured the political crisis. This conception of history is by no means new: Walter Benjamin's collection of aphorisms "Theses on the Philosophy of History", written in his exile from Nazi Germany in the 1940s, can shed some light on the situation. In the ninth thesis of his text, Benjamin introduces the often cited (and often misunderstood) "Angel of History":

> A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. […] This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.[31]

The subject who tries to reconstruct history – "to make whole what has been smashed" – is thrown backwards, not by the weight of the mounting catastrophes themselves, but by "progress", which Benjamin defines in another of these theses as the grand narratives and discourses that rely upon "homogenous, empty time",[32] i.e. a linear chain of events connected and bound by cause and effect. The referential practice of historiography, content with this causal chain of events, not only fails to access history, according to Benjamin, but rather *is* the barrier to historical truth itself. It seems, therefore, that the past and historical truth with it (not just past traumas) exist in an inaccessible void – in the rubble heap from which we are always thrown back by the strength of "homogenous, empty time".

Despite this, in his fifth thesis Benjamin offers a slightly more hopeful contrast, describing fleeting moments of historical truth that manifest themselves in the present: "The true image of history flits by. The past can be seized only as an image that flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. […] To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was'. It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger."[33] Zooming past us in the present is the true image of history – precisely that which is kept from

31. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, W. Benjamin & H. Arendt (Eds.), Boston/New York, Mariner, 2019, p. 201.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 198.

us by the storm of progress. The only true access to history flashes up as an image in the moment of danger. As Judith Butler explains, these true images are spatial and temporal distortions that break away and escape the pile of debris just for a moment.[34] To be perceptible, they have to evade the homogenous, empty time of progress and emerge spatially in the present. They are, in short, like ghosts. The Troubles exist as part of the wreckage pile of history, in the void of trauma and beyond the remit of referential language and historiography ("progress", in Benjaminian terms). The trauma of the Troubles cannot be accessed directly; a spectral parameter, namely the ghost of another, older trauma in the form of the doomed Titanic, is required. Flashing up in the present, in line with Benjamin's insights, this ghostly mediator is that which provides access to the burdensome history of the region. Historical truth is momentarily unlocked by the spectral, by the ghosts of Belfast herself and of the Titanic. In a striking paradox, the referential depends precisely on its opposite: elements of fiction. This complicates even the understanding of Lejeune's pacts but underscores once again the chaotic process of being pulled between the two ontological modes of fact and fiction – a process that is most characteristic of the phenomenon of autofiction.

Returning to the film's conception of time and history, one could ask, however, why is it that the trauma of the Titanic breaks free in ghostly form? What is different about it from the Troubles? Why can it be spoken of? As the film progresses, the obvious answer is shown to be the correct one: time. Using what they call "that old B-Movie", *Creature of the Black Lagoon*, as an illustration, the elderly Belfast remarks on how dark histories come to the surface over time: "God, it was gorgeous. 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."[35] While the Titanic is actively discussed now (indeed a museum about it even forms the city's best-known tourist destination), this was not always the case. The shame of it hung over the city for decades after the disaster: for the Protestant engineers and shipbuilders it was a failure and for the Catholics a reminder of the work discrimination faced on a daily basis. In her voiceover, Belfast's comparison between catastrophes is most telling – "Like a war" –, and the viewer is forced to relate the initial shame and silence surrounding the Titanic with the repressed, traumatised silence of the aftermath of the Troubles.

A lifetime later, the ghost of the Titanic has since resurfaced, and it can be talked about; the disaster, about the cruelty behind the fact that most of the deaths were of third-class passengers, how things could have

34. Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*, New York, Columbia U.P., 2012, p. 70.
35. *I Am Belfast, op. cit.*, 01:06:25 – 01:06:27.

been handled differently, and how one mechanical problem led to another can all be rendered in language. The same indeed holds for the pride in the ground-breaking feat of engineering, the world-class expertise of design and craftsmanship. Once again: "Things that are held down come up again." Cousins adds here perhaps a slight nuance to the Benjaminian view of history: While time, homogenous and linear pushes the angel away, while more catastrophes are hurled onto pile of debris, maybe the ones lower down become dislodged first, and these are the ones that can flash up in the present. *I Am Belfast*, striking a hopeful note, thus suggests that things may change in time. At some point in the future conceivably it will be the spectral images of the Troubles that will rudely squeeze their way into the present, maybe to help explain another catastrophe that has dropped onto the sky-high pile of debris. Or, given the current post-Brexit political unease surrounding the Irish border and the ghosts of violence and trauma that are invoked when discussing it, one could ask if this is already beginning to happen. Nevertheless, while the Troubles remain in living memory for so many, ghostly images of the Titanic, as the film suggests, may have to suffice for now in the search for historical truth.

To conclude, with an undoubtedly postmodern resolve, Cousins exposes how inherently unstable the usual categories and terms, such as fiction, reference, trauma, memory, past and present, really are – much like the instability that is a cornerstone of auto-fictional writing. Amid the integration of the spectral into Mark Cousins' ambiguous film (in the form of a 10,000-year-old woman called Belfast and of the fabled disaster of the Belfast-built Titanic), the viewer is unable to settle upon the clear referential pact that would be expected of the documentary genre. The spectral is juxtaposed alongside archival material and found footage, forcing the viewer to oscillate between fiction and non-fiction, caught in the irritation of – in Woolf's terms – trying to "serve two masters at once". Yet there is a deeper conflict between fact and fiction at play in *I Am Belfast*, and its consequences for autofiction are significant: the spectral is the very aspect that hinders the viewer from settling upon a referential, factual pact, that pulls the viewer towards a fictional pact, yet it is the key to recovering the "true image of history" before it slips away. We recover a reality of a "truer" kind than referentiality and non-fiction can access, and this reality is founded upon fictionalisation. Without a doubt, this conclusion is paradoxical, but surely, as Gerard Genette would point out, no more paradoxical than the concept at hand: autofiction itself.[36]

36.   Gérard Genette, *Fiktion und Diktion*, trans. H. Jatho, Munich, Wilhelm Fink, 1992, p. 87.

Born in Belfast, **Tom Hedley** is PhD student in the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies at Trinity College Dublin, and his research compares spatial understanding and representation in modern mathematics and aesthetic modernism. This project is funded by the Irish Research Council.

Bibliography

Primary Sources
Carson, Jan, *The Fire Starters*, Dublin, Penguin, 2019.
I Am Belfast, Dir. Mark Cousins, Northern Ireland, Canderblinks Film & Music and Hopscotch Films, 2016.

Secondary Sources
Benjamin, Walter, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, W. Benjamin & H. Arendt (Eds.), Boston/New York, Mariner, 2019.
Butler, Judith, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*, New York, Columbia U.P., 2012.
Caruth, Cathy, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, Baltimore, John Hopkins U.P., 1996.
Crosson, Sean, "Re-imagining an Irish City: *I Am Belfast* (Mark Cousins, 2016)", *Estudios Irlandeses*, 12, 2017 (doi:10.24162/EI2017-7365).
Dix, Hywel (Ed.), *Autofiction in English: Palgrave Studies in Life-Writing*, Cham, Springer, 2018.
Doubrovsky, Serge, *Fils*, Paris, Galilée, 1977.
Genette, Gérard, *Fiktion und Diktion*, trans. H. Jatho, Munich, Wilhelm Fink, 1992.
Gomel, Elana, *Narrative Space and Time: Representing Impossible Topologies in Literature*, New York, Routledge, 2014.
John, Stefanie, "Contesting and Continuing the Romantic Lyric: Eavan Boland and Kathleen Jamie", *Poetry Unlimited: New Perspectives on Poetry and Genre*, D. Kerler & T. Müller (Eds.), Berlin, De Gruyter, 2019.
Lejeune, Philippe, *On Autobiography: Volume 52 of Theory and History of Literature*, ed. P. Eakin, trans. K. Leary, Portland, Minnesota U.P., 1989.
Loughlin, Christopher, *Labour and the Politics of Disloyalty in Belfast, 1921-1939*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.
McAtackney, Laura, *An Archaeology of the Troubles: The Dark Heritage of Long Kesh/Maze Prison*, Oxford, Oxford U.P., 2014.
Mulholland, Marc, *Northern Ireland: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford U.P., 2003.
Tyrell, John, *Weather and Warfare: A Climatic History of the 1798 Rebellion*, Cork, Collins, 2001.
Woolf, Virgina, "The New Biography", *Selected Essays*, D. Bradshaw (Ed.), New York, Oxford U.P., 2009.
Zipfel, Frank, "Autofiktion", *Grenzen der Literatur: Zu Begriff und Phänomen des Literarischen*, S. Winko, F. Jannidis, G. Lauer (Eds.), Berlin/New York, De Gruyter, 2009.

Chapter twelve

« Bram » Stoker : Irlande chimérique et faillite du langage

///////////

Claude Fierobe
Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne

L A traduction du premier roman de Stoker (*The Snake's Pass*, publié d'abord dans *The People* en 1889, puis sous forme de livre en 1891) m'a fourni un point de départ[1]. Qui dit traduction dit lecture exigeante, répétée, dépassant à tout moment la simple attention au fil narratif pour essayer d'approcher l'intention auctoriale, et cet effort est sans cesse voué aux corrections et aux ratures. Mon travail m'a comblé au-delà de mes espoirs, ce qui ne vaut pas pour toute traduction. Ce que je crois avoir perçu, c'est un sens général fait de sens successifs, un millefeuille d'évidences, mais aussi une inquiétude rentrée, secrète, contenue dans l'histoire, dans la diégèse. Une inquiétude obscure encore opacifiée par un bienveillant et prévisible *happy end*. Pour dire autrement, le courant de fond, comme celui de Cruden Bay dans *The Mystery of the Sea*, s'oppose au déferlement lumineux des vagues ourlées de l'écume des beaux jours. *Oh les beaux jours : Happy Days* en effet, où Beckett s'interroge à sa façon, sur la vie, le temps, la façon de passer le temps, et sur l'avenir, sur la possibilité d'un avenir différent du passé. Beckett ou plutôt non, Winnie, elle aussi à demi enterrée – tiens-donc, comme Arthur Severn qui échappe de peu à l'étreinte de la tourbière – écho troublant, qui résonne le long d'un siècle et demi.

Selon Joseph Valente, Stoker construit « *an uneasy social and psychic space between authority, agency and legitimacy on one side and abjection, heteronomy, and hybridity on the other*[2] ». Nancy Mark Cantwell explore cet « espace social et psychique » : pour elle, la tourbière mouvante est « *a totem of Irish identity that persists in cultural memory and*

---

1. Édition utilisée : Bram Stoker, *The Snake's Pass*, Chicago, Valancourt, 2006. Les références sont données entre parenthèses après chaque citation. En français : *Le Défilé du Serpent*, trad. de l'anglais (Irlande) par Claude Fierobe, Rennes, Terre de Brume, 2011.
2. Joseph Valente, *Dracula's Crypt: Bram Stoker, Irishness, and the Question of Blood*, Urbana, Illinois U.P., 2002, p. 3.

resists the forward momentum of the assimilation narrative[3] ». L'opposition entre temps linéaire et « temps monumental » – concept emprunté à Julia Kristeva[4] – la conduit à repérer dans celui-ci l'empreinte ineffaçable d'un traumatisme majeur, un traumatisme de dépossession.

Je tiens ici à me situer en simple lecteur. La question n'est plus de savoir quelle partie de l'imaginaire de l'auteur se trouve cachée dans le texte ; elle est de savoir quel élément constitutif de l'imaginaire du lecteur ou, plus globalement, quel imaginaire du lecteur se trouve mis en éveil par le texte. C'est-à-dire : quel est l'envers de l'accumulation des révélations ? Devant un récit qui donne la clé de toutes les énigmes, le lecteur se trouve comme dépossédé du plaisir – certes égoïste – de s'en remettre à sa propre appréciation. Ne convient-il pas de desserrer le carcan du parti pris démonstratif, qui voudrait être performatif, pour essayer de voir ce qu'on nous cache ?

Ce qu'on nous cache ? On en a une idée dès le premier chapitre. Encore faut-il tendre l'oreille. Stoker orchestre une ouverture musicale sur le spectacle grandiose de la nature irlandaise. Un long paragraphe qui laisse à peine deviner, au détour d'une phrase, qu'il y a un narrateur – « *the almost primal desolation which immediately surrounded* us » (3) – et non pas un auteur omniscient. Récit à la première personne dont le prélude a une fonction d'alerte et pose la question du sujet réel. À dire vrai, il ouvre les yeux d'un être hybride – narrateur/lecteur – qui se dessine peu à peu : un petit tour de passe-passe. En effet, Arthur Severn apprend toute chose en même temps que nous, mais nous avons le privilège littéraire du surplomb. Il livre ce qui va servir de fil conducteur pour son action à venir. Il a eu une révélation, un éveil (« *waking up* », 4), l'accès à un niveau de connaissance plus élevé (« *I felt exalted in a strange way* », 4), à un autre monde (« *a more real life* », 4), mais il n'atteindra pas la pleine conscience de cette « vie plus réelle ». Ce qui paraît avoir valeur d'épiphanie programmatique ne va pas vraiment se réaliser : elle va abandonner Arthur en chemin, et nous avec.

*

Il est un domaine où tout fonctionne : faire connaître l'Irlande à Arthur Severn. D'où cette importante partie du roman qui relève du quasi-documentaire. Stoker compose un récit à la fois accessible et didactique qui se présente comme un répertoire des réalités irlandaises offertes aux yeux d'un jeune voyageur anglais. Certes, il ne s'agit pas de notes en bas

---

3. Nancy Marck Cantwell, « 'Keeping the Past Present': Time and the Shifting Bog in Bram Stoker's *The Snake Pass* », *Supernatural Studies*, 4(1), 2017, p. 38-50.
4. Julia Kristeva, « Women's Time », *The Kristeva Reader*, éd. T. Moil, Columbia U.P., 1986, p. 189.

de page comme chez les frères Banim (*Tales of the O'Hara Family*, 1825), ou de glossaire comme chez Maria Edgeworth (*Castle Rackrent*, 1800). La démarche n'est pas exactement non plus celle de Lady Morgan (*The Wild Irish Girl*, 1806) qui unit histoire de l'Irlande, description de la société, et nombreuses considérations sur la musique, le langage, la botanique, etc. Stoker choisit la voie d'une excursion doublée d'une intrigue amoureuse.

La méthode est claire, il est facile de dresser le répertoire des sujets abordés. Arthur aurait-il des porte-parole ? Pas vraiment, car, je le répète, il s'instruit lui-même en nous instruisant : le discours est d'abord à son intention. Le narrateur de premier rang élabore un minutieux collage de renseignements à l'usage du lecteur britannique. Nouveau pédagogue, il délègue ses pouvoirs en installant régulièrement des bulles d'autonomie narrative – autant de leçons de choses – dont les deux auteurs principaux sont d'un côté Andy, Irlandais natif du comté de Clare, de l'autre Dick Sutherland, Anglais bon teint. Le partage est net, du moins au début : à l'Irlandais le passé, à l'Anglais l'avenir. Il y a d'autres délégués.

Dick Sutherland apparaît au quatrième chapitre, intitulé « *The Secrets of the bog* » (39). Cet ingénieur féru de géologie partage le même intérêt qu'Arthur, son ancien condisciple, pour la tourbière, même si ses raisons sont différentes. Andy apparaît au premier chapitre. Très vite il devient, génie ou démon, le familier du roi Arthur qui, à son corps défendant, ne peut bientôt plus se passer de lui. Grâce à lui, Arthur fait la connaissance de Jerry Scanlan qui raconte la légende de saint Patrick, de Bat Moynahan qui raconte l'histoire des Français, et du « *gombeen man* », personnage typique de la société irlandaise contemporaine. D'Andy lui-même, Arthur dit : « *His knowledge of folklore was immense* » (89). Ajoutons l'aubergiste et l'officier de police qui apprennent à Arthur ce que sont les « *moonlighters* ». Se tisse un écheveau dont les fils appartiennent à des registres différents sans être complètement indépendants les uns des autres : géologie, histoire, folklore, mythologie, croyances populaires. Le savoir est un tout, et les récits enchâssés – un peu à la manière de *Melmoth the Wanderer* ou du *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse* – contiennent chacun une parcelle de vérité. D'où la pertinence de cette remarque de Dick : « *Legends have always a base in facts* » (53).

Il revient donc naturellement à Dick, l'homme de science, de dire ce qui est : « *Even the last edition of the Encyclopædia Britannica does not contain the heading bog* » (44). Or, d'entrée de jeu, il avait assimilé la tourbière à l'Irlande en affirmant que toute l'Irlande est tourbière – « *The difficulty they have in this part of the world is to find a place that is not bog* » (41) – façon métaphorisée de dire que l'Irlande est absente de la conscience britannique. Ces propos liminaires entraînent des conséquences logiques. Ils laissent entendre d'une part qu'il conviendrait sans

doute de rédiger une encyclopédie de l'Irlande – à l'usage des lecteurs britanniques –, ce que *The Snake's Pass* est, à sa façon ; et d'autre part, Norah Joyce étant à maintes reprises identifiée à la tourbière, que ce qui concerne Norah concerne aussi la tourbière et l'Irlande. Norah est jeune, son avenir va se construire, et cet avenir sera l'image de l'avenir de l'Irlande. C'est ainsi que fonctionne l'analogie : une intrigue amoureuse donne naissance à la chimère d'une Irlande nouvelle. En d'autres termes, l'entreprise de description méthodique se lézarde à l'avantage du sujet ordonnateur et de la visée pédagogique.

Le rôle du roman est d'incarner cette chimère, de transformer le fantasme en une narration plausible, solide, argumentée. S'affrontent deux mondes que Stoker veut réconcilier selon un plan préétabli. À cette fin correspond un texte contraint d'entrer dans un moule qui ne doit rien laisser déborder. Dans cette optique, Stoker met en parallèle deux cycles éducatifs qui s'imbriquent à merveille l'un dans l'autre, se complètent, s'unissent, pour le meilleur et pour le pire, c'est-à-dire par une union, par un mariage.

Arthur revient du continent où il a effectué son « grand tour ». Son excursion dans l'ouest irlandais pourrait bien alors en être considéré comme le terme, et pourquoi pas, comme le couronnement inattendu. Il ne manquait plus que ce détour, cet écart, pour boucler la boucle d'un circuit éducatif qui doit assurer à Arthur un départ réussi dans une vie responsable : en un mot il se sera constitué un viatique, le roman étant alors une variante du *Bildungsroman*. Mais l'homme accompli est-il réalité ou chimère ? Arthur saisira-t-il la chance offerte par *Knockcalltecrore* c'est-à-dire *the Hill of the Lost Golden Crown* ? La Colline sera-t-elle la montagne magique où, à l'instar de Hans Castorp, le héros de Thomas Mann, s'ouvrent peu à peu les yeux du héros ? Un début de réponse est fourni : en effet seule l'Italie, et non l'Irlande, sera décrite comme « *that magic land* » (135).

Voyons le détail. Arthur, orphelin de bonne heure, est pris en charge par une tante très riche et très sévère qui veut lui assurer « *a good and happy manhood* » (6). Il reçoit des rudiments d'éducation chez un vieil ecclésiastique et son épouse dans l'ouest de l'Angleterre. Privé d'études universitaires, il devient une sorte de « *country gentleman* » (5), mais est toujours considéré par sa parentèle comme « *an outsider* ». Le testament de sa tante est sans équivoque : « *I had been left heir to all her property, and… I would be called upon to take a place among the magnates of the county* » (6). Après un voyage de six mois sur le continent, le traditionnel « grand tour », il est invité par des amis dans le comté de Clare. Il ne s'y rend pas directement : « *I had determined to improve my knowledge of Irish affairs by making a detour through some of the counties in the west on my way to Clare* » (6). Riche et l'esprit libre, Arthur part à la découverte de l'Irlande de l'ouest. Il a dissipé les « *sleepy ideas* » et les « *negative forces* » (4) qui, jusque-là,

avaient dominé sa vie. On n'en saura pas plus, ce qui est peu, mais qui suf-fit pour faire de lui un terrain vierge, ou une sorte de *tabula rasa*.

Ce cycle éducatif n'est pas le privilège d'Arthur, il se répète avec le personnage de Norah Joyce, mais avec une différence de taille : le cycle est inversé. Il prend son origine en Irlande au lieu d'y trouver son terme. Norah Joyce est Irlandaise, fille de fermier, aimée de tous : « *She's that good that even the nuns in Galway, where she was at school, loves her and thrates her like wan iv themselves, for all she's a Protestant* » (81). Elle est au cœur de l'ouest irlandais, et son apparition se fait – évidemment – au sein d'une nature à laquelle elle appartient en toute légitimité. Andy identifie l'intérêt d'Arthur pour la tourbière à celui qu'il porte à Norah. Par l'amour, elle se trouve de façon inattendue, confrontée à la réalité des classes sociales, à la hiérarchie établie ; il lui faut donc effectuer un long chemin pour rejoindre Arthur pour de bon, le chemin de l'éducation. C'est à elle maintenant de partir pour le continent et c'est elle qui l'a décidé : « *Arthur, I want you to let me go to school for a while – a year or two before we are mar-ried. Oh, I should work so hard! I should try so earnestly to improve, for I should feel that every hour of honest work brought me higher and nearer to your level* » (135). Que par ailleurs Norah soit associée au phénotype fan-tasmatique du « *Black Irish* » et à une marchandise, à une volaille, voire à « *cattle or pigs* » (84) est extrêmement dérangeant et – même s'il s'agit d'un passage humoristique – la fait descendre dans l'échelle des êtres au niveau de l'animalité.

Elle propose ce parcours éducatif, son *grand tour* à elle, parce qu'elle sait ne pas pouvoir rejoindre autrement celui qu'elle aime. Parcours obligé, contrainte acceptée – Arthur en a bien conscience : « *It was to be done, we were both agreed* » (135). Elle ira à Paris, puis à Dresde, pour être transférée « *to an English school at Brighton, one justly celebrated among Englishwomen* » (213). Tout est dit : l'éducation est une annexion et c'est une Norah anglicisée – pas d'équivoque – qui rejoindra son pays natal. La question posée à son futur époux, à la porte de l'église, est celle d'une femme soumise : « *Mr. Severn, are you satisfied with me?* » (214). Voici venu le crépuscule de son identité irlandaise.

L'intrigue se déploie en surface, avec ses rebondissements et ses naïvetés, les rôles sont distribués avec un manichéisme qui ne laisse pas la place au doute. Ainsi les déambulations d'Arthur au clair de lune ne sont en aucun cas assimilables à celles des « *moonlighters* », « *the scum of the country-side – 'corner-boys' and loafers of all kinds* » (97). On a choisi son camp, celui de l'ordre, d'un ordre imposé de l'extérieur pour mettre en déroute un désordre émanant de l'intérieur. Le responsable, c'est le mauvais Irlandais, le *gombeen* – écho sans doute du Geraghty de *The Absentee* (1812) – qui est englouti dans la tourbière mouvante,

emportant avec lui, symboliquement, les maux qui affligent l'Irlande. Tout est clair, tout doit être clair : c'est la fonction du jeu horizontal des signifiants soigneusement déployés. Le propos de Stoker est d'une totale cohérence : c'est bien le système irlandais qui est responsable de la misère irlandaise.

La présence obsédante de la tentation encyclopédique montre clairement la prééminence du sujet qui connaît et ordonne sur une hypothétique observation objective du monde. C'est l'acte de connaissance et de hiérarchisation qui compte ; la finalité didactique l'emporte sur tout le reste. Or, inventorier, classer, ont pu être définis comme « des gestes créateurs qui […] permettent de contenir dans une forme la menace de l'inconstance et du désordre[5] ». Voilà qui correspond bien à l'intention majeure de Stoker, écrivain, administrateur du Lyceum, ordonnateur des œuvres et des fastes de Henry Irving.

L'ensemble forme un texte clos, pour ne pas dire figé. Une harmonie programmée inscrit les petits ordonnancements du réel dans un agencement de grande ampleur. Mais on doit se méfier de ce qui en réalité pourrait bien être un arrangement, au double sens du terme : organisation, certes, mais aussi compromis.

*

En effet, *The Snake's Pass* contient des éléments perturbateurs. Il y d'abord Andy qui, au mariage des deux jeunes gens, tient un long discours dont on retiendra l'élément essentiel : « *I often heerd iv fairies, an' Masther Art knows well how he hunted wan from the top iv Knocknacar to the top iv Knockcalltecrore, ans I won't say a wurrrd of the kind iv a fairy he wanted to find…* » (216). C'est la conclusion d'une longue suite métaphorique filée par Andy, à la fois naïve et pénétrante : cette histoire est un conte de fées. À la fée – construction de l'imaginaire – on construira une maison : « *A beautiful house it was, of red sandstone with red tiled roof and quaint gables, and jutting windows and balustrades of carven stone. The whole Cliff Fields were laid out as exquisite gardens, and the murmur of water was everywhere* » (212-213). En somme, comme prévu, « *a paradise on earth* » (153). L'intéressée n'est pas consultée, puisque la demeure doit être conforme à un fantasme et non à une personne réelle. À conte de fées, personnages attendus : Arthur, riche célibataire, en voyage en pays étranger ; une mystérieuse inconnue ; un dragon (le roi des serpents, le *gombeen*), et au terme d'un cataclysme, un mariage et la perspective de nombreux enfants, dans la paix retrouvée. La déréalisation de la diégèse mine la crédibilité de la résolution analogique, à savoir l'apaisement

---

5. Laurent Demanze, *Les Fictions encyclopédiques de Gustave Flaubert à Pierre Senges*, Paris, Corti, « Les Essais », 2015, p. 35.

des conflits sous l'autorité bienveillante de la Grande-Bretagne. Ainsi, une posture d'énonciation régulatrice et normative reçoit un premier correctif.

La référence, ténue mais palpable, au roi Arthur, est le second élément disruptif. Arthur est un roi unificateur, un rassembleur, un pacificateur, désireux de résorber le désordre d'un passé chaotique et barbare. Ce qu'est Arthur Severn, à sa façon. Certes la référence mythique ajoute de la cohérence au récit, lui impose une ligne narrative claire, mais en même temps l'inscrit dans le non-temps de la légende, sans chronologie, donc en dehors de toute histoire. Ambivalence donc que de proposer une résolution, une félicité, qui demeure fondamentalement uchronique.

En outre, Arthur Severn est un roi handicapé par une forme de cécité étonnante, comme s'il était ébloui par l'obscurité. Dans la campagne irlandaise battue par la tempête, seul Andy voit son chemin, alors qu'Arthur est complètement perdu dans une nature instable et littéralement aquatique (il n'est pas dans son élément) : « *I could not tell which was road-way and which water-way, for there were all watercourses at present and the darkness was profound…I felt like a blind man* » (34-35). Dans cet environnement biblique du début des temps – « les ténèbres couvraient l'abîme, l'esprit de Dieu planait sur les eaux » –, Arthur est sans pouvoir. Lui échappe la perception d'une partie de l'Irlande : littéralement, il ne la verra jamais. L'aveu est explicite : « *Andy and Joyce semed to have a sense lacking in myself, for now and again they spoke of things which I could not see at all* » (34). Pour lui, Knockcalltecrore est au mieux « *a blackness projected on a darkness* » (34).

La déréalisation s'opère aussi dans la structuration du récit autour du schéma dominant. Se met en œuvre une entreprise sournoise qui se déploie en trois temps : verticalité, possession, gothique. Si quelqu'un est possédé, c'est moins le *gombeen* que Stoker lui-même. Il est pris par son argumentaire, par son bel arrangement – tout en devenant l'artisan inconscient d'un grand dérangement.

Verticalité. Une image-clé : Arthur, *deus ex machina*, élève Norah à son niveau dans la hiérarchie sociale, mais c'est Norah qui le tire hors de la tourbière. On veut savoir ce qu'il y a dans la tourbière : on sonde, on descend dans la psyché collective. On trouve de la ferraille, et un trésor, et une couronne. Le mouvement de la tourbière (« *shifting* ») est le point nodal du récit. Avec une « *terrible convulsion* » (199) elle traverse le Shleenanaher avant de se déverser dans l'océan : « *The millions of tons of slime and ooze, and bog and earth, and broken rock swept through the Pass into the sea* » (199). Point final ? Non, car il s'agit sans doute de la fin d'un cycle : « *It is possible, if not probable, that more than once, in the countless ages that have passed, this ravine has been as we see it, and again as it was but*

a few hours ago » (205). Cette suggestion d'un éternel recommencement, d'une remise en cause permanente, est incompatible avec la notion de progrès : la résolution des problèmes – à dire vrai une réduction à un modèle préétabli – est un leurre. Le texte se défait, se délite, il est lui aussi une formation géologique instable.

Possession : thématique qui hante le roman. La possession amoureuse, celle de Norah convoitée à la fois par Arthur, Dick et Murdock. La possession foncière, sous deux aspects différents : un problème interne à l'Irlande – le conflit entre le *gombeeen* et Phelim Joyce – et un problème externe – entre l'Irlande et l'Angleterre. Les deux Anglais, Arthur et Dick, hommes de bonne volonté, sont en terre de mission. Alors, remettre la terre en de meilleures mains, en des mains anglaises, est bien la meilleure des choses. Tout s'arrange à merveille : « *All the tenants on the east side of the hill wished to emigrate and so were anxious to realize on their holdings* » (162). On pourrait en juger autrement : Arthur achète les terres et déposssède de leur seul bien les Irlandais condamnés à l'émigration. On jette le problème à la mer, tandis qu'Arthur prend l'allure d'un *Absentee* repenti.

Il y a une autre possession, qui relève de l'irrationnel. Dan affirme que la montagne *tient* le *gombeen* : « *There may be raysons that a man gives – sometimes wan thin, an' sometimes another; but the Hill houlds – an' houlds tight all the same!* » (19). Le prêtre évacue un peu vite cette affirmation : « *When they say the Hill holds him, they mean he doesn't like to leave it because he hopes to find a treasure that is said to be buried in it* » (20). Mais Arthur ne s'y trompe pas : « *And a vague wonder drew upon me as to whether it could ever hold me and how!* » (36). En réalité, cette possession surnaturelle est le reflet inversé de la possession matérielle, son image spectrale. Même s'il se moque des superstitions locales, Arthur se trouve pris dans un filet qui n'est pas simplement celui de la passion amoureuse.

On entre alors dans le domaine du « gothique », dont les marqueurs s'accumulent pour l'opération d'érosion qui contrarie la diégèse. Une sorte de prélude à cette entrée en territoire de l'étrange est fourni par Arthur lui-même : Norah n'est que « *my Unknown* » (77), une voix dans la nuit, une créature qu'il a peu de chance de trouver au sommet de la colline et même qu'il croit disparue : « *I seemed to have lost my unknown* » (90).

Murdock est un loup et un démon qui vient réclamer son dû, comme le Méphistophélès de *Faust*, un vampire : « *He would take the blood out of yer body if he could sell it or use it anyhow!* » (19). Ce bestiaire, qui se retrouve de façon confuse dans les cauchemars d'Arthur, annonce *The Lair of the White Worm* et *Dracula*. Dans les nuits agitées d'Arthur, Murdock est à la fois le *gombeen* et le Roi des Serpents, statut qu'il revendique :

« *If I am the Shnake on the Hill – thin beware of the Shnake!* » (28). On passe des faits à la suggestion d'une menace surnaturelle et polymorphe.

Polymorphe car c'est l'homme de science qui renchérit sur les propos du barbare. Comme le docteur Frankenstein, Dick sait tout des cadavres, et en particulier il sait tout de leur comportement au sein de la tourbière : immersion dans la masse visqueuse quand la *rigor mortis* s'est installée, puis effort vain pour regagner la surface, enfin absorption définitive dans la fange profonde. Tableau effrayant de la décomposition, celle des corps et de la matière inerte : selon Arthur « *real cold-blooded horror* » (47). En outre, il faut intervenir médicalement, toujours selon Dick, sur la terre irlandaise qui est un grand corps malade, « *almost infamous for bogs* » : « *In fine, we cure bog by both a surgical and a medical process* […] *to kill the vital principle of its growth* […] *We drain, we put lime to kill* […] *scientific and executive man asserts its dominance* » (44). L'assimilation de l'Irlande aux tourbières donne tout son poids à cette affirmation d'une brutalité inouïe.

En bref, la tourbière, symbole de l'identité nationale selon Derek Gladwin, mémoire de l'Irlande selon Seamus Heaney (« *a congruence between memory and bogland*[6] »), est la pièce maîtresse de cette déstructuration du récit réaliste. La tourbière mouvante est insaisissable et dangereuse. Elle n'appartient à personne, elle a sa vie, sa force propre puisée aux âges géologiques et mythiques. On a dit à juste titre que le fantastique était une « poétique de l'incertain[7] » : ici la tourbière, « *a carpet of death* » (47), en est l'élément majeur, le centre autour duquel s'agrègent tous les éléments d'étrangeté. Elle s'inscrit dans un ensemble – « *quite worthy of being taken as the scene of strange stories for it certainly had something "uncanny" about it* » (45) – elle fait basculer le roman dans un fantastique qu'on peut difficilement réduire.

*

Une dernière tentative est faite pour prévenir tout dérapage, et même pour projeter le texte dans un hors-texte qui lui sert de garant : sur une pierre, des caractères sont gravés, et là s'inscrit l'histoire en toutes lettres. Le monument qu'Arthur fait ériger, sous la direction de Dick, en l'absence de Norah, est une très pertinente mise en abîme, une projection du roman dans la géologie qu'il met en œuvre – un dispositif anti-tourbière mouvante – à la fois pétrification du mouvant et *in memoriam* à destination des générations futures :

---

6.   Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations*, London/Boston, Faber & Faber, 1980, p. 19.
7.   Irène Bessière, *Le Récit fantastique, la poétique de l'incertain*, Paris, Larousse, 1974.

> *Norah Joyce*
> *A brave woman*
> *On this spot*
> *By her courage and devotion*
> *Saved a man's life.*

Il n'y a rien de plus à dire, rien de plus à écrire : le monument, le roman s'entend, est un « *monolithe* »(213) : il n'y a rien à ajouter, rien à retirer. Procédure de verrouillage qui, *in fine*, devrait mettre fin aux spéculations ou aux interrogations.

Tel n'est pourtant pas le cas. Le texte, on l'a vu, est une formation géologique instable qui se défait et se délite. La stratégie du bouclage narratif n'a pas fonctionné complètement. Le texte fermé en apparence a laissé s'ouvrir des failles. La forme utilisée n'est pas totalement adéquate, signe d'une incertitude initiale que tout tend à dissimuler, sans véritable succès. La transformation fantastique du langage s'opère en dépit des ressources documentaires référentielles mobilisées tour à tour, ou bien parfois grâce à elles. Car elles diffusent une altérité qui déstabilisent le propos : pour preuve la dissertation scientifique qui se transforme en tableau de l'horreur, comme si elle recelait le germe de sa propre destruction. Si bien que l'affleurement d'une vérité masquée devient une constante du roman.

Rien de plus normal donc que cette altérité menace la construction de l'utopie chimérique. L'Irlande tend un miroir où, en fin de compte, Arthur, tel Narcisse, ne voit que son propre visage. Il y verra aussi celui d'une femme courageuse qui finira par lui ressembler, ou du moins qui, en cette fin-de-siècle, sera modelée à l'image de la femme victorienne idéale.

Une affirmation optimiste clot le roman : « *There never was a cloud to shadow our sunlit way* » (216). Pourtant, plus tard, Jonathan Harker suivra, au cœur d'une terrible tempête, le chemin qui mène au Défilé de Borgo, autrement plus dangereux que le Défilé du Serpent. Sans jamais en parler directement, *Dracula* en dit sans doute plus long sur l'Irlande que la posture réductrice de *The Snake's Pass*[8]. Lors d'un retour en Transylvanie, Jonathan Harker constate que rien ne demeure dans « *a waste of desolation* » : « *Every trace of all that had been was blotted out*[9] ». Rien sur le terrain, rien dans l'écrit non plus : « *In all the mass of material of which the record is composed, there is hardly one authentic document!*[10] ». Lire *Dracula* après *The Snake's Pass* jette une lumière singulière sur le seul roman « irlandais » de Stoker.

---

8. Voir à ce sujet : Claude Fierobe, « Dracula roman irlandais, vraiment ? » et Marie-Noelle Zeender, « Dracula ou Droch-Fhola : mythe irlandais », *Dracula, mythe et métamorphoses*, C. Fierobe (dir.). Villeneuve d'Ascq, PU Septentrion, 2005, p. 53-76.
9. Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, Oxford, Oxford U.P., 1983, p. 378.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 378

La vérité de l'Irlande, une vérité complexe, multiforme, ambiguë, est peut-être à rechercher dans la figuration spectrale que Stoker en a donnée dans *Dracula*. *Dracula* est la déconstruction de la fabrique si savamment élaborée dans *The Snake's Pass*, une sorte de sous-texte *a posteriori*, la revanche du désordre sur l'ordre, et surtout de l'œuvre ouverte sur l'œuvre fermée, comme si Stoker avait d'abord donné des réponses avant de formuler les bonnes questions.

Ce qui autorise justement à poser une question, à la manière de John Sutherland (*Can Jane Eyre be happy?*) : *Can Norah Severn be happy? Can Ireland be happy?* Rien n'est moins sûr. En effet, le diable étant dans les détails – ces détails que nous avons évoqués –, le *happy end* avec ses beaux jours paraît n'être que le fantasme, et le fantasme seulement, de la résorption du chaos. Un surcroît de lucidité – *Dracula* – conduira à l'aveu de l'échec. La science et le conte ne sont que des outils émoussés : Arthur, aidé fidèlement par Dick, n'est qu'un *deus ex machina* à la petite semaine.

Alors il y a bien « une part du roman qui ne peut être ramenée au récit », selon la formule célèbre d'André Malraux dans *L'Homme précaire et la littérature*, ce que Julien Gracq appelle des contacts « intra-textuels[11] » qui sont difficiles à détecter… Cette part du roman, modeste dans *The Snake's Pass*, est immense dans *Dracula,* qui ouvre sur une autre vision de l'Irlande, jusque-là occultée.

*

Paradoxalement, *The Snake's Pass*, seul roman « irlandais » de Stoker, est un voyage en terre d'étrangeté. Parce que s'y mêlent exotisme ambivalent et réalité historique complexe. Celle-ci, par l'analogie et l'expansion, double la banale et quasi féérique histoire d'amour entre le prince et la belle inconnue. En outre, dans la production littéraire de Stoker, le roman entre en résonance avec *Dracula*, les deux livres traitant de sujets identiques : amour, terre, possession, hiérarchie, émigration. Comme si Stoker n'était pas satisfait de la réponse donnée au « problème irlandais » dans *The Snake's Pass*, comme s'il avait du mal à l'admettre, à admettre que, d'une certaine façon, il avait fait fausse route. Alors quittant les rives irlandaises il s'est tourné vers le plus étrange des pays étrangers. Non pas pour donner la bonne réponse, mais pour donner une expression plus juste, bien que plus obscure, de son inquiétude, de son désarroi. Pour ouvrir d'autres possibles, plutôt pour essayer de les ouvrir. Bien entendu on laisse de côté le problème de l'intentionnalité, c'est-à-dire du rapport explicite à un objet précis : Stoker voulait-il vraiment parler de l'Irlande dans *Dracula* ? Inquiétude *a priori* exclue de *The Snake's Pass*,

---

11.   Julien Gracq, *En lisant en écrivant*, Paris, Corti, 1981, p. 111.

oui, mais perceptible dans les marges, où histoire d'amour, documentaire et *happy end* sont comme corrodés par les manœuvres accumulées, semi inconscientes, de déréalisation. De telles manœuvres ne sont pas nécessaires dans *Dracula*, situé sur le plan de l'imaginaire vampirique, tout élément irlandais étant apparemment banni dès le départ. Tout est laissé dans l'obscurité, rien n'est sûr, ne demeure que « *a mass of typewriting* […] *a wild story*[12] ».

Ce qui ouvre un plus large débat, au cœur de la littérature irlandaise et plus spécifiquement du « gothique » irlandais, si toutefois on peut concevoir une telle chimère : le débat sur la nature et les pouvoirs du langage. On connaît le pamphlet de Swift, *A Modest Proposal* (1729). *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767) – on laisse de côté la question de l'identité irlandaise de Sterne – a été décrit comme « *an account of the problems of telling a story…of getting it down to paper*[13] ». En 1820, dans un dialogue entre Immalee et Melmoth, Maturin déplore « *the bankruptcy of language*[14] ». *Melmoth the Wanderer* est l'emblème de la faillite du langage : au cours de cent cinquante années de pérégrinations, l'homme errant n'a jamais réussi à convaincre quelqu'un de reprendre le pacte diabolique à son compte. Mrs Edgeworth publie son dernier roman « irlandais », *Ormond*, en 1817, et elle écrira en 1834 :

> *It is impossible to draw Ireland as she now is in a book of fiction – realities are too strong, party passions are too violent to see, or care to look at their faces in the looking glass. The people would only break the glass, and curse the fool who held the mirror up to nature – distorted nature, in a fever*[15].

Peut-on traduire le réel par des mots, s'il est trop violent, trop insaisissable, trop instable ? S'il est, comme l'écrit Daniel Corkery, dominé par « *flux and uncertainty* », si « *the national consciousness may be described, in a native phrase, as a quaking sod. It is not English, nor Irish, nor Anglo-Irish* […][16] », « *Quaking sod, native soil, shifting bog* ». John Banville n'a pas de réponse : « *There is no form, no order, only echoes and coincidences, sleight of hand, dark laughter*[17] ». Beckett non plus, qui ne peut pas continuer mais qui doit continuer, qui doit « dire des mots tant qu'il y en a » : « Je vais avoir à parler de choses dont je ne peux parler […] Cependant je suis obligé de parler […][18] ». De Swift à Banville, à bien d'autres encore,

12. Stoker, *Dracula*, *op. cit.*, p. 378.
13. William Holtz, « Typography, Tristram Shandy, the Aposiopesis, etc. », *The Winged Skull*, Arthur H. Cash et John M. Stedmond (dir.), London, Methuen, 1971, p. 255.
14. Charles Robert Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer*, Oxford U.P., 1972, p. 298.
15. Lettre de Maria Edgeworth à M. Pakenham Edgeworth (14 fév. 1834), citée par Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography*, Oxford, Clarendon, p. 452.
16. Daniel Corkery, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature*, Cork, Cork U.P., 1931, p. 14.
17. John Banville, *Birchwood*, Paladin, 1987, p. 174.
18. Samuel Beckett, *L'Innommable*, Paris, Minuit, 1953, p. 8.

court cette longue, cette obsédante interrogation sur la puissance du mot ; intense, émouvante parfois dans le roman irlandais, à la poursuite d'une chimère insaisissable. *The Snake's Pass* et *Dracula*, son image « *in a glass darkly* », s'inscrivent dans un paysage fait d'incertitudes, parfois de résignation amère ou de désespoir. C'est le paysage de la modernité. À son firmament, quelques années plus tard, la fameuse *Lettre de Lord Chandos* (1902), écrite par Hugo von Hohmannstahl : « Les mots tournoient sans fin et à travers eux on atteint le vide[19] ». Et malgré tout, Beckett l'indomptable : « Il faut que le discours se fasse[20] ».

---

19. Hugo von Hofmannstahl, *Lettre de Lord Chandos et autres essais*, trad. A. Kohn et J.C. Schneider, Paris, 1980, p. 80.
20. Beckett, *L'Innommable, op. cit.*, p. 12.

Chapter thirteen

The Northern Ireland Civil Rights movement: the chimera of change and the spectre of sectarianism

///////////

Claire Mansour
Université Toulouse-Jean Jaurès

Abstract: Following the fiftieth anniversary of the Derry march of 5 October 1968 ––both Sinn Fein and the Democratic Unionist Party have been presenting a revised version of the history of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights movement exaggerating the role played by Republicans to fit in their own Manichean narratives. Former participants to the movement have on the contrary insisted that their cause was a genuinely non-sectarian attempt to bring change to Northern Ireland. They were trying to break away from the Orange and Green protest traditions to create a new, inclusive movement in order to obtain the same rights as other British citizens. Thanks to semi-structured interviews carried out with former members of various Civil Rights groups in October 2019, this chapter will shed light on their efforts to overcome the sectarian divide and bring about change through moderate demands. It will also endeavour to put the movement back into the context of the international uprisings of the 1960s by studying instances of cross-national diffusion of protest tactics and ideas which enabled activists to construct a different image for their movement, by summoning the respectable aura of the non-violent American Civil Rights movement or reinventing the radical slogans from the student protests in the United States and France. In their recollections, most activists depict thrilling times which contrast with the traditional narratives of the period, usually seen in the gloomy shadow of the Troubles. Thus, taking into account the international dimension of the context can be a way to counterbalance the narrow focus of the partisan versions presented by Sinn Fein and the DUP.

Keywords: Northern Ireland Civil Rights movement, People's Democracy, Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA), Cross-national diffusion, 1960s, Protest, Sectarianism

THE Northern Ireland Civil Rights movement emerged in the late 1960s, when, frustrated by the failure of conventional methods, activists decided to take their demands to the street. They were calling for the end of a number of discriminatory practices in elections and political representation, in housing and employment, as well as fairer policing. Most participants felt convinced that Northern Irish society needed to change, to become more equal, but their attempts were met by the reluctance to compromise of the opponents to their movement. In that respect, 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. The tension between the idealistic aspirations for change of the participants in the movement and the tendency to depict the period of Civil Rights agitation in a negative light because it was directly followed by the eruption of three decades of conflict known euphemistically as the Troubles will be the focus of this chapter.

The role and the motives of Civil Rights activists have given rise to different interpretations from commentators on both sides. The two main parties in Northern Ireland, the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Fein, are both trying to impose their visions of the movement in order to further their own ends. The recent commemorations of the fiftieth anniversaries of a number of landmarks in the history of the movement in 2018 and 2019 have crystalised the main controversial issues. On the one hand, the DUP maintains that the leading organisation of the movement, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA), had been formed and controlled by Republicans and Communists, and was, in short, nothing more than a front for the IRA, in line with what the founder of the party, Ian Paisley, who was possibly the most outspoken opponent to the movement, was already saying at the time. This version implies that the Civil Rights movement had a secret agenda and that its real purpose was to achieve Irish reunification.

On the other hand, Sinn Fein asserts that they had themselves played a crucial role in the Civil Rights movement, that they had been instrumental in the creation of the NICRA and have always been fighting for the rights of the people. Their goal is to legitimise their current position by presenting their fight as a continuous struggle, thwarted at every turn by hard-line Unionists who implacably rejected any concession. In the words of Sinn Fein's National Chairperson, Declan Kearney: "the civil and democratic rights legacy of the Civil Rights movement today remains unfinished business in the North. Fifty years on sections of political

Unionism continue to oppose the development of a rights-based society.["]1
Declan Kearney refers to the "North" as do most Sinn Fein spokespeople,
meaning "the North of Ireland" as if the island comprised only one sin-
gle state, and to "unfinished business" insinuating that the demands the
Civil Rights movement was agitating for, have still not been achieved, due
to the sheer hostility of hard-line Unionists. In fact, by 1973, the activ-
ists' original grievances had mostly been addressed by successive Unionist
governments, under the pressure of Westminster. The five-point reform
programme introduced by Terence O'Neill in November 1968 brought in
significant changes but still fell short of the leading 'one man, one vote'
demand by leaving the rate-payers' franchise untouched, and there was no
guarantee that the issue of policing would be resolved.[2] Universal suffrage
in local elections would be granted a few months later, in April 1969 and
came into effect for the first time in May 1973.[3] As for the maintenance of
law and order, the local police forces would be reformed in October 1969
and the repressive arsenal of the Special Powers Act would be repealed
with the imposition of direct rule from London in 1973.[4] Therefore, the
"civil and democratic rights" that Kearney alluded to are meant to depict
more recent issues like same-sex marriage, abortion and the Irish language
as part and parcel of the same movement for equality. The point is to por-
tray the DUP as a reactionary party, resolutely opposed to any degree of
change, to present Sinn Féin, by contrast as modern and progressive. To a
certain extent, Sinn Féin and the DUP agree on some elements. They both
tend to exaggerate the role played by Republicans within the Civil Rights
movement – albeit for different reasons. Their interpretation of the move-
ment is also restricted by their rigidly-polarised vision of Northern Irish
society, trying to make it fit in their Orange versus Green narratives.

Former participants to the movement tell, on the contrary, a very
different story. Thanks to qualitative semi-structured interviews carried
out with former members of various Civil Rights groups in Belfast and
Derry in October 2019, supplemented by references to existing literature
and archival material, this paper will show that the Civil Rights move-
ment was on the contrary a genuine attempt to transcend the politico-reli-
gious divide in the hope to effect change and needs to be placed within the
wider international context of the late 1960s. It will also be demonstrated
that the divisive collective memory of the movement springs from a form

1. Declan Kearney, "Declan Kearney: My factual reference to the role of republicans in
    civil rights movement was misrepresented", *The Irish News*, 21 February 2018 (https://
    www.irishnews.com/news/2018/02/21/news/declan-kearney-the-days-of-second-class-
    citizenship-are-over-in-the-north--1260110, last accessed on 5 September).
2. Marc Mulholland, *Northern Ireland at the Crossroads: Ulster Unionism in the O'Neill Years*,
    1960-9, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2000, p. 166.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 195.
4. Niall Ó Dochartaigh, *From Civil Rights to Armalites: Derry and the Birth of the Irish
    Troubles*, Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2005, p. 292-3; James Loughlin, *The Ulster
    Question since 1945*, London, Macmillan, 1998, p. 80.

of hindsight bias, caused by the haunting spectre of sectarian conflict and the dark shadow of the tragic events of the Troubles, cast retrospectively.

A non-sectarian movement for change

The Civil Rights movement split Northern Ireland along a new line: on the one hand, those who wanted change, who wanted Northern Ireland to become a fairer, more equal society where all citizens would have the same rights as on the British mainland, and on the other, those who rejected it, who wanted to preserve Protestant-Unionist domination over the Catholic-Nationalist minority – people belonging to that category tended to be mainly hard-line Unionists and Loyalists, and became the main opponents to the Civil Rights movement.

Environmental factors bridging the politico-religious divide

The 1960s were a period of change in Northern Ireland. The reforms of the post-war Labour government of Clement Attlee had been, for the most part, applied to Northern Ireland and had led to a rise in living standards and mass access to higher education, widening the gap with the Republic of Ireland. The concrete benefits of the British Welfare State contributed to changing the attitude of the Catholic-Nationalist community on the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, by convincing them that they were better off than their neighbours South of the border.[5] Cross-community relations were also improving, partly thanks to the impulse given by religious leaders who embraced the rising ecumenical movement, like Pope John XXIII and the Archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsey. This closer cooperation between churches took the form of joint religious celebrations and activities, thereby encouraging tolerance and increased interactions between communities.[6] The arrival to power of new reformist premiers like Sean Lemass – who became Taoiseach in 1959 and wanted to break away with anti-English nationalism and economic isolation, together with Terrence O'Neill – who became Prime Minister of Northern Ireland in 1963 and tried to dissociate himself from the anti-Catholicism often associated with the Ulster Unionist Party, also fostered a new spirit of reconciliation and collaboration between North and South, as well as

---

5.   Jonathan Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, Belfast, Blackstaff, 1992, p. 587.
6.   Bob Purdie, *Politics in the Streets: the Origins of the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland*, Belfast, Blackstaff, 1990, p. 18-20.

between Catholics and Protestants. They both met in Belfast in 1965, for the first official encounter since the partition of Ireland in 1921.[7]

The younger generation of activists involved in the Civil Rights movement had grown up amid these changes. More and more young people were going to university, and the proportion of Catholic students increased rapidly in the 1950s and 1960s.[8] Because primary and secondary education was, and still is, mostly segregated by religion, going to university allowed students to meet and interact with people from different backgrounds, particularly people from outside their religious community, which was often a first. For instance, Fergus Woods, who came from the Catholic-Nationalist area of West Belfast and who would become very active within the radical Civil Rights organisation based at Queen's University Belfast – the People's Democracy, exemplifies this trend:

> Essentially you were one tribe or the other. In my life, until I went to university, at 17, I lived in an area which was only Catholic, I went to a Catholic school, I didn't know anyone from another religion. I was enclosed in that community until I went to university and started to meet different types of people, and broadened up a bit.[9]

Before 1968, the only university in Northern Ireland was located in Belfast, leading students from across the province to leave their hometown. Young people were also becoming increasingly mobile, frequently going to England to find a summer job, thereby broadening their horizon and enabling them to mingle with individuals who did not define themselves in Orange or Green terms. Many future participants and leaders of the Civil Rights movement also crossed the Irish Sea to take part in the big demonstrations organised to protest against nuclear weapons and the war in Vietnam, which had both respectively become the focus of mass movements on the British mainland. These movements provided some of the future Civil Rights activists and organisers with a first experience of collective action, but also with a different protest culture, very distinct from the local Orange and Green traditions.

---

7.   Loughlin, *op. cit.*, p. 27, 31.
8.   Although there are no official denominational statistics available for these decades, articles in the student newspaper of Queen's University in Belfast estimate that the proportion of Catholic students had increased by 29% between 1946 and 1956, and amounted to 24% of the undergraduates in 1959. "Increase in Catholic Students at Queen's", *The Gown*, 7 December 1956, p. 4; "Agnostic Poll 1 in 8", *The Gown*, 20 November 1959, p. 1.
9.   Interview with Fergus Woods, 29 October 2019, Belfast.

An inclusive movement framed in moral terms

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and the protests against the Vietnam War were pacifist movements framing their demands in moral terms that had a universal appeal. Both Eamonn McCann, who had grown up in the Catholic-Nationalist Bogside area of Derry and would become one of the radical leaders of the Civil Rights movement, and Erskine Holmes, who came from a Protestant-Unionist background and would become a member of the executive of the NICRA, took part in the CND Aldermaston to London march in the early 1960s, then became the chairmen of the CND group at Queen's University.[10] As in Britain, where one of the figureheads of the movement was an Anglican priest – Canon of Saint Paul Cathedral John Collins, the Belfast branch of CND was first chaired by a Presbyterian minister – Reverend Alex Watson.[11] Despite its relatively small scale, the movement still managed to gather cross-community support, a salient feature that the Civil Rights movement would later retain.[12] To do so, the activists expressed their grievances in terms of universal values like fairness, justice, equality, and, more importantly, they did not question the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. Erskine Holmes described their approach: "what we wanted to do was to eliminate any differences between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom on citizens' rights, on the franchise, on the allocation of housing, on jobs, and so on and so forth. […] Full British rights, full British citizenship was the basic demand."[13]

The Civil Rights movement innovated by trying to be as inclusive as possible and to break away with traditional Northern Irish politics. It was a very broad church, and likewise, its two main organisations, the NICRA and the People's Democracy, gathered people from all sorts of backgrounds: Republicans, Nationalists, trade-unionists, Labour, Communists, unorthodox Marxists, Unionists, and a lot of apolitical people. Fergus Woods, who was a member of the executive committee of the People's Democracy (PD), recounted why he joined the movement: "Starting the PD, one of the reasons I became enthusiastic about it and I wanted to become involved in it was because I saw it as being non-sectarian, non-political – as in neither Unionist or Nationalist, I wouldn't have got involved in a very extreme party in one sense or another."[14]

---

10. Interview with Eamonn McCann, 28 October 2019, Derry; interview with Erskine Holmes, 30 October 2019, Belfast.
11. "The Campaign in Northern Ireland", *Peace News*, 22 May 1958, p. 2.
12. Interview with Eamonn McCann, *op. cit.*; interview with Erskine Holmes, *op. cit.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. Interview with Fergus Woods, *op. cit.*.

The movement against the Vietnam War, which emerged in the wake of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the mid-1960s, also drew from both sides of the politico-religious divide. Paul Arthur, who was raised in the Bogside, and became one of the main thinkers behind the People's Democracy, recalled his first memory of collective action:

> My first overtly political action was when I was in my final year at high school, when I was involved in a protest march from the Guildhall in Derry to the Waterside, where there was a US naval communication space. We were protesting against Vietnam and protesting against American foreign policy generally.[15]

This description of the route of the march in Derry going through the predominantly Protestant-Unionist Waterside area shows that the demonstrations against the Vietnam War broke away with the Nationalist and Unionist protest traditions and their sectarian division of the territory. In many places in Northern Ireland, and first and foremost in Derry – a city with a Catholic majority controlled by a Protestant minority, marching outside one's community would have been perceived as coat-trailing. The Civil Rights movement would also borrow from these early attempts to march through the city, regardless of politico-religious boundaries. On 5 October 1968, the NICRA organised a march into the city centre of Derry, which had been planned to start from the Waterside area, precisely to prove its non-sectarian character. In fact, this decision resulted in getting the demonstration banned by the authorities, blocked off by the police, before it degenerated into a scuffle which was violently repressed. One RTE television cameraman captured the shocking images which would contribute to get mass support for the Civil Rights movement. Paul Arthur, who experienced the events first hand, explained how frustrated the organisers and the participants were with the restrictions imposed on their legitimate use of public space:

> There was real anger about that. And there was real anger about the fact that, because we had said that we were non-sectarian, we deliberately wanted to walk from the Waterside to try and demonstrate that Derry did not belong to a particular political class or a particular religious outfit.[16]

But despite the efforts of the activists to transcend old political divisions and to rally in the name of universal moral principles, a particular section of the population did not get on board with it: hard-line Unionists and Loyalists, who perceived this movement for change as a real threat to the status quo. Eileen Weir, who had grown up in the Protestant-Unionist

---

15. Interview with Paul Arthur, 30 October 2019, Belfast.
16. *Ibid.*

Shankill area of Belfast, joined the paramilitary Ulster Defence Association in her teenage years before becoming a Civil Rights activist though her involvement with the trade unions, explained: "I was thirteen when the Civil Rights movement started […], but you would have heard adults talking about Civil Rights and everything else. And then it was perceived to be a Republican thing. So people from my community didn't get involved."[17]

The strategy used by Civil Rights organisers to avoid precisely this type of suspicious reaction and sectarian association had been to cast their local protest tradition aside, and to turn to foreign sources of inspiration.

Transnational diffusion: change inspired from abroad

The Northern Ireland Civil Rights movement can be seen as an example of the transnational diffusion of protest. This process, which has been theorised by sociologists Doug McAdam and Dieter Rucht,[18] happens when a group of activists decides to adopt the tactics and ideology of another group of activists in a different country, because they perceive some similarities between their respective situations and identify with them. The adopters will then adapt the elements borrowed from the transmitters to suit their own particular purposes. In the case of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights movement, activists looked mainly towards the American Civil Rights Movement, the international New Left and the French May of 1968.

The model of the American Civil Rights Movement

The movement of Martin Luther King, famous for its non-violent ethos and its strong focus on equality, was regarded by protesters as an example to be followed. This explains why they borrowed some aspects of its ideology and tactics. They adopted the frames[19] of the American movement, choosing deliberately to express their demands in terms of "Civil Rights", to describe the inferior status of the Catholic minority with the phrase "second-class citizens", or even, in some cases, to refer to them as

---

17. Interview with Eileen Weir, 30 October 2019, Belfast.
18. Doug McAdam & Dieter Rucht, "The Cross-National Diffusion of Movement Ideas", *Annals of the American Academy of Political Science*, DXXVIII(1), July 1993 (https://www.jstor.org/stable/1047791), p. 59.
19. Collective action frames are ideological elements which reflect how protesters perceive and interpret their situations, identify problems that they seek to remedy and try to mobilise support. For more detail, see Robert D. Benford & David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment", *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 2000 (doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.611), p. 615.

"White Negroes".[20] They also sang the anthem of the American movement, "We Shall Overcome" and started organising long marches linking different cities, modelled on the one that was organised in 1965 from Selma to Montgomery in Alabama to protest against racial discrimination, and had led directly to the passing of Civil Rights legislation. This particular tactic, which consisted in walking across the country over a few days to gather support despite the anticipated hostility of the opponents of the movement, was most notably used by the radical elements who were the driving force behind the People's Democracy in the first days of January 1969, when they led a group of about 80 marchers from Belfast to Derry.[21] Vincent McCormack, who participated in the Belfast to Derry march and was involved in its organisation, explained why they consciously chose to follow in the footsteps of Black Americans:

> I think we chose the model because so much of the Montgomery march was about discrimination, and all discrimination may have its own aspect, but it's called discrimination because it excludes people. It's the same. […] We felt that we could recognise our own situation in the situation of Black people in the United States.[22]

These perceived similarities between the condition of Black people in the Deep South and that of the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland enabled the activists to identify with their source of inspiration, drawing an analogy between racial and religious discrimination which would also serve as propaganda for their cause. The main reason why the Northern Irish Civil Rights organisers wanted to draw a parallel with the movement of Martin Luther King was to distinguish themselves from the local Orange and Green protest traditions, in order to emphasise the peaceful and non-sectarian nature of the movement, to involve both Catholic-Nationalist and Protestant-Unionist communities. "[…] we were thinking of Selma-Montgomery, and we believed, and I genuinely believed, that it was to demonstrate our non-sectarian bona fide", recalled Paul Arthur, one of the main organisers of the Long March – as it would come to be known. "We were actually quite pathetic, calling on Protestant protesters to come and join us because we were marching in their behalf. It was patronising, but it was very very innocent."[23]

This attempt to forge an alliance between students and workers and to unite the working class to transcend the politico-religious divide was the cornerstone of the strategy pursued by the left-wingers within the

---

20. This particular phrase came from a 1968 speech made by Fionnbarra ÓDochartaigh. Fionnbarra ÓDochartaigh, *Ulster's White Negroes: from Civil Rights to Insurrection*, Edinburgh, AK, 1994, p. xvii.
21. Paul Arthur, *The People's Democracy, 1968-1973*, Belfast, Blackstaff, 1974, p. 39.
22. Interview with Vincent McCormack, 28 October 2019, Derry.
23. Interview with Paul Arthur, *op. cit.*

People's Democracy. Vincent McCormack's testimony concurred: "[…] we were trying to actually get away from the Nationalist model, towards a more Socialist model, and therefore concentrate on issues relating to equality."[24] In that respect, other significant influences were the events of the French May and the intellectual current of the New Left.

People's Democracy as a New Left organisation

The People's Democracy played a crucial role within the Civil Rights movement by giving it a more dynamic and radical impulse, spurring on the more moderate Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association. It was formed at Queen's University as a reaction to the violent repression of the march of 5 October in Derry. Paul Arthur, a recent graduate at the time, described the feeling of moral outrage among the students who had witnessed the events first hand, or seen them subsequently on television, and decided to take action:

> Because of what happened in Derry, we came back to Belfast and we organised a march from the university to the city centre – again to demonstrate our non-sectarian bona fide, and we were amazed at the numbers who came along, at the McMordie Hall, and it was then just a young generation of students, who, for the most part, had been apolitical, and who decided that it wasn't right, what they had seen. […] And we set out, then we were stopped and had to come back to Queen's, that's when we established the People's Democracy.[25]

The fact that this march to protest against the events in Derry was in turn rerouted and then forced to come to a halt by the police to avoid a clash with Loyalist counterdemonstrators only reinforced the protesters' sense of injustice. They chose to create an organisation that would reflect their rejection of the Northern Irish political scene, founded on the core egalitarian principles of the New Left. The New Left was an international ideological current that had emerged as an alternative to Soviet-style Communism and Social Democracy in the late 1950s. Its ideas influenced students across the globe, providing the ideological background for the Free Speech Movement of 1964 at the University of Berkeley, California, and the Movement of 22 March at Nanterre University, West of Paris.[26] Both would become key sources of inspiration for the young members of the People's Democracy. From the onset, they established their

---

24. Interview with Vincent McCormack, *op. cit.*
25. Interview with Paul Arthur, *op. cit.*
26. Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North American, 1956-1976*, Oxford, Oxford U.P, 2007, p. 60-65, 102-104.

organisation on the principle of participatory democracy and endowed it with an open, non-hierarchical structure. It had no individual leader but a committee called the "Faceless Committee" made up of ten members with no previous political affiliations, like Bernadette Devlin – an unknown psychology student who would become one of the rising stars of the movement and would be elected to Westminster the following year. Paul Arthur recalled: "We came up with this name of People's Democracy, this notion of Faceless Committee, and this sort of permanent thinking – which we had taken from Paris – when we would talk all day and all night, and everyone would have their speak."[27] All decisions were taken collectively at meetings where anybody could attend, participate and vote, which meant that debates often carried on late into the night. For its first year of existence, which was arguably its most influential phase, it had no fixed membership. Eamonn McCann, who was also involved in the group, explained:

> To be a member of the People's Democracy, all you had to do was to turn up at the meetings. And you're a member. There was no entry, there was no register, the organisation never had a bank account, an address, never had a secretary. So I took part in a lot of activities based on this. […] Such was the democracy in People's Democracy that at every stage they had a vote to do the next stuff, at every stage![28]

To illustrate this statement, Eamonn McCann remembered one particular march to the Belfast City Hall which had been outlawed and blocked off by the police, leading the protesters to stage a sit-down in the street and decide what to do next. The chair organising the discussion, a young lecturer called Cyril Toman, went as far as asking the policemen surrounding them to take part in the vote.[29]

Emulated by the events of the French May, the People's Democracy adopted the tactic of the occupation. On 24 October 1968 – which was both symbolically United Nations Day in what had been declared International Human Rights Year and the day when a Human Rights Bill was to be discussed in Stormont – the young protesters occupied the main hallway of the Northern Ireland Parliament for several hours, trying to gather support for the bill after the House had refused to consider it.[30] Paul Arthur, who along with Bernadette Devlin was one of the leading organisers of that action, explained that the French model had been a real source of influence for them, but unlike the Movement of 22 March which was originally centred around student issues, and then widened its focus during the May Days, the People's Democracy immediately agitated for societal

---

27. Interview with Paul Arthur, *op. cit.*
28. Interview with Eamonn McCann, *op. cit.*
29. *Ibid.*
30. Interview with Paul Arthur, *op. cit.*; Bernadette Devlin-McAliskey, *The Price of My Soul*, London, Pan, 1972, p. 108-109.

demands.[31] They were demonstrating not so much as students, but as citizens, seeking to change the whole structure of Northern Irish society, and, for a very brief moment, they would get the opportunity to challenge the authority of the state and bring their ideals to life.

Brushing off the shadow of the Troubles

Paradoxically, the march of 5 October 1968 in Derry is both the moment when the Civil Rights movement gained mass support while being also usually pinpointed as the start of the Troubles. For that particular reason, the most common account given of the years 1968-69 is generally one of escalating tensions and spiralling violence, ultimately leading to armed conflict. While this is undoubtedly true, it should not obscure the fact that these two years were a time of hope for Civil Rights activists in Northern Ireland. They felt that change was possible, within reach, and this is why some of them seem to have a positive outlook on the period, describing the events and the atmosphere surrounding them in relatively carefree, festive terms that have more in common with the late 1960s in other countries than with the gloom usually associated to the Troubles.

Free Derry

The so-called "no-go" areas of Derry and, to a lesser extent Belfast, illustrate this point perfectly. The expression "no-go" area, is seen from the point of view of the authorities, but to the activists, these enclaves were known as Free Derry and Free Belfast. On 4 January 1969, the final day of the Long March from Belfast to Derry, protesters were ambushed and brutally assaulted by Loyalists with the connivance of the police at Burntollet Bridge, just before they reached their destination, and again, as they crossed the Waterside area of the town.[32] As the news of the attack spread, more clashes ensued between the police and Catholic-Nationalist youths from the Bogside. During the night, a cohort of police forces ran amok in the Bogside, brutalising its inhabitants and damaging property. As an act of self-defence, the people of the area erected barricades to protect themselves from another onslaught.[33] What shows through the testimonies of those who experienced that episode is the initial fear caused by the violent

31.   Interview with Paul Arthur, *op. cit.*
32.   For a detailed account of the Long March, see Bowes Egan & Vincent McCormack, *Burntollet*, London, LRS, 1969.
33.   Michael Farrell, *Northern Ireland: The Orange State*, London, Pluto, 1980, p. 251; Simon Prince, *Northern Ireland's '68: Civil Rights, Global Revolt and the Origins of the Troubles*, Newbridge, Irish Academic Press, 2018, p. 212.

attack of the security forces, followed by a heady sense of empowerment for managing to keep them out of the Bogside. Vincent McCormack, who took part both in the march and in the ensuing Free Derry experiment, recalled:

> As a result of police actions and police collusion with Loyalists, people were very very fearful, for their lives and safety, which is why the barricades went up. Everyone helped in their own way. [...] [The atmosphere] was one of liberation. We were demonstrating and we could control our futures and get organised, so that there was a sense of freedom.[34]

The area inside the barricades encompassing the Catholic-Nationalist districts of the Bogside, Brandywell and lower Creggan was proclaimed "Free Derry" – a name that originated from a famous graffiti painted on a gable wall that said "You are now entering Free Derry". With hindsight, it is easy to interpret that name as a Republican slogan, since "Free Derry" could refer to liberation from Unionist or British rule. But its original meaning was actually a reference to American students protesting to defend their right to freedom of opinion and expression. Eamonn McCann came up with the idea and told a local teenager to paint the message. He explained:

> The slogan was taken directly from a sign which was outside Berkeley college at the University of Berkeley, California, where a few years earlier, there was the Berkeley Free Speech movement, with Mario Savio. There was a little sign outside as the students were occupying the university, [...], and they had a cardboard that said "You are now entering Free Berkeley". And we saw that and thought "That's cool!" So in January 1969, when the police had been driven out of the Bogside – the first time it ever happened – with barricades around it, "You are now entering Free Derry". In a funny way, without thinking about it, student occupations in California, and the Civil Rights movement here in Derry, all that distance away, were the same thing, with the same slogan, one echoed the other.[35]

The Free Speech Movement was a protest against the restrictions on political activities on campus that took place in 1964, when students involved in the American Civil Rights movement used civil disobedience to defy the ban.[36] To the young radical activists of the People's Democracy and other local left-wing groups like the Young Socialists and the Derry Labour Party, the barricades of Free Derry were a sign of their belonging

---

34. Interview with Vincent McCormack, *op. cit.*
35. Interview with Eamonn McCann, *op. cit.*
36. Horn, *op. cit.*, p. 60-65.

to the global wave of protest that swept many parts of the world in the late 1960s and the concrete realisation of the New Left ideals of worker-student alliances, autonomy and self-organisation. This can be seen in this description of the atmosphere given at the time, in January 1969, by Paul Campbell, a student actively involved in the People's Democracy who helped with the organising of Free Derry:

> Behind the barricades the embryo of a new society developed – a society distinguished from the rest of the world by the camaraderie and interdependence that was necessary for the co-ordinated running of Free Derry. […] Such features were manifest in the willingness of each man to take his time on the barricades, by the co-operation of the people in feeding the people, by the communal cigarette packets, and by the setting up of a Free Derry Radio as an expression of the community's unity of action.[37]

The utopian dimension of this account, portraying Free Derry as a revolutionary commune, with a number of alternative institutions designed to make the community self-reliant, concurs with the memories of Eamonn McCann, Paul Arthur and Vincent McCormack. For instance, a "people's militia" was created to man the barricades and defend the area. Its recruits were given free cigarettes to lay the emphasis on the spirit of solidarity, because in the words of McCann "everybody smoked" at the time.[38] The young left-wingers also produced their own daily alternative newspaper, *The Barricades Bulletin*, to inform the people of the area of what was happening and to try to get their support. The articles were written, edited and printed in a flat in the Bogside, and it was then distributed from door to door by local children.[39] Another alternative means of communication was the creation of Radio Free Derry, thanks to a radio transmitter smuggled in by members of the People's Democracy and taken to the top of a block of flats. On the waves of their pirate station, the protesters broadcast political messages about the Civil Rights movement, made the case for civil disobedience and played a mix of folk and pop music. Music played a key role at the time, and the young left-wingers sought to use it to get support for their ideas by organising a festival – the "Freedom *Fleadh*" (festival in Irish) – which took place behind the barricades in August 1969. They managed to attract famous Irish folk bands like The Dubliners and Tommy Makem, from the Clancy Brothers, as well as local bands from Derry. The motto of the festival was "Derry Merry, Derry Free" and it was written in large block letters on a banner hung between two trees. The organisers had also arranged to provide free toffee apples and donkey rides for children by borrowing two donkeys from

---

37. "Derry squat-in goes on", *Peace News*, 17 January 1969, p. 2.
38. Interview with Eamonn McCann, *op. cit.*
39. Interviews with Paul Arthur, Vincent McCormack and Eamonn McCann, *op. cit.*

a neighbouring farm. Eamonn McCann, who was the leading organiser of the Free Derry *Fleadh*, recalled:

> So we had all this going on, it was terrific. We had balloons! Oh, jumping up and down and all that stuff! That was part of that atmosphere of fun, enjoyment, of celebration. In the midst of all the CS gas, and violence and fear, there was also this celebration of freedom! And also of achievement! [...] A sense of achievement for yourself and for the community. [...] It was, I remember very well, I remember the feeling of it, holding our heads up high.[40]

If the initial Free Derry experiment lasted only for six days in January 1969, the barricades went up again briefly in April, and in August of the same year after two days of intense rioting following the annual Loyalist parade of the Apprentice Boys.[41] Riots then spread to the rest of Northern Ireland, and violent clashes in Belfast gave birth to the enclave of Free Belfast in the Falls and Ardoyne areas.[42]

Free Belfast

While Free Belfast shared some of the characteristics of Free Derry, like the creation the pirate station Radio Free Belfast, an underground publication called *Citizen Press* and the taking over of the policing and defence of the area by local groups of residents, the atmosphere seemed to have been more tensed.[43] This could be explained by the fact that the Free areas of Belfast were directly adjacent to working-class Protestant-Unionist districts, Shankill, Woodvale and Crumlin – causing considerable friction.[44] Nonetheless, some People's Democracy members were involved in the running of the enclave. For instance, Fergus Woods, who helped presenting and overseeing Radio Free Belfast, explained:

> Belfast was always different from Derry because there was very much more of a sectarian thing going on in Belfast. [...] Radio Free Belfast, the barricades, it was a bit of an adventure for me too, and it was exciting as well, you know, you were going down to do your shift and then you would come out through the barricades. [...] I remember feeling very comfortable, very much welcomed. People generally felt

40. Interview with Eamonn McCann, *op. cit.*
41. Paul Arthur, *The People's Democracy, op. cit.*, p. 51, 58, 67.
42. *Ibid*, p. 67-68; Michael Farrell, *op. cit.*, p. 263.
43. Interviews with Paul Arthur and Fergus Woods, *op. cit.*; Arthur, *The People's Democracy, op. cit.*, p. 67-69.
44. David McKittrick & David McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, London, Penguin, 2001, p. 54-55.

> that – even though I wasn't a student at the time – these students are nice people and they're helping us, I had that definite impression. […] It was a good time really. It was more kind of joyful and bonding, there was no talk of violence, or taking on revenge on anybody. But it was one of the first times I saw a gun, a person armed with a gun.[45]

If Free Derry and Free Belfast embodied the concrete realisation of key New Left ideals, they paradoxically also contributed to the polarisation of the situation along sectarian lines. Some of the men in charge of the protection of the Free areas were Republicans, like Seán Keenan in Derry, or Jim Sullivan and Liam MacMillen in Belfast.[46] The escalation of violence would then drive individual Republicans to be increasingly concerned with the defence of the Free areas, and lead to a revival of the IRA.[47] The paramilitary organisation, who had, thus far, been dormant after the failure of its 1956-62 campaign, started remobilising to take over its self-assigned role: the defence of the Catholic-Nationalist community.[48] By August 1971, when the barricades went up again as a response to the introduction of internment without trial, armed men from both wings of the IRA – the Official and the Provisional[49] – were openly patrolling the Free areas.[50] The resurgence of the IRA convinced many Protestant-Unionists that the Civil Rights movement had been a Republican ploy to press for a united Ireland and that the protesters' demands of equal rights for all British citizens had been disingenuous.[51] As the situation degenerated into armed conflict, the dark shadow of the Troubles fell onto Northern Ireland.

Conclusion

The Civil Rights movement was an attempt to achieve moderate demands to change Northern Ireland into a fairer, more equal society, as part of the United Kingdom. It involved people from various backgrounds and strands of opinion. It drew on the previous movements of the early sixties, like those against nuclear weapons and the war in Vietnam, which had gained mass support on the British mainland and had also involved activists from both sides of the politico-religious divide in Northern Ireland,

45. Interview with Fergus Woods, *op. cit.*
46. Interviews with Paul Arthur and Fergus Woods, *op. cit.*
47. Niall Ó Dochartaigh, *op. cit.*, p. 37, 162.
48. David McKittrick and David McVea, *op. cit.*, p. 59-60.
49. In December 1969, the IRA split into two rival factions, the 'Red' or Official IRA which was characterised by its Marxist views, and the 'Green' or Provisional IRA, who advocated a more traditional and Conservative Republican approach. McKittrick & McVea, *op. cit.*, p. 59-60.
50. Ó Dochartaigh, *op. cit.*, p. 236.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

as well as other movements taking place abroad, like the American Civil Rights movement, the Free Speech Movement or the protests of the French May. Northern Irish activists did so in a conscious effort to try to build an inclusive, peaceful, non-sectarian movement, that would break away with the Orange and Green traditions. The "no-go" or "Free" areas of Belfast and Derry embodied the ideals of autonomy and self-help characteristic of the international New Left, as well as drawing from the homegrown Republican tradition, which they would ultimately contribute in reviving. Therefore, the international context of the late 1960s needs to be taken into account to shed light on the history of Northern Ireland and question the partisan narratives depicted by both Sinn Fein and the DUP.

Without falling into the trap of looking back with rose-tinted glasses, the testimonies of the participants to the Civil Rights movement give both colour and complexity to the general view of the period as the start of the Troubles. They show that the sense of empowerment, liberation and joy that characterised the late 1960s in various countries did not elude Northern Ireland.

Claire Mansour is a lecturer in British and Irish studies at the University of Toulouse Jean-Jaurès. Her research focuses mainly on the diffusion of social movements in the long sixties in the United Kingdom, including national, cross-national, diachronic and synchronic processes.

Sources

Interviews
Arthur, Paul, 30 October 2019, Belfast.
Holmes, Erskine, 30 October 2019, Belfast.
McCann, Eamonn, 28 October 2019, Derry.
McCormack, Vincent, 28 October 2019, Derry.
Walker, Linda, 27 October 2019, Belfast.
Weir, Eileen, 30 October 2019, Belfast.
Woods, Fergus, 29 October 2019, Belfast.

Press articles
"Increase in Catholic Students at Queen's", *The Gown*, 7 December 1956, p. 4.
"The Campaign in Northern Ireland", *Peace News*, 22 May 1958, p. 2.
"Agnostic Poll 1 in 8", *The Gown*, 20 November 1959, p. 1.
"Derry squat-in goes on", *Peace News*, 17 January 1969, p. 2.
"Declan Kearney: My factual reference to role of republicans in civil rights movement was misrepresented", *The Irish News*, 21 February 2018 (https://www.irishnews.com/news/2018/02/21/news/declan-kearney-the-days-of-second-class-citizenship-are-over-in-the-north--1260110, last accessed on 05 September 2020).

Bibiliography
Arthur, Paul, *The People's Democracy, 1968-1973*, Belfast, Blackstaff, 1974.
Bardon, Jonathan, *A History of Ulster*, Belfast, Blackstaff, 1992.

Benford, Robert D. & David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment", *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 2000, p. 611-639 (doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.611).

Devlin-McAliskey, Bernadette, *The Price of My Soul*, London, Pan, 1972.

Egan, Bowes & Vincent McCormack, *Burntollet*, London, LRS, 1969.

Farrell, Michael, *Northern Ireland: The Orange State*, London, Pluto, 1980.

Horn, Gerd-Rainer, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North American, 1956-1976*, Oxford, Oxford U.P., 2007.

Loughlin, James, *The Ulster Question since 1945*, London, Macmillan, 1998.

McAdam, Doug & Dieter Rucht, "The Cross-National Diffusion of Movement Ideas", *Annals of the American Academy of Political Science*, DXXVIII(1), July 1993, p. 56-74 (https://www.jstor.org/stable/1047791).

McKittrick, David & David McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, London, Penguin, 2001.

Mulholland, Marc, *Northern Ireland at the Crossroads: Ulster Unionism in the O'Neill Years, 1960-9*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2000.

ÓDochartaigh, Fionnbarra, *Ulster's White Negroes: from Civil Rights to Insurrection*, Edinburgh, AK, 1994.

ÓDochartaigh, Niall, *From Civil Rights to Armalites: Derry and the Birth of the Irish Troubles*, Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2005.

Prince, Simon, *Northern Ireland's '68: Civil Rights, Global Revolt and the Origins of the Troubles*, Newbridge, Irish Academic Press, 2018.

Purdie, Bob, *Politics in the Streets: the Origins of the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland*, Belfast, Blackstaff, 1990.