"A CRY OF WIND THROUGH A RUINED HOUSE": TRAUMA AND THE

CONTEMPORARY TROUBLES NOVEL IN NORTHERN IRELAND

AN ABSTRACT

SUBMITTED ON THE THIRTIETH DAY OF MARCH 2016
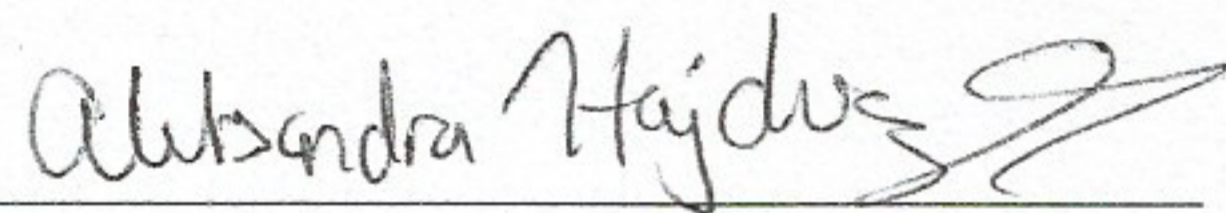
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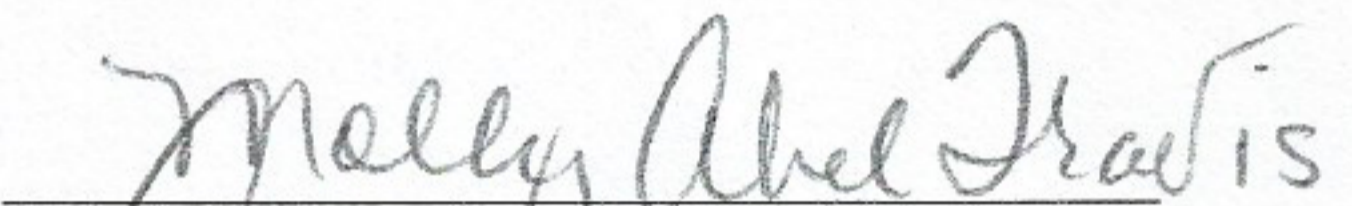OF THE SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS

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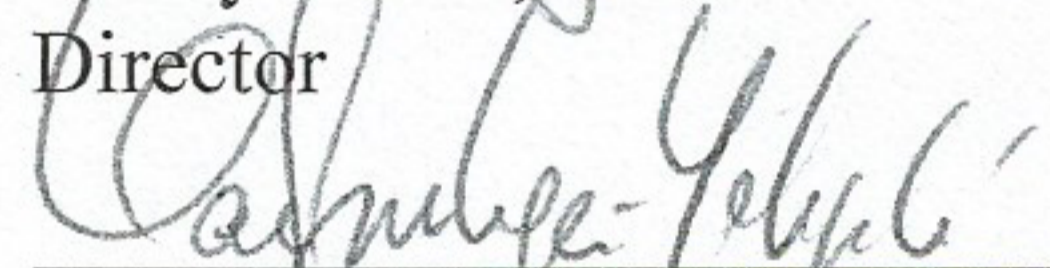
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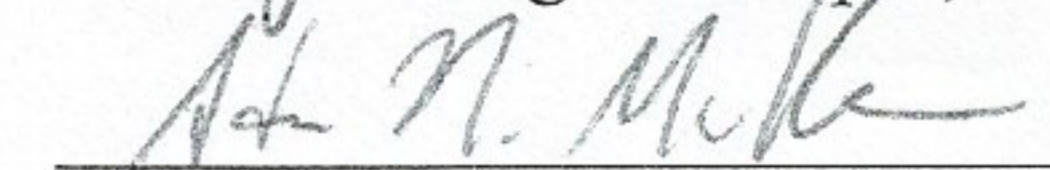
BY

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Aleksandra Hajduczek

APPROVED: _____
Molly Travis, Ph.D.
Director

_____
Karen Zumhagen-Yekple, Ph.D.

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Adam McKeown, Ph.D.

<u>Abstract</u>

This dissertation will examine how recent Northern Irish novelists have chosen to represent and respond to the lasting impact of the Troubles after the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. In particular, my first chapter will explore how texts written during the peace process and after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (1998) deal with transgenerational trauma and its continuing impact on post-conflict Northern Ireland by focusing on the Troubles *Bildungsroman*. In my second chapter, I will look at how contemporary authors focus on recovering "lost narratives" from the past as a means of approaching reconciliation. Finally, in my third chapter I will examine how a tired and clichéd genre like the thriller has been reimagined and reclaimed as an appropriate means of representing the sectarian conflict and its traumatic aftermath. In order the explore these issues, trauma theory, which has been successfully used to examine narrative representations about the Holocaust and the American slave trade, will be employed as a theoretical framework to analyze how recent fictional narratives about the Troubles attempt to represent and come to terms with the historical and individual trauma in Northern Ireland. Additionally, I will incorporate Jacque Derrida's notions about archivization and forgiveness, which have a strong affinity with topics related to trauma, such as the return of the repressed and the impact of historical suffering on the individual and national psyche.

"A CRY OF WIND THROUGH A RUINED HOUSE": TRAUMA AND THE

CONTEMPORARY TROUBLES NOVEL IN NORTHERN IRELAND

A DISSERTATION

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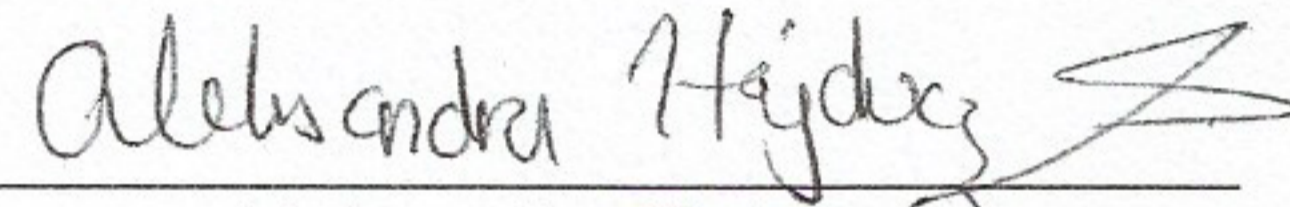TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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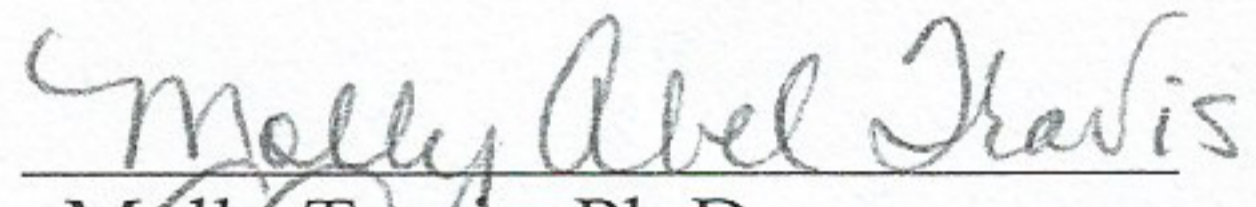
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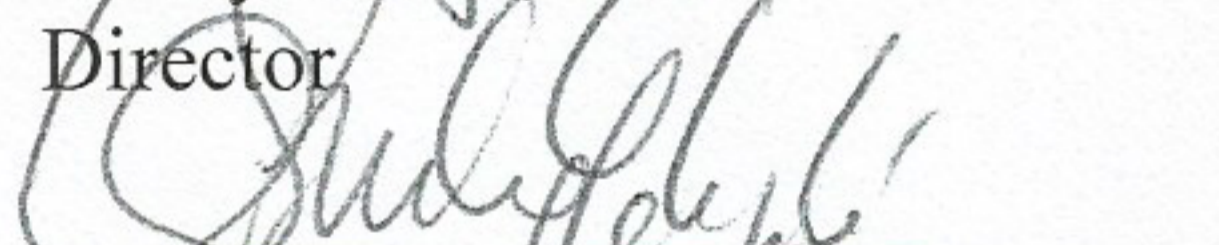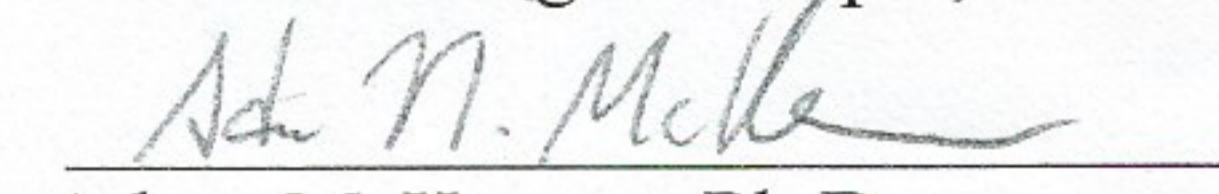
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Adam McKeown, Ph.D.

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Introduction

Why should every victim not have an elegy? A poem so fitted to their death (and life)
that the massive memorial diversity would unignorably challenge Northern Irish memory
– Edna Longley[1]

Towards the conclusion of Deirdre Madden's novel *One by One in the Darkness*

(1997), her protagonist, Cate, whose return to rural Northern Ireland subsequently forces

her to confront her father's mistaken assassination decades earlier by members of the

IRA, contemplates what an ideal memorial paying homage to all the victims of the

Troubles would look like. Madden writes:

> She imagined a room, a perfectly square room. Three of its walls, unbroken by
> windows, would be covered by neat rows of names, over three thousand of them; and
> the fourth wall would be nothing but a window. The whole structure would be built
> where the horizon was low, the sky huge. It would be a place which afforded dignity
> to memory, where you could bring your anger, as well as your grief. (149)

The fact that such a memorial, one that Michael Parker notes "serves as a potential space

for recuperation, a theater for purgation," exists only in the imagination of a fictional

character is notable, considering that, to date, there has been no "official" monument or

memorial that commemorates all of the diverse victims of the sectarian conflict (183).

While some progress to address this omission has been made, such as Healing Through

Remembering's establishment of an annual personal day of reflection, most attempts at

such inclusive commemoration have been complicated by the deep divisions that still

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[1]   From 'Northern Ireland: Commemoration, Elegy, Forgetting' in *History and Memory in Modern
Ireland*. Ed. Ian McBridge. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 223-53.

exist within Northern Irish society, even after the peace process. This fact has tended to spawn, at most, partisan monuments or memorials dedicated to large-scale incidents, such as Bloody Sunday (1972) or the Omagh Bombing (1998). Conversely, when curators, artists, or cross-community activists have attempted to provide more inclusive modes of commemoration, such as Isobel Hyland's *Taking Account* exhibit, which projected the names of all the victims onto an electronic billboard, these efforts have been met with hostility or outright rejection by various members of the Northern Irish community.

One result of this impasse is that many artists and historians have chosen to focus on forms of remembrance that look beyond the boundaries of a physical monument, specifically highlighting the act of storytelling as one means of bringing together multiple, and often contradictory, perspectives about the conflict. One such model, for example, can be found in *Lost Lives: The Stories of the Men, Women and Children Who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles* (1999), a 1,500 page text that details the lives and deaths of all the various victims and has been labelled by its authors as simultaneously representing a memorial, an archive, and an alternate history. In a similar sense, novels that were published in the midst and aftermath of the peace process have stepped in to fill a similar void. Specifically, such works have provided a reexamination of the conflict that moves beyond a reductive univocal perspective, an exploration of previously taboo subject matter (such as collusion and the fate of the disappeared), and a commemoration of the various victims of the Troubles, in particular those whose stories are at risk of being marginalized or subsumed by state-sanctioned "official" narratives about the past.

Yet, despite the proliferation of post-peace process texts, the "Troubles novel" has generally been overlooked in critical studies about Northern Irish fiction, a trend that is partly grounded in the genre's slow development to address local historical conflicts. For example, in *The Rattle of the North: An Anthology of Ulster Prose* (1995), Patricia Craig states that "it is well known that conditions in the North of Ireland, from Plantation times on, were never sufficiently settled to foster literary activity, and that the development of the novel, in particular, was consequently retarded" (1). Thus, this particular genre provides a late contribution in terms of literary works that explicitly deal with the Troubles and, as a result, this fact has led to a pattern of critical scholarship that has been more focused on poetry rather than on prose fiction. In particular, poetic voices like Seamus Heaney's and Derek Mahon's have been heralded as legacies "of a bardic past" and "the twentieth-century inheritance of a Yeatsian aesthetic grounded in the creative tension between commitment and artistic independence" (Patten 130).   Other genres, therefore, were seen as more adequate to representing the complex issues of the sectarian conflict, and, therefore, critical engagement, while occasionally focusing on the Troubles novel, has tended to emphasize poetry, drama, and, eventually, short stories. Thus, as Joseph McMinn notes, while there has been "much critical interest" in "those Ulster poets who deal indirectly with the 'Troubles," there has been "very little interest in that form which is traditionally more direct in its reflections of society and the individual" (113).

Critical disparagement of the novels written in the 1970s and 1980s, additionally, can be attributed to the fact that the novels written during the height of the Troubles were often categorized as offering either a delayed, underdeveloped, or marginal exploration of the conflict. Specifically, most works that emerged during that time period were

disparaged for adhering too strongly to naturalism or realism, modes which Elmer Kennedy-Andrews argues are the result of fiction writers who were "ill-at-ease with the social and political issues of the conflict" (7). Moreover, such narratives were often labeled as inadequate when dealing with the position of a colonial or traumatized subject. For example, Gerry Smyth notes that the distinctive characteristics of the realist novel (linearity, unity, and closure) are "challenged by ones which more closely represent the reality experienced by the colonized subject (confusion, displacement, ambivalence, in effect a radical alienation from the reality promulgated by colonist ideology)" (23). In a similar vein, novels from the pre-peace process era were also catalogued in terms of their adherence to specific Troubles tropes, most notably domestic fiction, love-across-the-barricades stories, "Troubles Trash" thrillers, or, more generally, texts that seemed mired in replicating a perspective that defined the conflict as an ongoing, inevitable, and entrenched historical repetition of past struggles. Thus, the critical consensus about Troubles novels written during the conflict itself tends to fall into two neatly defined categories: either a "skeletal (and necessary bleak) realism as the most appropriate means of national self-critique" or an apolitical liberal humanism, "which repeatedly located a well-meaning individual within a debilitating and ultimately damaging political context" (Patten 131).

However, beginning in the 1990s, there is notable shift in terms of the kinds of novels being produced in Northern Ireland. In particular, new narrative modes were implemented and a more complex, distanced, and critical approach was taken by writers who came of age during the latter half of the conflict. Additionally, postmodern literary techniques began to emerge, such as a reworking or subversion of previous clichéd forms

and genres, a reexamination of collectively accepted historical or state-sanctioned narratives about the past, as well as the incorporation of humor, satire, pastiche, and irony. Taken together, these texts suggest that the conflict could not and should not be represented or understood through a reductive univocal perspective, and instead highlight the contention that it is "only when the novel is made difficult – parodied, mimicked, overlain with other forms of narrative and other genres – that it ceases to collude with the colonialist status quo" (Smyth 26). Yet these new modes continue to be overlooked in terms of critical attention; for example, as Stephanie Schwerter notes, though "the trend towards a carnivalesque exploration of the Troubles became increasingly apparent only in recent years, the new tendency has rarely been commented on" (19). Similarly, several scholars have dismissed the significance of these new technical and stylistic innovations, arguing that there has "been too much 'grief' of various kinds" to allow the contemporary Northern Irish writer to effectively engage in postmodernism or that the new trend towards postmodernism represents, rather, a masked return to the naturalism of the 1970s and 1980s (Cosgrove 387). Thus, as Joe Cleary argues in "Toward a Materialist History of Twentieth-Century Irish Literature," such techniques could plausibly be argued to "represent an essentially superficial renovation of an old aesthetic… since the formal experiment remains shackled to the same dystopian, entropic, naturalist worldview" (236).

<div align="center">II.</div>

In many ways, the few book-length scholarly studies that focus exclusively on the Troubles novel shaped these kinds of critical assessments, while at the same time charting the early stages of development for the new forms of fiction that began to arise towards

the tail end of the conflict. John Wilson Foster's *Forces and Themes in Ulster Fiction* (1974) represents the first comprehensive study to attempt to define Northern Irish literature as a unique genre, one that exists apart from the writing that was emerging in the Irish Republic at that time. While Foster's survey does not focus solely on novels, it remains important as the first scholarly work to fully engage with Northern Irish fiction, establish the genre's central motifs and themes, and map the literary and cultural changes of the region since Plantation times. However, Foster never explicitly defines the boundaries of what may be considered "Ulster fiction," and instead focuses his examination on a familiar dichotomy between "rural nationalists," identified as realist writers (like Brian Friel and Benedict Kiely) who he claims offer uncritical representations of the peasant class and the love of the land, and urban, middle-class, Protestant novelists, epitomized by authors such as Brian Moore. Furthermore, Foster ultimately concludes that both groups are working within restrictive perspectives: the rural nationalists remain provincial and limited in their scope, while the urban Protestants, due to their weakened cultural power, "are tragic in the classical sense of having wasted their creative potential, misused their power and failed to recognize their character flaw of overweening pride that has rendered their power brittle and their outlook myopic" (275). Thus, while Foster does offer some insight into the importance of topography and place, his overall assessment of the literary landscape tends to rely more on contrasts and binary divisions between these two worldviews and, ultimately, he finds both perspectives to be inadequate when contending with contemporary issues. It is also notable, however, that in 1974 Ulster fiction was a subject that reviewer Terence Brown contends is not "a particularly enthralling topic for book-length treatment,"

although he argues that Foster "manages to make the subject seem worthwhile, even important," despite only focusing on, in Brown's opinion, "two writers of real weight" (58).

By 1998, with more than 500 published novels that fell under the category of "Troubles Fiction," such an assessment would seem outdated; however, in *Writing the North: The Contemporary Novel in Northern Ireland* (1998), the first academic survey to focus exclusively on the contemporary Troubles novel, Laura Pelaschiar notes that "no critic has as yet gone so far as to claim for [these works] the title of 'Northern Irish Literature'" (9). Pelaschiar's interest in the genre stems from her argument that poets like Seamus Heaney and Michael Longley have approached the Troubles from a critical distance, often grounding their interpretations of the conflict in folklore or mythology, and employing "analogies, allegorized or metaphorized in other historical or geographical situations and contexts," to create this distance and universalize violence (18). By contrast, Pelaschiar argues that the contemporary Northern Irish novelist approaches the same issues in a more direct manner and, thus, her study concentrates on establishing the key literary figures and the common themes found in the genre. In this sense, like Foster, Pelaschiar is less concerned with providing a theoretical framework for her critical assessment and more interested in laying the groundwork to establish and group these writers together in terms of stylistic similarities and common thematic concerns, such as dysfunctional families (in particular, father/son relationships), pathological personalities and their connection to terrorism, and the role of Belfast as a "post-modern urban centre" (115).

Thus, Pelaschiar's study is noteworthy for both its attempt to define the specific

characteristics of "Northern Irish literature" and its overall scope of identifying the major

contributors to the Troubles novel, including a new generation of writers who, she

contends, "have consciously tried to represent a Northern Ireland which, far from being a

fated place of unresolvable violence, becomes instead a location for multiple

opportunities" (115). However, Pelaschiar is notably dismissive of the thriller genre,

which, by the 1990s, was heavily identified with the conflict, claiming that such works

are generally "badly crafted, simplistic and inflammatory and rather than attempt to

understand and participate in the human tragedy of the part of the world they are writing

about, they exploit it for authorial fame and financial gain" (19). While she does later

concede that, "in certain skillful Northern Irish hands, the Troubles thrillers have risen

above the expected functions of their form and been transformed into penetrating studies

of a complex reality," Pelaschiar does not pursue this analysis or discuss these novels at

length (21). Similarly, because of her lack of a clear theoretical framework, Pelaschiar

tends to cite concepts from both postmodern and trauma theory, among others,

throughout her close reading of the fiction, but without any explicit or extended treatment

of how such contexts inform the development of the contemporary Northern Irish novel.[2]

Lastly, Elmer Kennedy-Andrews' *Fiction and the Northern Ireland Troubles:*

(De)constructing the North (2003) can, in many ways, be considered a sequel to Foster's

study and a logical extension of Pelaschiar's work, in the sense that Kennedy-Andrews'

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[2]   For example, Pelaschair's brief history of the conflict, found in the appendix, is entitled "The Wounds
of History" and, as reviewer David Pierce notes, "underlying this study – and I'm sure this wasn't intended
- seems to be the belief of the claim that history is a wound and that the novel is some kind of bandage or
balm or ointment. There is merit in such a view, but I would have liked more direct treatment" (483).

survey is more grounded in theoretic insight and expands the critical range of the two previous assessments, while also reiterating Pelaschiar's point about how recent Northern Irish fiction incorporates certain postmodern strategies, such as irony and indeterminacy. Covering forty novels by twenty-eight authors, who Kennedy-Andrews contends "were hurt into writing by the need to explore and to understand the specific tensions, divisions and ambiguities inherent in Northern society," his study contrasts the conservative Realism of early novels (which, like Foster, he sees as restrictive) with the "classical liberal humanist narrative" (which he argues fails to adequately deal with the intersection between the public and political realm) and, instead, advocates postmodernism as a viable means to move beyond outdated national myths and stereotypes (7). Specifically, Kennedy-Andrews argues that the past aesthetic model of realism has, in some ways, continued on into the 1980s and 1990s, where it has, however, become fused with "elements of postmodern style" (9). Likewise, he contends that liberal humanism falls short as an alternative to realism because it separates the private from the political realm and holds it up as both a viable alternative to political realities and as a source of authenticity or truth. Thus, following anthropologist Richard Sweber, Kennedy-Andrews advocates for a "postmodern humanism," one that would not necessarily dismantle the liberal humanist cultural position, but rather questions "traditional concepts of individual autonomy, the unity and stability of the self, the universality of human values" (40).

More than the previous two studies, *Fiction and the Northern Ireland Troubles* merges several theoretical approaches (specifically, post-structuralism, postcolonial theory, and feminism) and adopts a multi-disciplinary perspective to analyze these texts. Moreover, as the author notes, such frameworks provide useful ways of interpreting texts about the

Troubles because they break down binaries such as Catholic/Protestant or Unionist/Republican, while also eliding grand narratives about nationalism. Additionally, Kennedy-Andrews' most important contribution is his contention that postmodernism has now become possible in Northern Ireland, represented by a shift from older writers (Brian Moore, Eugene McCabe, Michael MacLaverty) to younger ones (like Glenn Patterson, Colin Bateman, and Robert McLiam-Wilson) who "challenge the very foundations of accepted notions of what constitutes the individual and his world" and "experiment with the possibilities of remapping identity, re-writing history and re-inventing the language of the Troubles" (92). Yet, despite his assertion that such writers are an example of a "new, pluralistic, postmodern humanism" and represent a new political vision that incorporates the Other and embraces a "rejuvenating multiculturalism," Kennedy-Andrews, like Pelaschiar before him, continues to uphold the distinction between popular and "serious" literature. Moreover, he is prone to conflating his various theoretical contexts underneath the umbrella of the "postmodernism" label, and thus he largely ignores the contradictions within post-structuralism, postcolonialism, and feminism, while also adhering to a utopian view of postmodernism as an unquestionably preferable alternative to the stagnant political worldview of previous Troubles novelists. Lastly, despite the author's earlier proclamation that such novelists were "hurt into writing," Kennedy-Andrew's study only sporadically deals with the relationship between the texts he examines and their attempts to depict individual and historical trauma (195).

III.

While trauma theory has been successfully and repeatedly employed to examine narrative representations of the Holocaust and the ramifications of the American slave trade, it is equally appropriate as a method for exploring the emerging trauma narratives about the Troubles, particularly those written by a new batch of writers who came of age during the latter half of the conflict. Moreover, such trauma novels often share characteristics with postmodern fiction, specifically in terms of their tendency to expose the limitations of narrative and language in order to convey the damaging and disorienting impact of an individual or historical traumatic event. Thus, the Troubles novels explored throughout my first chapter reflect the fact that traumatized individuals often come to terms with violence through rupture and many of the common symptoms of traumatic rupture are present in these narratives: disorientation, distortion or fragmentation, escapism or delusion, and a yielding of individual control to external, seemingly more powerful forces, including historical ones. Furthermore, these texts reflect these emotional states through stylistic techniques and thematic concerns, such as the preponderance of the ghost story as a means to reflect communal or individual haunting; a focus on silence, absences and gaps; a loss of confidence in the community; and a critical stance on mythical or idealized reinterpretations of history as one means to evade or subsume traumatic experiences. In this sense, the three *Bildungsromans* explored in chapter one, Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark* (1996), Mary Morrissey's *Mother of Pearl* (1995), and Patrick McCabe's *Breakfast on Pluto* (1998), all have some affinity with Gothic fiction, a genre which, according to Siobhan Kilfeather, "enables Irish writers to address anxieties about speech and silence, to accuse the state and the

family of psychological terrorism" in order to demand "some reflection on what possibilities for change are allowed by an obsession with the memory of the dead" (44).

Following these particular Gothic concerns, my analysis will examine each text within the broader theoretical framework of trauma theory, particularly with regards to Cathy Caruth's abreactive model of trauma and how this model is complicated by each novel's exploration of the cultural context that defines and shapes individual trauma. In a similar manner, Abraham and Torok's theories about secrets, crypts, and phantoms will be employed to explore how traumas, both familial and communal, are passed down generationally and impact the possibility of national reconciliation. In this way, I hope to show how each individual author interrogates the "traumatic paradigm" of Northern Irish history by focusing on both personal loss and historical absence and the ways in which they inform each other, an exploration that ultimately correlates with Caruth's contention that history functions in a similar manner as trauma, in the sense that "history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence" (18). Additionally, by focusing on the collective silencing of violent histories and the navigation between the personal and the political, I will examine how each text suggests the importance of place in "organiz[ing] the memory and meaning of trauma," which, according to these three novelists, ultimately leads to a pattern of both transgenerational transmission of trauma and the repetition of cyclical violence (Balaev 150).

While the novels explored in chapter one, all of which were written during the peace process, take a retrospective approach by dealing with the time period either immediately preceding the Troubles or during the height of the conflict itself, my second chapter will examine how novelists address the concepts of archivization, "lost" narratives, and

forgiveness in four texts written in the decade following the Good Friday Agreement (1998): Sebastian Barry's *The Secret Scripture* (2008), Glenn Patterson's *That Which Was* (2004), Eoin McNamee's *The Ultras* (2004), and David Park's *The Truth Commissioner* (2008). In particular, Jacques Derrida's theories about the function of archivization and the "impossible madness" of pure forgiveness will be used as a framework through which to analyze these texts, since each of these writers explores issues of collective amnesia, marginalized testimonies and counter-narratives, and the problematic concept of reconciliation when a nation has not fully dealt with its traumatic past. In many ways, this shift to a Derridean theoretical framework is a logical extension of my earlier exploration of trauma theory, since both deal with absences, gaps, and losses and the way in which these are compensated for, which is often through either an attempt to return to an origin or the enactment of a repetition compulsion.

Specifically, I will analyze how each writer examines the tension between the "official record" of the archive and the counter-narrative of personal memory; thus, just as the individual traumatic experience can be shaped and challenged by the cultural context in which it occurs, the texts explored here examine how the intersection of the personal and the collective (or official) can trouble the archive and complicate forgiveness, particularly in regards to the concepts of victimhood and repressed collective memories surrounding collusion or the fate of the disappeared. Such a literary examination, moreover, holds particular relevance to the current issues still plaguing Northern Irish society in the post-conflict era. As Kevin Hearty notes:

> Desire to cement political agreement that would bring violent conflict to an end seems to have fed an erroneous belief that the past could be sacrificed wholesale for the benefit of the future. The folly of such logic has been compounded ever since by

the downgrading of the past to 'a legacy' to be periodically addressed from 'a manageable distance.' (1048)

In many ways, these works provide their own counter-narrative to the view presented by the novelists examined in chapter one, and each text foregrounds the concept of "archive fever" as means to complicate or revolutionize the archive by showing how the inclusion of "forgotten" or marginalized counter-memories can disrupt totalizing versions of history, including those that reduce the past to a mere "legacy." By doing this, each of the aforementioned texts opens up the possibility for multiple, conflicting viewpoints to exist simultaneously within the national consciousness.

Finally, my third chapter will explore the often overlooked thriller novel as a valid means of representing trauma during and after the peace process by examining three variations on this genre: Eoin McNamee's *Resurrection Man* (2004), Colin Bateman's *Cycle of Violence* (1995), and Stuart Neville's *Ghosts of Belfast* (2006). Given its historical exploitation of the sectarian conflict, and its repeated labelling as "Troubles trash," the thriller remains the most contentious genre to emerge from the conflict. However, it is also simultaneously the most popular and profitable fictional model and has undergone an extensive transformation in the past two decades; thus, it deserves more direct critical attention. While certain thrillers have received some critical consideration, most scholars, such as Pelaschiar and Kennedy-Andrews, have been careful to distinguish the genre from "serious" literature and cite its use of cliché, stereotype, flat characters, and recycled plotlines to uphold this distinction. As a result, little attention has actually been given to how these recent novelists rework and reclaim the thriller as a valid means of representing the effects and aftermath of the sectarian conflict. Specifically, as Shameem Black has observed, "the thriller has rarely been considered a serious player in

discussion of literature in the aftermath of atrocity," despite the fact that such "forms

may help the novel to envision productive alternatives to the narrative of silence so

intimately linked to the writing of catastrophe" (47).

Specifically, contemporary Troubles thrillers reflect a great interest in trauma and

psychosis and there is a need to reexamine this genre to show how certain works dissolve

the line between popular and serious fiction by both employing many of the standard

tropes of the typical Troubles thriller, while simultaneously engaging in the political and

social complexities of the historical situation in Northern Ireland. Therefore, I will

examine how these three novels incorporate postmodern techniques and concepts, such as

Linda Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction and the idea of pastiche, as well as the use

of satirical or comedic treatments of the political climate of the Troubles, to show how,

following Pelaschiar, "in certain skillful hands" the thriller can be a beneficial genre in

making sense of the moral complexity of the Troubles and provide a new perspective on

the "narrative(s) of silence" that are the dominant thematic concerns of the texts analyzed

in my first two chapters.

<div align="center">IV.</div>

Ironically, Northern Ireland has recently transformed from being a largely ignored

region in terms of literary output to being described as "one of the most over-narrativised

areas of the world" ("The Troubles with Fictional Troubles"). In fact, even in 2003, Neal

Alexander, when reviewing Kennedy-Andrew's survey, noted that "the sheer weight of

material for analysis is formidable" (139). Despite this increase in material, however,

certain general assumptions concerning Northern Irish writers continue to influence the

dominant critical outlook. For instance, one such common perception, noted by Edna

Longley, is that these authors exhibit an unhealthy obsession with the past and that, as a result, their work tends to be redundant in terms of subject matter and technique. Likewise, in the aftermath of the peace process and the Good Friday Agreement, many scholars have questioned the need for these writers to continue to excavate the time period of the Troubles in their fictional representations. For instance, even in 1994, Francine Cunningham already asked, "so now that the ceasefire has been announced, what will happen to all the Northern Ireland writers? Where will they go for their material?" (26).

Ultimately, by offering this critical overview of the contemporary Troubles novel, and emphasizing how such works address the ongoing issue of historical trauma, I hope to prove both that these texts show how reflecting on the past is a necessity towards addressing historical wrongs and moving forward as a nation and that there is a more varied and nuanced approach to the Troubles in contemporary Northern Irish fiction than has been previously acknowledged, one that deserves the same critical attention that other postcolonial literature has received. In particular, it should be noted that one reason that contemporary novelists continue to return to the Troubles for their source material is that Northern Ireland is currently experiencing a negative, rather than a positive peace, one that is devoid of the kind of violence seen during the height of the conflict, but still bears the lasting impact of sectarianism. Additionally, as Morrissey and Smyth have pointed out, assessing the ramifications of a conflict "must be a task associated with the end of such conflict. Such work cannot, it seems, be undertaken whilst conflict is ongoing and survival the main goal" (3). In this sense, the works analyzed here present the first potential stage of moving towards a positive peace and a genuine post-conflict society by

laying the groundwork for what is possible in future literary production. Specifically, as

these authors show, the struggle for national reconciliation cannot be grounded in moral

forgetfulness or a blind adherence to a univocal, totalizing view of history. Instead, these

texts actively engage with the ethics of mourning, which William Watkin contends occurs

"at the point where personal loss and public commemoration meet" (2).

Chapter One: "Everybody Knew, Nobody Said": Secrets, Crypts, and Phantoms in the Troubles *Bildungsroman*

> To know and not to speak/In that way one forgets. /What is pronounced strengthens itself. /What is not pronounced tends to non-existence. – Czesław Miłosz, "Reading the Japanese Poet Issa."

Since the reemergence of the sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland in 1969, the Troubles have often been interpreted by historians and literary critics as part of a broader traumatic pattern that has plagued Irish history for centuries. Joep Leerssen, for example, claims that Irish history is defined by a "traumatic paradigm," wherein history is presented as "a nightmarish burden of uncanny familiarity, repeating the same dreary pattern . . . over and over again, as in a neurosis or a nightmare" (45). Similarly, Patrick Grant has adopted the term "the iron circle," from John Hewitt's poem of the same name, to suggest how Northern Irish history, and the Troubles in particular, are grounded in a series of reprisals, mutual recriminations, and a conflation and mirroring between the accuser and the accused, both of whom consequently become "locked into an *anonymous mechanism* of reciprocal exchange" (17; emphasis in original). Lastly, as Tom Nairn points out, such readings of the sectarian conflict within a larger pattern of traumatic history ultimately perpetuate a "myth of atavism," which suggests that "a special historical curse, a luckless and predetermined fate can account for the war" (222-4). In this sense, these interpretations of the Troubles as linked to a "historical curse" grounded in deep-rooted sectarian divisions and, thus, propagating a sense of uncanny repetition is a common motif in both historical and fictional representations of the conflict. Yet, as

Grant also points out, literature, unlike history, "is distinctive because it challenges and complicates the conceptual descriptions by which we might contrive to define violence in order to keep it at a safe distance" (3).

One notable literary expression that both documents and complicates the "traumatic paradigm" of Northern Irish history can be found in novels that deal with child protagonists who come of age immediately before and during the time period of the Troubles. Specifically, such *Bildungsromans* examine the trauma of the nation through an exploration of familial trauma and dysfunction and explore the effect this overall atmosphere has on the child protagonist, even when such traumas are relegated to the realm of the unspeakable and the taboo. In *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, Jenny Edkins delineates trauma as occurring "when the very powers that we are convinced will protect us and give us security become our tormentors: when the community of which we considered ourselves members turns against us or when our family is no longer a source of refuge but a site of danger" (4). This chapter will explore three novels in which the family and the community become such "sites of danger" due to the repression of past traumatic events and the resultant secrets and "hauntings" these repressions engender: Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark* (1996), Mary Morrissy's *Mother of Pearl* (1997), and Patrick McCabe's *Breakfast on Pluto* (1998). Moreover, each novel not only focuses on a child or adolescent protagonist who comes of age during the sectarian conflict, but also adheres to the characteristics of a trauma novel, as outlined in Robert Garrett's *Trauma and History in the Irish Novel: The Return of the Dead* (2011).

Specifically, all three works feature central characters who experience a conflation between the past and the present and are, as a result, "continually haunted and shaped by

previous events and moments of intense violence . . . Thus, a sense that history repeats itself . . . which gnawed at Irish political thought during the 1970s and 1980s, lies at the heart of these novels" (Garratt 3). Additionally, each novelist employs specific stylistic techniques, adopted largely from postmodern fiction, that complicate or rework previous genres and their conventions in order to mirror the effects of trauma on the protagonist's psyche. Such techniques include incorporating a pastiche of popular genres, such as the detective or the ghost story; the presence of temporal and chronological collapse; and a recurring sense of uncanny repetition in the actions of the protagonists. Ultimately, as Garrett notes, such stylistic devices work as a means of "revisiting the past [to] suggest uncanny ways in which the present generation repeats the actions of its ancestors" (7).

By thus examining how the "traumatic paradigm" of Northern Irish history impacts the next generation of citizens, these novelists share a common interest in how trauma is transmitted across familial and communal lines, how it comes to contaminate the conscious and unconscious actions of the younger generation, and how such a transmission ultimately contributes to the ongoing cycle of secrecy, repression, and political impasse that is so commonly seen to characterize the Troubles. As Luc Huyse has pointed out, in societies defined by violent conflict, "the second generation, particularly, tends to absorb and retain pain and grief, consciously or unconsciously. They carry traces of the experience into adulthood, and this is a problematic heritage that can threaten the future of society" (55). Both Cathy Caruth's concepts about the belatedness and incomprehensibility of trauma and Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok's theories about secrets, crypts, and phantoms provide a useful framework in which to analyze how these texts address what is concealed in the individual or national

consciousness and how the repressed and unspeakable elements of the past create a haunted environment for the second generation of victims.

Specifically, Caruth's theories about trauma's impact on the individual psyche provide a useful starting point to examine how the ruptures and gaps in the traumatized mind can continue to exert a haunting presence, one that can be transmitted transgenerationally, as well as how this rupture impacts the possibilities and limitations of linguistic representation. Moreover, an examination of the three novels discussed below also offers some insight into the limits of Caruth's abreactive model of trauma by showing, instead, how a specific cultural context can influence the way in which trauma is experienced by the individual. In this sense, it is useful to discuss Caruth's foundational concepts within a broader framework of recent developments in trauma theory, particularly those advocated by Michelle Balaev, which situate personal responses to trauma within political, communal, and cultural models that dictate "what is socially possible to speak of and what must remain hidden and unacknowledged" (Balaev 156).

I.

In her groundbreaking theoretical work, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth defines trauma as "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (7). Trauma, Caruth argues, causes a rupture in the ordinary processes of cognition, thereby refusing to be assimilated into both time and consciousness. The traumatic event will, as a result, reenact itself, often against the will of the survivor, in the form of flashbacks, hallucinations, nightmares, or other repetitive behaviors. In fact, the repetitive nature of

trauma, according to Caruth, is one of its key features and functions as a response to the simultaneous presence and absence of the traumatic event within the subject's psyche.

Furthermore, working from Freud's theories regarding latency and deferred action, Caruth identifies the central feature of trauma as not the event itself, but rather the incomprehensibility of the event. Trauma is, therefore, most clearly defined by a temporal dislocation, meaning that its significance is defined by its inaccessibility. Consequently, the repetitive nature of trauma results not from some desire to literally act out the traumatic moment, but rather constitutes a kind of performance that underscores how the event refuses to be fully assimilated into consciousness. Likewise, the fact that trauma is marked by this simultaneous presence and absence explains the difficulty of transmitting or representing the traumatic event, since it produces a gap in consciousness, linearity, and memory. Caruth concludes that trauma is more than "a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (4).

Caruth's concept of the traumatized psyche, therefore, relies extensively on the notion that the traumatic event disrupts consciousness, produces a fragmented or destabilized sense of self, and precludes representation, thereby relegating the traumatic event to the realm of the unknowable or unspeakable. As the novels discussed below reveal, however, "evocations of the unspeakable often give rise to paradoxical attempts to speak the unspeakable" (Stampfl 22). One way to resolve this paradox and modify Caruth's model of trauma is to examine the role of place and culture within the individual experience of trauma. Specifically, as Michelle Balaev notes, trauma novels often move

beyond Caruth reductive model, which situates traumatic experience within a pathological individual response, by "demonstrating that how the protagonist views the self before and after the traumatic experience depends upon… the place of its occurrence, which highlights the available culturally informed narrative structures for expressing the experience" (161-2). In other words, as I will show, these novels complicate Caruth's abreactive model of trauma by situating the effects of trauma within the political, communal, and cultural forces that influence both the memory and the interpretation of the traumatic event. In this sense, the authors expand Caruth's notion about the singular response to trauma in order to indict Northern Ireland as a site of culturally pathological responses to such individual and historical events, a response that promotes not only aporia but also the transgenerational transmission of trauma.

In fact, the final contribution that Caruth makes to trauma theory is her linking of individual and historical trauma and her argument that trauma is transmissible between individuals and across generations. Caruth sees this mode of transmission as playing out, in the most basic sense, in the face-to-face encounter with the trauma victim, but she extends this concept to a kind of diffusion of trauma across space and time. Following her reading of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*, Caruth contends that Freud's central insight in the text is "that history, like trauma, is never simply one's own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (24). Caruth's model of transmission, therefore, suggests a kind of contamination, whereby an individual's traumatic experience can lead to "the encounter with the other, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound" (8). In this way, trauma

becomes transferrable and trans-historical through verbal and written acts of narration or remembrance.

This final point is noteworthy because it suggests the possibility for the existence of transgenerational trauma, which radically departs from Freud's model. While Caruth does not elucidate this aspect of her theory, Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's collective work in *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis* (1994) helps to fill in this gap. In particular, their ideas are worth discussing in some detail because they are useful in terms of exploring the complex ways in which what is culturally repressed creates the "traumatic paradigm" of Northern Irish history that subjugates all of the protagonists in these novels, in which individual, familial, and national secrets all play a role in the central character's psychic development.

II.

Abraham and Torok's theories are notable in the realm of psychoanalysis for several reasons. Firstly, they eschew what they see as totalizing narratives in the Freudian model of psychosexual development, such as castration anxiety, penis envy, or the Oedipal complex, particularly when these concepts are used to explain trauma and, more specifically, the psychological reaction to traumatic events. At the same time, both theorists adopt Freud's hypotheses about the symptom as a memory trace of repressed events or traumas and the concept of working through these traumas in order to restore stability and unity. Thus, like Caruth, Abraham and Torok interpret trauma as, fundamentally, a disruption in the psychic life of the subject, which leads to incoherence or a disintegration of the subject's psyche. Additionally, they focus on language as a means to uncover and work through trauma, since, like Caruth, they are particularly

interested in how traumatic events disrupt signification and bring about a tendency towards silence and secrecy. Thus, their clinical interest is in moving from the unspeakable to the speakable, to recapture signification after traumas have seemingly rendered language incapable of representation.

In addition to rejecting the universality of stages in childhood psychosexual development and their influence on psychic conflicts, Abraham and Torok also noted, from studying both Freud's Wolf Man case and their own clinical experience, that certain symptoms could not reasonably be traced back to an originating trauma in the patient's own life. This observation led them to reconceptualize Freud's theories about the return of the repressed and to posit instead that one could inherit someone else's secrets or traumas. In effect, through their focus on phantoms, secrets, and crypts, Abraham and Torok suggest that traumas can be passed down transgenerationally.

In order to understand how phantomatic haunting comes about, it is necessary to first consider Abraham's theory regarding dual unity since the phantom is primarily seen as its pathological corollary. According to Abraham, and following Lacan's model, early development centers on the fact that one begins as an undifferentiated entity who gradually defines the self through a process of division from a union with the mother. Additionally, the catalyst for this moment of differentiation occurs when a child discovers language, thus detaching himself from the mother's words (or "pieces-of-the-mother"), and is able to use words that correlate with external reality. However, despite this division, the child is never entirely able to rid himself of the mother's unconscious; rather, the discovery of language is also marked by the moment when "the child realizes the repression of the mother's unconscious as the Core or Kernel of its own" (Rashkin

17). In this sense, each child's differentiation from the mother is unique, since the

"pieces-of-the-mother" that are repressed in the child's unconscious are themselves

specific to the circumstances and traumas of the individual mother. Moreover, since the

same process has presumably been experienced by the mother herself, she is always

already a carrier of the contents of another's unconscious as well. In this way, Abraham

suggests that we are all inheritors of a regressive series of other people's unconscious

material and, therefore, family histories can be passed down through this process. Dual

Unity, therefore, not only explains the process of transmission through which the subject

becomes the recipient of his or her family history, including familial secrets and traumas,

but is also necessary for individuation to occur, a process that both Abraham and Torok

contend is furthered throughout adult life by what they define as "introjection."

While sharing some affinities with Freud's concept of working through, introjection

has a more central role in Abraham and Torok's model of psychology because they see

introjection as the driving force behind psychic life. In essence, introjection can be

defined as the continuous process of broadening the psyche in relation to both oneself and

the external world; in other words, it is "the constantly renewed process of self-creating-

self" (Rand 100). Thus, introjection relies on a fluid relationship between the

unconscious and the conscious, one which ultimately strives to introduce into the ego

"the unconscious, nameless, or repressed libido" (Torok 113). As a result, Abraham and

Torok are able to interpret psychic disturbances beyond the realm of sexual instincts and

phases because introjection occurs beyond childhood or young adulthood and accounts

for the way one is continually interacting with the external world and adapting to new

circumstances.

In this way, psychopathologies can arise from disruptions or disturbances in introjection and can occur beyond childhood and, indeed, at any point in life. In short, traumas interrupt the natural work of introjection and, therefore, unassimilated traumas, unexperienced mourning, or the inheritance of transgenerational secrets all contribute to the inability to introject loss. Moreover, when such a disruption occurs, language often breaks down and, thus, signification must be reinstated in order to transform such obstacles into guides that reveal the source of the trauma. Therefore, Torok and Abraham focus on disturbances in the expressive functions of language and note that patients often obscure their speech in order to avoid revealing a secret. Two examples of this are "cryptonomy," which refers to the concealment of a secret in language by masking significance in a chain of seemingly meaningless words, and "decrypting," the process by which the analyst uncovers the hidden meaning behind seemingly incoherent language by locating a crucial word to unlock the secret and provide coherence.

When introjection is disrupted, Torok and Abraham argue that a corollary process takes place in the subject's psyche: incorporation or "preservative repression." Unlike Freud's dynamic repression, incorporation represents, more generally, an interruption in the "self-creating-self" and suggests an inability to readjust after a traumatic event. In an inversion of introjection, incorporation involves the elimination of a traumatic or unbearable reality by confining it to a region of the psyche that is often inaccessible to the subject. As Nicholas Rand has pointed out, preservative repression, thus, "seals off access to part of one's own life in order to shelter from view the traumatic monument of an obliterated event" (18). As a result, silence or secrecy (whether individual, familial, or communal) becomes one of the most common symptoms of preservative repression,

which requires such secrecy in order to maintain the unassimilated "traumatic monument" apart from normal psychic development.

One such example of incorporation occurs during what Torok defines as the "illness of mourning," which focuses on secrets that are formed within the subject's psyche following the trauma of a loss or a love situation that results in the violent loss of a love object. Specifically, Torok contends that the secret is a trauma that becomes entombed and relegated to internal silence by the victim of such a loss; as such, these secrets are intrapsychic and cause an internal psychic splitting. Thus, the illness of mourning is not triggered by the actual loss of the love object, but rather by the secret that the loss brings on, which creates a crypt or "psychic tomb" in the subject's unconscious.

The illness of mourning, therefore, occurs largely because of the ego's fixation on the love object and the subsequent increase in libido is deemed an attempt at introjection through a kind of hallucinatory satisfaction, whereby regression "substitut[es] fantasy for the real thing, magic and instantaneous incorporation for the introjective process" (117). In essence, then, impossible mourning hinders introjection and replaces it with a form of delusion or fantasy that functions to provide momentary satisfaction for the subject's ego. However, this temporary fulfillment is met with condemnation and repression in the psyche, which attempts to preserve what Torok terms the "exquisite corpse" of the love object, with the ultimate desire that the love object will be "both revived and satisfied" (121). More specifically, incorporation can be linked to a refusal to mourn because, instead, the subject establishes a psychic "crypt" that houses the departed love object in secret and, in this sense, the subject is able to behave as if no such loss occurred.

As a result of both the intrapsychic secret and the formation of a crypt, Torok and Abraham go on to establish the concept of Endocryptic Identification, whereby the love object uses the ego as a kind of mask, thereby exchanging "one's own identity for a fantasmic identification with the 'life' of an object of love, lost as a result of some metapsychological traumatism" (142). In essence, the subject imagines that he/she is the one mourned by the love object, instead of the one in mourning for them. Thus, by projecting one's own suffering onto the love object, the subject can mask his or hers' real suffering, which is unassimilated and would threaten the subject's mental topography if it were revealed or uttered. Yet, in a tendency notably comparable to the return of the repressed, Torok and Abraham contend that "from their hideaway in the imaginary crypt… the unspeakable words never cease their subversive action" (132). Thus, the ghost of the crypt can continue to haunt the subject, leading to strange or incomprehensible behaviors and sensations.

Torok and Abraham's concepts of Dual Unity, as well as the intrapsychic secret and the crypt (or "psychic tomb") created in the subject's mental topography, all inform their most important contribution to the concept of transgenerational trauma: the phantom. As Abraham notes, there is a strong historical precedent for the return of the dead, particularly in relation to the dead who have "suffered repression by their family or society" (171). This observation, in turn, leads him to contend that some individuals can become recipients for the buried secrets of their parents and ancestors, an occurrence that is particularly relevant when the subject's symptoms cannot be traced back to his or her own experiences because these symptoms, in fact, originate in the secrets and traumas of others. Thus, while the crypt explains how an individual comes to be haunted by the

dead or lost love object, the phantom is used to clarify how one can be haunted by the secrets of the dead or the past. While, in the most innocuous sense, Abraham posits that phantoms can determine one's choice of hobbies, professions, or leisure activities, they can also cause a clandestine shift in the entire psychic topography because the loss must be both disguised and denied. As a result, people who are in the grips of a phantomatic haunting are "prey to strange and incongruous words or acts, transferred from events unknown to them, events whose initiator was an other" (188).[3]

Through the phantom, Abraham and Torok suggest that an entity that is completely outside of the view of traditional psychological development can infect or contaminate the individual's mental topography. The phantom, then, represents "a pathological or 'diseased'" inversion of dual unity because it disrupts the normal processes of differentiation, individuation, and introjection. Instead, phantomatic haunting "hold[s] the child (later the adult) in a pathogenic dual union with the parent, in a silent partnership dedicated to preserving the secret intact" (Rashkin 17-18). As a result, the eradication of a phantom is an inherently difficult process, and Abraham suggests that such a psychic exorcism can only take place when the phantom is recognized as an unrelated entity within the subject's own psyche and through a method that "entails reducing the sin attached to someone else's secret and stating it in acceptable terms so as to defy,

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[3] To illustrate this process, Abraham offers a brief sequel to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which imaginatively constructs events directly following the conclusion of the play and is meant to shed new light on Hamlet's infamous indecision in terms of seeking vengeance for his father's murder. Countering Freudian notions that Hamlet's behavior is the direct result of an unresolved Oedipal complex, Abraham instead posits, through a return of the ghost, that Hamlet's father killed the elder Fortinbras with a poisoned sword and that Hamlet is, in fact, the illegitimate child of Gertrude and Old Fortinbras. In this sense, the secret originally revealed by the ghost (his murder by Claudius) masks another family secret that is unspeakable, even to the phantom itself.

circumvent, or domesticate the phantom's (and our) resistances, its (and our) refusals, [thereby] gaining acceptance for a higher degree of 'truth'" (189).

Ultimately, while Torok and Abraham are never explicit about exactly how transgenerational secrets or phantoms are passed down, their theories suggest that the subject, while learning language, can also internalize gaps that are buried in the discourse of parents and relatives. Through these gaps or euphemisms, a narrative is passed down that is never explicitly told to or consciously understood by the subject. Furthermore, because the content of the phantom's secret is shameful or taboo in some way, the ego follows what the authors term the "obligation not to know" in order to maintain the secret and ensure that it is never shared with or transmitted to others. Thus, according to Abraham and Torok, phantoms inherently lie because their entire purpose is to hide the truth, and maintaining such secrecy is what, ultimately, motivates their return. It is this theory that will help me to shed light on how family secrets, crypts, and transgenerational phantoms work in three Troubles *Bildungsromans*.

<div align="center">III.</div>

In Seamus Deane's novel *Reading in the Dark*, the author employs a hybrid of autobiography and fictional *Bildungsroman* as a means to capitalize on the popularity of contemporary memoirs about Irish childhood,[4] while also incorporating a variety of additional genres that deconstruct the traditional progression often found in the conventional coming-of-age story. Thus, much of the narrative is grounded in Deane's own family experiences, such as the disappearance of his Uncle Eddie after the Irish Civil

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[4] Frank McCourt's memoir *Angela's Ashes*, for example, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1996.

War and a grandfather who was allegedly involved in the IRA, and Deane even delayed publication of his book for several years, stating that he felt "unease about having his family's painful history made public" (Cremins). Yet, despite the text's autobiographical traces, it also shares an affinity with contemporary fictional accounts concerning young protagonists who come of age in pre-Troubles Ireland (both north and south of the border), such as Glenn Patterson's *Burning Your Own* (1988), Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy* (1992), and Roddy Doyle's *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* (1993). In this sense, Deane fits into a long-standing tradition in Irish literature of employing both the child protagonist and the dysfunctional family as metaphors for the current state of the Irish nation. By thus fusing autobiography and fiction, Deane destabilizes both genres and reinforces a central theme found throughout his novel, one that Michael Parker defines as a "preoccupation with unstable texts and the difficulties of interpretation" (184).

In addition to utilizing a hybrid format, Deane further deconstructs the memoir and *Bildungsroman* by weaving a plethora of genres throughout his work. For example, several critics, such as Terry Eagleton, have cited Deane's use of neo-Gothic elements, such as the emphasis on repression/return of the repressed and hidden family secrets, the persistent atmosphere of doom and isolation, and the evocation of the uncanny and abject, all of which bear some affinity with Abraham and Torok's concepts regarding secrets, phantoms, and crypts. In addition to these Gothic traits, Deane also adapts characteristics from detective fiction, such as the piecing together of seemingly disparate clues in the search for some final "truth" and the traditional ghost story's constant focus on spectral presences, at various points throughout his narrative. Likewise, this incorporation of multiple genres is reinforced by the formal structure of the novel, which

is notably marked by fragmentation, chronological dislocation, and an overall sense of stunted momentum. As a result, Deane's atypical format can clearly be read as an intentional parallel to the traumatic content of the novel's subject matter, as the unnamed narrator fluctuates between the past and present in his attempts to uncover an authoritative account of his family's secret and shameful history.

As such, *Reading in the Dark*, according to Robert Garrett, follows the format of the typical trauma novel, where a belated historical or personal trauma is returned to repeatedly and re-enacted in the present. Moreover, as Garrett notes, this format implicates the reader because "the novel demands that we, along with the narrator, must return, in true traumatic fashion, again and again to the confusing events of 1922, in order to sort out some detail or uncover some connection to achieve some understanding" (97). However, while several aspects of the novel clearly follow the model of traumatic return exemplified in both Freud and Caruth's theories, Deane's text, with its specific focus on transgenerational trauma, also incorporates several features of Abraham and Torok's ideas about how trauma is transmitted, most notably in relation to their concepts of the crypt and the phantom. As such, *Reading in the Dark* offers a profound commentary on the way in which transmitted personal and national traumas impact the events of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

On the surface, however, the novel may not, at first glance, appear to function as a traditional Troubles text, given that it concludes in 1969 when the first outbreak of violence begins, and thus does not engage at length with the conflict. In fact, some critics, such as Derek Hand, have argued that it does not fall under the genre of Troubles fiction, citing that the contemporary conflict is "rushed over in the final pages as if the

author wants to telescope these events and move away from them," and that, as a result, Deane fails to offer "a viewpoint on the violence of the Troubles" (248-249). I would contend, however, that Deane's focus on the time period that immediately preceded the new outbreak of violence, as well as the Irish Civil War following partition, and, moreover, his emphasis on transgenerational haunting, provides a clear authorial stance. Specifically, Deane's text reveals how the cyclical violence in Northern Ireland can be explained in terms of communal and familial failures to deal with past traumas and, specifically, how these failures produce phantoms that continue to haunt the next generation of Northern Irish citizens. As Gerry Smyth points out, the unconventional structure of the novel also provides a means to effectively dramatize "the confrontation between official narrative in Northern Ireland and a range of silenced voices capable only of being represented through the medium of imaginative writing" (133). In this sense, *Reading in the Dark* shares an affinity with other Troubles texts, such as Sebastian Barry's *The Secret Scripture* and Glenn Patterson's *That Which Was*, in that past events continue to exert an influence on the present, while Deane's work simultaneously incorporates the motif of the haunted child protagonist as a representative of the traumatized nation.

The opening scene of the novel, when the unnamed narrator recalls experiencing his first haunting on the family's staircase while in the presence of his mother, establishes not only the phantasmal atmosphere that pervades the boy's subsequent experiences, but also highlights the context of family silences and secrets and the consequences these have in terms of the transmission of trauma from one generation to the next. Likewise, the figure of the boy's mother, who speaks the opening lines ("There's something there

between us. A shadow. Don't move."), foreshadows the central conflict in the story.

There indeed proves to be a "shadow" on the family itself, one that increasingly creates

tension between the boy, who describes himself as "enthralled" and "excited" by the

ghost, and authority figures such as his mother, who ultimately insists that the apparition

is "all imagination. There's nothing there" (3-4).[5] Thus, from the onset of the narrative,

the distance between the mother and son, which is literalized here by the physical

expanse between them on the staircase, is marked by the intrusion of a mysterious

"something," which destabilizes the physical space and hints at a supernatural presence

that threatens the stability of their relationship.

Furthermore, while the mother maintains that the presence is merely the result of her

"imagination," her reappearance at the end of the opening section, "looking white" and

"crying quietly at the fireside," belies her assurance that the specter haunting their family

home is "just your old mother with her nerves" (4). The mother's insistent denial,

moreover, finds a correlation with the atmosphere surrounding this original haunting,

which the narrator notes is marked by a "clear, plain silence" (5). In this moment, Deane

establishes the familial and communal tendency for dealing with the return of the

repressed, one that is aptly described by Seamus Heaney's phrase "the famous Northern

reticence. The tight gag of place" in his poem "Whatever you Say, Say Nothing." Thus,

while the opening section can clearly be read in terms of Caruth's theories regarding the

use of repression as a psychic defensive mechanism and the belatedness of traumatic

experience, the emphasis that Deane places on both the mother and the silence

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[5]   A similar occurrence happens in the section entitled "Blood," when the boy asks his mother about
Eddie and the family feud and is told "I think sometimes you're possessed. Can't you just let the past be
the past?"

surrounding the encounter also exemplifies how phantoms come into existence and how a

traumatic event can be passed down from parent to child. As Abraham and Torok point

out, children who mature in such an atmosphere of secrecy inherit a "gap in the

unconscious" that comes to be inhabited by the repressions and traumas of earlier

generations. They write:

> The buried speech of the parent will be (a) dead (gap) without a burial place in the
> child. This unknown phantom returns from the unconscious to haunt its host and may
> lead to phobias, madness, and obsessions. Its effect can persist through several
> generations and determine the fate of an entire family line. (140, footnote 1)

Therefore, the staircase incident that begins the narrative not only establishes a moment

of the past returning to make its mark on the present, but also hints at how a phantom is

already at work within the family, thus suggesting how it will infect the novel's

protagonist as he moves towards young adulthood.[6]

The crucial inciting incident in the novel for this spectral return centers on the

mysterious disappearance of the narrator's Uncle Eddie, who vanished in 1922 during the

violence that erupted after the Anglo-Irish Treaty, and whose individual history the

narrator receives in fragments from various sources both within and outside of his family

circle. Specifically, Uncle Eddie's disappearance functions as a phantom because the

details of his perceived background (he is commonly thought to have been an IRA

informer by both his family and the community at large) and the mysteries surrounding

his disappearance (the absence of a body) are inherently unspeakable since they hint at

stigmatized and taboo subject matters within the nationalist community. In other words,

as Eoin Flannery points out, Eddie's "phantasmal or nomadic presence is accentuated by

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[6]   This fact that is reinforced by the narrator's fixation on the "faint memory" of the linoleum's "original
pattern" by the stairs at this moment.

his inability to be represented or integrated within either of the 'accepted' narratives, and thus, Eddie's is an occluded memory" (77-78). Eddie's spectrality, moreover, coincides with Abraham's notion that the dead who not only return but also haunt are typically those who "were shamed during their lifetime or those who took unspeakable secrets to the grave" (171). While, initially, Eddie's phantasmal presence seems to be the result of the unspeakability surrounding his role as an informer, the narrator eventually comes to discover that the hidden secret of Eddie's disappearance involves a web of betrayal that encompasses the narrator's grandfather, who ordered Eddie's execution; his mother, who discovers that Eddie was mistakenly put to death and carried on a romantic relationship with the actual informer; and members of the entire community, who were either directly involved in the disappearance or have since become complicit in the repression of the truth.

This emphasis on betrayal and secrets throughout the novel, as Elmer Kennedy-Andrews notes, "destabilizes the narrative," yet it also serves to destabilize more than just the text because the prevalent atmosphere of secrecy found in the family and the community erodes familial bonds, the narrator's relationship with his nationalist community, and problematizes the boy's attempts at producing a stable identity (216). Commenting on the nature of secrecy and the exposure of betrayals, Deane has noted that the "first effect is to make everything seem phantasmal. Everything you thought was secure and actual has now become almost ghostly and haunting, and yet at the same time, the very moment it becomes that, it becomes super-real" (Rumen 30). One manifestation of this effect can be seen when the narrator is exposed to his second ghostly encounter, during which he sees the image of his dead sister Una playing in the local graveyard.

Here, a literal death, and, more importantly, the narrator's first direct experience with loss, is transposed onto a spectral presence that appears "dressed in her usual tartan skirt and jumper, her hair tied in ribbons, her smile sweeter than ever" before disappearing, thus highlighting the simultaneously phantasmal and "super-real" atmosphere that such an encounter induces (17). Tellingly, after relating the incident to his brother and questioning whether to mention it to his mother, the narrator is instructed that "you saw nothing. You say nothing. You're not safe to leave alone," mirroring not only the denial exhibited by his mother in the opening section, but also suggesting that the narrator has transgressed in some way (he is "not safe") by transmitting the secret of his ghostly encounter to another (18).

If transmitting the unspeakable becomes a taboo act within the boy's family, the novel also explores how such transmission takes place on a communal level, most notably in the form of inherited stories, folklore, and mythology. Specifically, throughout the narrator's development, he is exposed to a series of tales steeped in the supernatural, and it is telling how many of these communal myths center on the themes of disappearances, possessions, and hauntings. For example, as a young child, he recalls being told that "people with green eyes were close to the fairies," and that individuals with one green and one brown eye are to be feared because "that was a human child that had been taken over by the fairies" (5). This superstition, which recalls the threat of being "taken" and subsequently becoming possessed by a supernatural entity, would seem to belong to the fantastic. However, given the political nature of the boy's social world, one could read clear analogies in this cautionary tale to sectarian kidnappings or disappearances. Therefore, this particular legend suggests that this is a society where people can, in fact,

mysteriously disappear, and acts as a subtle reference to the madness that can result

should one become "possessed" by the phantoms of the past.[7]

As the above example shows, and as Abraham and Torok point out, the function of

such myths can be one means through which the community is able to transpose and

transmit the unspeakable and, thus, enact a symbolic return of the repressed. They

explain:

> ...myths are efficient ways of speaking by means of which some situation or other
> comes about and is maintained. We know how: by carrying out, with the help of
> their manifest content, the repression of their latent content… If they provide food for
> understanding, they do so much less by what they say than by what they do not say,
> by their blanks, their intonations, their disguises. (94)

In this sense, the various folklores that are passed down to the narrator represent

allegories for his own experiences with secrets and phantoms, while also highlighting

how these distorted fictions are a means to transmit trauma and pain that would otherwise

be unspeakable for the community at large. One such representative incident occurs

when the narrator's Aunt Katie relates the tale of Brigid McLaughlin, which conforms to

the structure of a traditional ghost story and contains echoes of Henry James' *The Turn of

the Screw* (1898). Brigid's encounter with the spectral presence of the parents of her two

wards, along with the children's disappearance at the end of the story and Brigid's

subsequent descent into madness and silence, all coincide with the themes already

established in the text. However, the supernatural tale also has political resonances, since

the McLaughlin family has ties to the narrator's own. Specifically, Neil McLaughlin is

an IRA member who was murdered by Billy Mahon, the same policeman the narrator's

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[7] The phrase "away with the fairies" is a common Irish saying to describe someone who is perceived as
mad or divorced from reality.

grandfather is accused of throwing off a bridge in 1921 during a reprisal killing, and Larry McLaughlin (Brigid's distant relative) is later revealed to be Uncle Eddie's executioner, acting on the orders of the narrator's grandfather. Thus, these communal myths can be interpreted as a palimpsest, resembling the "faint memory" of the "original pattern" on the linoleum floor that the narrator fixates on earlier in the novel: they simultaneously mask certain unspeakable truths, yet retain traces of them, thereby enacting a symbolic return of the repressed.

Likewise, the moral that Aunt Katie attributes to Brigid McLaughlin's experience also has significance when considering both the narrator's familial history and the way that such phantoms are dealt with communally. Upon finishing the story, Katie remarks that some families are "devil-haunted," and marked by a curse: "Maybe it's something terrible in the family history, some terrible deed that was done in the past, and it just spreads and spreads down the generations like a shout down that tunnel, the secret passage, in the wall of Grianan, that echoes and echoes and never really stops" (68). Thus, while such myths may serve a useful function for the community to transmit, in distorted form, historical traumas that have been repressed from the collective conscious, this distortion also affects how such traumas are transmitted transgenerationally, in that they reverberate throughout the family line in a ceaseless cycle that is reminiscent of phantomatic haunting.

The problem, then, becomes how to successfully exorcise such traumas and phantoms, as reflected in another story the narrator receives in fragments throughout his childhood: the haunting of Jimmy Grenaghan and his wife by Danno Bredin. Initially introduced as the tale of a "great exorcism" by Father Browne, the narrator eventually learns, from his

older brother, the full version of the story, which centers on a jilted husband and his haunting of his former wife and her lover, both of whom are eventually found dead in their home (6). Once again, the moral of this supernatural legend is telling, since, after encountering a descendent of Jimmy Grenaghan, the narrator is instructed that "people said no one from those families should ever get married. They should be allowed to die out. That was the only way to appease the ghost" (172). Interestingly, the lesson the narrator receives here is not about how mollifying the ghost involves bringing a previous trauma to light in order to work through it, but rather about appeasing the phantom through the eradication of the entire family line, thereby presumably bringing an end to transgenerational haunting.

Yet these distorted fictions not only, as Abraham and Torok contend, enact a symbolic return of the repressed. In the context of pre-Troubles Northern Ireland, such myths also serve a useful function by appropriating traumatic narratives for a decidedly sectarian purpose. One example occurs when the narrator witnesses the accidental death of a local boy after he is run over by a lorry. On the surface, this episode may seemingly function as a means to highlight the nationalist community's hatred of the Protestant police force, as all the men turn their backs to the policemen who attempt to extract a statement from them. However, the transmission of the story over time suggests how certain narratives, even ones divorced from the supernatural or mythological, become altered upon retelling, often to reflect the community's political agenda. Thus, when the narrator hears the story retold, the child is now transformed into a victim of blatant police brutality and disregard: "Danny Green told me in detail how young Hannaway had been run over by a police car which had not even stopped" (11). Despite being a firsthand witness to the event, the

narrator tellingly decides to remain silent, suggesting his own inherited awareness about the dangers of betraying secrets and exposing hidden truths. In this particular instance, Deane complicates Abraham and Torok's notion about the function of myths, suggesting that the social and political atmosphere can also play a factor in the willful distortion of such transmitted communal fictions.

The tension between repressed traumatic memories and their symbolic return in such altered forms thus affects the narrator's own understanding of what is an acceptable narrative and what, by necessity, must remain unspeakable and, in turn, this realization complicates his various attempts at uncovering the "truth" about his own family's history. For example, after being told the story of Billy Mahon's death, he is confronted by his classmates and told that his grandfather was, in fact, the murderer; however, he initially chooses to dismiss this revelation as "just folklore" (27). In this instance, Deane reveals how "factual history" and mythology evade binary distinctions and, instead, contaminate each other, thereby fueling an atmosphere of paranoia and secrecy that the narrator must increasingly unravel by examining the gaps and silences inherent in each narrative that is passed down to him. Thus, as the novel progresses, he matures from a simplistic understanding, one that allows him to dismiss certain problematic stories as mere "folklore," to a more complex realization about how the truth is embedded and hidden within the silences of each narrative strand he uncovers. One result of this development, however, is that the narrator becomes increasingly susceptible to both inheriting the phantoms of previous generations and, as a result, to forming a crypt within his own unconscious in order to protect his family's collective secrets.

If such communal myths can be read as vessels that evade traumatic memories, while simultaneously pointing to the gaps in such memories, their pervasiveness in the narrator's social world is further established by how they infect the landscape of his border town. The various landmarks the narrator encounters contain their own mythology and, like the staircase in the opening scene, are locations where shadows and phantoms reside. For example, the narrator relates, "we were told never to play in the park at night, for Daddy Watt's ghost haunted it, looking for revenge for the distillery fire that had ruined him." This particular haunting, characterized by a ghostly "shadow" with a "mouth that opened and showed a red fire raging within," functions much like Brigid McLaughlin's story, in that it has implications for both the narrator's family and the broader nationalist community (33). Specifically, Uncle Eddie's disappearance is intricately connected with the distillery fire, since several family members assume that he perished there while fighting Unionist forces during a "last minute protest at the founding of the new state." Thus, in addition to playing a significant role in the family's personal history, the distillery is also a site of historical conflict and a symbol for the traumatic failure to gain independence following partition; it notably stands, in the narrator's words, as a "burnt space in the heart of the neighborhood" (34). In fact, the narrator's entire neighborhood occupies a similarly ambiguous and contested space, since it is "border country" and, therefore, literally a place where one can easily cross over into the Republic and back and, more symbolically, a liminal space that is populated by phantoms from the past.

The two most significant landmarks in the protagonist's narrative are the Field of the Disappeared and Grianan, each of which correspond to Abraham and Torok's concept of

the phantom and the crypt, respectively. During a trip with his father and brother, the

narrator encounters the Field of the Disappeared, a purgatorial place near an ancestral

farmhouse that was itself the scene of an old family feud, where it is believed "the souls

of all those from the area who had disappeared, or who had never had a Christian

burial…collected three or four times a year… to cry like birds and look down on the field

where they had been born" (54). As Flannery points out, the landmark is significant as a

space where "the real and the phantasmal coincide, and where disparate temporalities and

spatial distances are unified" (77). As with the staircase, the narrator once again

experiences a kind of "enthrallment" when encountering the traumatic site and, against

his father's warnings, he is physically drawn towards it, only to be frustrated by his

father's refusal to articulate how it relates to the family's own secretive past. In this

sense, the Field of the Disappeared works as an apt metaphor for the phantom, in that it

literalizes the way in which "the subject may come to be haunted by secrets which do not

in any direct way relate to its own experience" (Abraham 78). Specifically, the boy is

told that entering the Field would "result in the same fate" as its spectral inhabitants, and

that even witnessing the sounds of the souls crying out is potentially destructive: "You

weren't supposed to hear pain like that; just pray you would never suffer it. Or if you

were in a house when the cries came, you were meant to close the doors and windows to

shut them out, in case that pain entered your house and destroyed all in it" (54). Thus,

the Field itself evokes the main characteristics of the phantom, both in terms of its ability

to possess anyone who transgresses its boundaries, "to lead [the living] into some

unfortunate trap, into some mechanism that will lead to tragedy," and in its tendency

towards protecting a secret from becoming known (closing "the doors and windows to shut them out") (Davis 80).

Like the Field of the Disappeared, the physical landmark of Grianan, an old stone fort that carries sacred connotations, is another liminal zone where the real and the spectral coexist. In addition to its mythological status of housing the Fianna warriors, who it is believed will one day rise to defend Ireland and expel the British occupiers, it is also "symbolic of the betrayal and guilt that have infected the narrator's family like a virus" because it is eventually revealed to be the site of Eddie's execution (Smyth 146).   In an uncanny repetition of his uncle's own death, after the narrator is locked inside by his schoolmates, he sits in the throne at the center of the fort and becomes "terrified that I might, by accident, make that special wish and feel the ground buckle under me and see the dead faces rise, indistinct behind their definite axes and spears" (56). Thus, Grianan can be read as a projection of the crypt that forms in the boy's own unconscious, a metaphor for the "psychic tomb" that houses the inaccessible knowledge that has been passed down from parents to son. In this sense, he becomes a literal version of Abraham's "cemetery guardian," one who has inherited the power to guard over the secrets of the dead, while also experiencing terror at accidentally exposing these secrets and enacting a return of the repressed. Moreover, Grianan literalizes the enigmatic atmosphere the narrator can detect within his own family, specifically in terms of his father, which further contributes to the formation of the crypt: "I felt we lived in an empty space with a long cry from him ramifying though it. At other times, it appeared to be as cunning and articulate as a labyrinth, closely designed, with someone sobbing at the heart of it" (42).

While acting as both a historical locale and a metaphor for Abraham and Torok's "psychic tomb" or crypt, Grianan is, furthermore, significant because it is a site that also has associations with madness and irrationality. This motif becomes increasingly prevalent as the narrator continues his search for the truth about his family's past, specifically in terms of the consequences these attempts have on his mother's mental state. For instance, the narrator recounts a story in which a customs agent is locked in the fort for two days and emerges "stark, staring mad," thereby providing another parallel to the earlier fantastical story about Brigid's descent into insanity and his mother's own real decline into psychosis (59). Having gained knowledge about Eddie's execution in Grianan from her own father, the narrator's mother attempts to ensure that such traumatic memories will not be transmitted to the other members of her family, thus sparing them the "shadow" that such a secret will undoubtedly cast on their lives if the truth were to be made public. In essence, as Deane points out, "the mother is, in her grief, taking the shock, the trauma of a history into herself, but can find no escape from it" (*English & Media Magazine* 19).

By sealing this trauma "into herself ," and because she is unable to openly confess what she knows, the mother begins to exhibit clear signs of maintaining her own crypt, the result of an improper mourning for both Eddie and her former lover, Tony McIlhenny, who was the actual informer. In other words, as Caruth argues, in such cases of unassimilated trauma, "the outside has gone inside without any mediation" (59). As the narrator notes, his mother begins "going out from us, becoming strange, becoming possessed" and she becomes increasingly prone to hallucinations of an all-consuming fire that threatens to destroy their community and their family home (145). Even after her

eventual recovery from this momentary psychosis, the narrator notes the permanent physical alteration that continues to mark her throughout his childhood. Deane writes:

> By All Souls' Night, she had false teeth, and her smile was white again. But   when I saw her smile, then and ever afterwards, I could hear her voice, creased with sorrow, saying, 'Burning, Burning,' and I would look for the other voice, young and clear, lying in its crypt behind it. But it slept there and remained sleeping, behind her false white smile. (151-52)

Like the lost souls in the Field of the Disappeared, therefore, the mother has become infected by the family's past trauma. Moreover, her attempts to prevent the pain from entering her house and "destroying all in it" leads to the "buried speech" that Abraham and Torok note is responsible for engendering the "unknown phantom" that haunts the family line.

If the mother's increasingly unstable mental state is a sign of impossible mourning and the result of maintaining secrecy in the face of trauma, then the unspeakable nature of this trauma is what is passed down to her son as a phantom. As Abraham and Torok note, the phantom "pursues its work of disarray in silence" and is marked by "cryptonomy," linguistic mechanisms such as "demetaphorization" and "designification" whose aim is to destroy the representational power of language. Thus, the narrator's mother increasingly adopts a "new voice" and engages in a "new conversation," that consists of "connected remarks separated by days, weeks, months" (150). In response, the narrator feels a simultaneous urge to flee from this breakdown in language, while also desiring to "run into the maw of the sobbing, to throw my arms wide to receive it, to shout into it, to make it come at me in words, words, words and no more of this ceaseless noise, it's animality, its broken inflection of my mother" (147). In essence, then, what the narrator seeks is to "decrypt" the linguistic breakdown of signification that has resulted in his mother's madness.

In contrast to his mother's cryptonomy, the narrator's attempts at decrypting the family's secrets are ironically aided by Crazy Joe, an individual who shares both his mother's false teeth and a general proclivity towards perceived insanity. Joe, who functions in a similar manner to a Greek Chorus or a Shakespearean Fool in the text, is defined by his notably ambiguous position within the community, simultaneously being interpreted as a pariah and a soothsayer: "To live with this condition of his was, he said, the great connubium of his infelicity – the condition of being sane married to the condition of being mad; the knowledge that he was mad married to the knowledge that he was sane" (223). However, unlike his mother, Joe fuels the narrator's search for knowledge about his family's past, while also warning him about the dangers of exposing the phantom's secrets. He cautions him, for example, that punishment "makes you remember everything" (201).

Likewise, while his mother employs gaps and silences, which unwittingly transmit the phantom from one generation to the next, Joe literally and symbolically brings the narrator into the "Adults Only" section of the local library and exposes him to enigmas and riddles that are fraught with meaning: "Here's a conundrum. There's a place where a man died but lived on as a ghost, and where another man lived as ghost but died as a man, and where another man would have died as a man but ran away to live as a ghost. Where would that place be?" (231). Additionally, Joe is ultimately revealed to be the individual who identified the actual informer, Tony McIlhenny, passing along this information to the narrator's mother, who, in turn, warned McIlhenny, thus prompting his abandonment of Aunt Katie and his flight from Ireland. Therefore, by the end of the novel, Joe is both tasked with the role of guardian to the mother's "last secret," while his

intrusion into the family's life through his interactions with the narrator prompts both of his parents to forbid their son from having contact with Joe, stating "he was not normal. I was never to let him touch me. He was odd" (224, 232-33).

If, as Abraham and Torok point out, the work of the phantom relies on cryptonomy, and the bringing to light of secrets is done through the process of decrypting, the other notable feature of the phantom is that it "gives rise to endless repetition and, more often than not, eludes rationalization" (175). As such, the most apparent feature of how trauma functions in the novel is, as Robert Garrett points out, grounded in "the development of what Freud calls the uncanny, the compulsion to repeat a disturbing experience" (105). The uncanny, whereby a series of coincidental events occur with no apparent causality and create a feeling of both familiarity and strangeness, is unconsciously reenacted throughout the narrator's experiences in the text, such as his previously mentioned entombment in Grianan, the site of Eddie's murder. As such, the uncanny functions to show how the past continues to intrude on the present, such as when the narrator unwittingly reenacts the central traumatic event of the novel. Specifically, after he is seen in a police car, following an attempt to escape a sectarian beating, he is branded as an informer by the nationalist community, "just like your uncle, like the whole lot o' ye" (100). As a result, his own childhood experiences serve as uncanny reminders of unspeakable events from the family's past, a fact that is reinforced when his mother wonders whether there is a curse on the family and his father directly questions him: "Why did I have to bring the police back into our lives? Was once not enough? Was there something amiss with me? No, I told him, there's something amiss with the family" (104). The most significant moment of the uncanny occurs, however, once the

narrator learns of Eddie's misguided execution from his grandfather on the former's

deathbed, after which the narrator remarks, "I left him and went straight home, where I

could never talk to my father or my mother properly again" (132). Thus, like his mother,

the narrator unintentionally becomes yet another guardian of family secrets, a role he

inhabits with unease and resentment.

Yet, as both Freud and Caruth point out, repressed traumas have a tendency of

returning, often in disguised forms that suggest, in Freudian terms, that some destructive

"daemonic force" appears to be at work in the subject's unconscious (*Beyond the

Pleasure Principle* 35). Likewise, Abraham notes that those who experience

"phantomatic haunting" are prone to a similar disruption in their psychic life, with the

difference that "what returns to haunt is the 'unsaid' and 'unsayable' of *an other*." As a

result, Abraham likens the subject to a ventriloquist, in the sense that what speaks

through the words and actions of the subject is actually "the silence, gap, or secret in the

speech of someone else" (28). In Deane's novel, several instances in the narrator's life

are used to symbolize how the return of the repressed functions on a psychic level in his

unconscious, most notably in the section entitled "Rats." In this recollection, the town,

which has become overwhelmed by an accumulative rat population, takes communal

action by driving the rats into trenches and eradicating them with fire. After participating

in this event, the narrator responds with feelings of extreme nausea and imagines "the

living rats that remained, breathing their vengeance in a dull miasmic unison deep

underground" (80). Thus, this incident can be read as simultaneously highlighting the

need to repress certain "sickening" truths and the concomitant realization that some

secrets and traumas refuse to remain buried and will return to enact their "vengeance" on the subject's psyche.[8]

Likewise, in an act that more directly corresponds to the family's secret and the narrator's inheritance of a phantom, another scene of burial occurs during the boy's most direct challenge to his parents' shame regarding the past. Following his branding as an informer, and his father's direct accusation, the narrator responds by destroying his father's prized rose bushes in an attempt to draw attention to what he does not yet fully understand about his parents' past history and to express how the family's reticent atmosphere is affecting him directly. In what amounts to the most serious boundary-crossing in the novel, the narrator uses the moment to expunge the "dread and nausea" that he notes "died in me" after the transgression and posits a direct challenge to his mother when she asks him what "possessed" him to do such a thing: "Ask father. He'll know" (107). However, as with the rats, the incident only results in his siblings feeling "ashamed for me," while his father and his uncles pave the garden in an attempt to cover up the scene of his misdeed. Yet, also like the rats, the narrator continues to imagine the roses calling out and burning underground: "Walking on that concreted patch where the bushes had been was like walking on hot ground below which voices and roses were burning, burning" (111). Thus, through this incident, one can see the narrator's indirect attempt to transmit the phantom he has inherited from his mother to his father, while a direct link to his mother's madness is revealed in their shared phrase of "burning, burning." In this way, the destruction of the rose bushes highlights the conflict he

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[8] Tellingly, this incident occurs immediately after the narrator experiences a primal scene, during which he sees two tinkers copulating in an underground air-raid shelter, after which he proclaims that "I didn't know what I had seen, but I said nothing" (78).

experiences from being caught in a pathological dual unity with his mother, a tension that is defined by a desire to uphold her inherited secrets and the opposing need to differentiate himself as an individual subject through the transgression of those secrets.

Given the familial and the communal tendency towards distorting and repressing traumatic memories, the effects of this oppressive atmosphere on the narrator's psyche become increasingly prominent in the latter half of the novel. Most notably, as he enters young adulthood and receives more narrative fragments concerning Eddie's disappearance and his family's history, the narrator attempts to decrypt the story, both in his imagination and through linguistic representation. As Abraham and Torok point out, because of the phantom's tendency to destroy the representational power of language, the subject must discover new linguistic mechanisms to recover signification, a process they label "cryptonomic analysis" or "decrypting." One such instance occurs when, towards the end of the novel, the narrator attempts to piece together the entire story of Eddie's death, which represents the first attempt by a family member to reinscribe the execution onto a cohesive narrative structure. Deane writes:

> Then, maybe, Grandfather took out a revolver and handed it to Larry and told him to go in and do it. And Larry crawled down the passageway to the space where Eddie sat on the wishing-chair, and he hunkered down before Eddie and he looked at him and, maybe, said something, maybe, told him to say his prayers and then he shot him, several times or maybe just once, and the fort boomed as though it were hollow. (192)

Yet, as the above quote suggests, such a process of decrypting is itself fraught with problems, since the narrator can never be entirely certain that the narrative he constructs is capable of signifying the "truth" or authenticity of the story. This fact is further problematized by his repeated qualification of the story with the adverb "maybe" and his gradual realization that he lacks "the one story that cancelled all the others, the one truth she [his mother] could tell" (217).

A second attempt to decrypt the story and, more importantly, to transmit it to his father occurs when he writes out his reconstructed narrative in Gaelic, a language with which both he and his parents are largely unfamiliar. In this scene, the phantom that has been transmitted to the boy through the gaps in his parents' speech is redirected at them, yet the historical loss of the Gaelic language significantly contributes to the ongoing problem of silence, thus fusing the family's personal trauma with a broader historical loss for the Irish nation. In effect, this moment acts as yet another example of distorting fictions, since it is a translation he painstakingly constructs with the aid of a dictionary. In other words, just as the nationalist community reinscribes their communal traumas onto folklore and mythology, the narrator must similarly translate the narrative into a "dead" language to provide a sense of removal and distance from the original source material. Significantly, he fears preserving his written account in English, in case "someone would find it and read it," thus making him responsible for transmitting the secret further; as a result, he chooses to burn the English version "in front of my mother's eyes" (203). While his mother seemingly understands what he is attempting to do when he reads the Gaelic version aloud, his father merely responds by stating that "he liked to hear the language spoken in the house," thereby suggesting that, once again, the act of decrypting has been largely unsuccessful. Yet, Deane leaves the possibility of transmission ambiguous here, noting that the father's immediate reaction is to "vigorously sweep" the concrete patch where the rose garden had once been before "leaning on the handle [and] staring intently at the ground" (203).

Coupled with his desire for decryption, and complicating it even further, is the fact that the phantom, according to Abraham and Torok, seeks to elude the bringing to light of

the secret. As a result, the haunted subject's ego is "given the task of a cemetery

guardian. It stands fast there, keeping an eye on the comings and goings of the members

of its immediate family who… might claim access to the tomb" (159). Thus, as the

narrator develops into young adulthood, he is caught between the simultaneous longing to

unburden himself from the truth of his family's history, while also exhibiting a desire to

maintain the phantom's secret, fearing that to do otherwise would once again brand him

as an "informer" within the family circle. For example, he personally celebrates "all the

anniversaries: of all the deaths, all the betrayals – for both of them – in my head, year

after year," thus taking the burden of his parents' guilt and shame into himself, much as

his mother attempted to do earlier (236). Likewise, corresponding with this role of

"cemetery guardian" is the fear of exposing his mother's secrets, a difficulty that

Abraham and Torok note is particularly problematic during analysis because of the

"patient's horror at violating a parent's or a family's guarded secret, even though the

secret's text and content are inscribed within the patient's own unconscious" (174). This

"horror of transgression" is repeatedly alluded to in the narrator's progressively distant

relationship with his mother, who returns once more to the staircase of their original

haunting, but now "disliked anyone standing with her there to talk, most especially me.

There she was with her ghosts. Now the haunting meant something new to me – now I

had become the shadow" (228). This transformation of the narrator into "the shadow" of

the opening section is directly tied to his "horror of transgression," as his mother can no

longer stand the presence of her son and, specifically, the threat that his conscious and

unconscious knowledge presents, and she thereby effectively exiles him from the

household.

Moreover, the family drama that plays out in the concluding sections of the novel has clear affinities with the community's own attempts to bury the past and cast out those who transgress or betray its secrets, as seen in Sergeant Burke's final interaction with the mother. Despite his earlier role in having the narrator branded as an informer, Burke insists to the mother that he wants to "make an end it" and "walk away" from the sectarian conflicts of the past, presumably because he sees the influence that these events have in terms of transgenerational trauma: "Politics destroyed people's lives in this place, he said. People were better not knowing some things, especially the younger people, for all that bother dragged on them all their lives, and what was the point?" (213, 215). However, the mother's response here, which underscores the tradition of continual and internalized violence in Northern Ireland by specifically citing the house searches, internments, detentions, and beatings that the nationalist community have endured at the hands of the RUC, suggests that this family's personal trauma is indicative of a much larger communal one. Thus, her response anticipates the Troubles, because the feuds, secrets, and betrayals are seen as deeply rooted in the communities of both Catholics and Protestants and, therefore, cannot be easily addressed by Burke's rather hackneyed rhetorical questions: "Isn't it time it was all stopped? Did nobody want free of it? Why had it to go on and on and on?" (213).

As Deane notes, his novel fundamentally acts as a parable of the "attempt (and a painfully abortive attempt)" to "take charge of interpretation yourself, not to allow yourself to be interpreted by others" (Rumens 30). Following this "abortive attempt," the narrator seemingly chooses a life of self-exile, since, as Barbara Ann Young notes, "his presence is not comforting but threatening to those who have made their home among

suppressed memories and repressed desire" (322). Thus, by choosing to physically remove himself from the family home until his mother suffers a stroke that renders her speechless and his father's death, the narrator ultimately recreates the same cycle of secrecy and betrayal that have plagued his family since his uncle's disappearance. Yet, there is a slight difference in the narrator's own repetitive experience, since he does consciously choose to retain his knowledge of his family's past, rather than repress it, even if he is not able to openly transmit or reveal it to others. Therefore, as Gerry Smyth argues, "the best available option, the text seems to say, is to insist upon the existence of secrecy without trying to violate the integrity of *the* secret" (158; emphasis in original).

In this sense, the final story that the narrator relates, one that has been passed down from McIlhenny and recounts a father who, following the unexpectedly tragic death of his child, endlessly travels with one baby sock until he finds its match, solidifies the theme of transgenerational trauma and its effects on the psyches of the younger generation. Specifically, the tale, whose moral argues that the "worst punishment is the one Sean of Malin had created for his child – not being able to let it die properly, getting it caught between this world and the next," highlights the detrimental impact of refusing to properly deal with traumatic memories and, instead, choosing to pathologically hold onto the dead, who return as phantoms to haunt the present and lead to cycles of blame and betrayal (220-221). Thus, like the child in the story, the narrator is similarly caught between "this word and the next," in the sense that he is entrapped by his knowledge of the past yet cannot express this knowledge in the present. Moreover, the story also speaks to the broader historical impact of such repressions and obsessions, a fact that is confirmed by McIlhenny's statement that Ireland "was full of such people… because of

our bad history" and the narrator's mother's similar contention that "people in small places make big mistakes" (221). While the narrator's border town, and Northern Ireland in general, are such "small places," the mistakes people have made and continue to make reverberate throughout history and lead to a society that is haunted by the dead and their untold or concealed narratives. As a result, such unspeakable narratives and traumas masquerade as myth and legend, a fact that Deane suggests directly contributes to the general atmosphere of secrecy, betrayal, and sectarian hatred that leads to the onset of the Troubles at the end of the novel.

Thus, while critics like Derek Hand contend that the novel fails to provide a clear authorial viewpoint on the emerging violence that culminates in the Troubles, the coupling of the narrator's marginalization from his family and community, along with the intensification of local violence in his border town, seems to be an intentional commentary on how the family's individual history is only part of a much broader communal narrative that plays itself out by 1969. As Robert Garrett notes, the uncanny repetition already evident earlier in the text has a direct correlation with the renewed cycle of violence because "Deane's story about one family in Derry offers a traumatic parable of how history can repeat itself" (112). This correspondence is further reinforced by the fact that his mother suffers a stroke "and lost the power of speech, just as the Troubles came in October 1968." Now "sealed in silence," the mother's loss of speech marks the moment when the narrator can imagine a tentative peace between them, since there can be no further transmission of phantoms and she no longer feels the spectral threat produced by her son's knowledge (242). However, one of the final moments in the novel, when a British soldier is shot and killed on the threshold of the family's home,

highlights how the secrets and repressed traumas of the past have literally been brought to the family's doorstep. Thus, despite the family's own uneasy internal peace, marked by the narrator's belief that "now we could love each other, at last, I imagined," a new round of conflict, one grounded in past tensions and betrayals, has broken out and will continue to impact both this generation and the one to come.

The ambiguous nature of the novel's ending, which extends the possibility of reconciliation between mother and son, yet also withholds it until the mother is incapable of speech and the narrator has consciously decided to suppress the knowledge he has gained, is encapsulated by the text's final image. Following the imposition of a mandatory curfew and the death of his father, the narrator watches from his window as a young gypsy boy moves through the rubble: "Bareback, he held lightly to the horse's mane and turned out of the direction the army had taken hours before, although it was still curfew. The clip-clop of the hooves echoed in the still streets after he had disappeared" (245). Some critics, like Kennedy-Andrews, have interpreted this apparition as hopeful, comparing the gypsy to a phoenix that embodies the "defiant spirit of place" and arguing that he represents the narrator's new "sensitivity to pre-modern, oral cultural modes" (223). However, this final vision is also a notably bleak and almost post-apocalyptic one, particularly given that the gypsy boy is a tinker and, thus, an outsider to both traditional Irish culture and the sectarian violence surrounding him. Moreover, as Michael Parker points out, the gypsy boy's haunting presence offers one final reminder of "all the other lost, transient children peopling the text – the narrator, his father, Una, the orphans in Katie's story, the infant girl in McIlhenny's anecdote" (92). Therefore, I would argue that *Reading in the Dark*, which opens with a "shadow" that

separates mother from son and explores the overall effects of transgenerational trauma at length, ends by reinforcing the long-lasting and detrimental consequences of phantomatic haunting on the children of Northern Ireland. In essence, the gypsy boy could be read as a doppelgänger for the narrator himself since, by the end of the narrative, the protagonist has also failed to gain a name and, thus, a stable sense of subjectivity, and his ostracism from the community aligns him with the status of the tinker.

IV.

Mary Morrissy's novel *Mother of Pearl* centers on the themes of dispossession, split subjectivity, the disruption of the present by the past, and the phantomatic haunting that links two generations of women. Based on the real-life Baby Browne Case of 1950, in which three-month old Elizabeth Browne was kidnapped in Dublin and recovered four years later in Belfast, Morrissy focuses on the traumatized upbringing of a child protagonist who is kidnapped and passed between two mothers – her biological mother, Rita, and her "adoptive" mother, Irene. Stylistically, Morrissy interweaves the separate but intricately connected narratives of these three women to dramatize the issue of national identity in contemporary Ireland and Northern Ireland, an identity she defines as destabilized, wounded, and continuously haunted by an elusive, unknowable, and thus destabilized, past. The three narrative strands coalesce around the figure of a child who has inherited the secrets and phantoms of her unorthodox family line and, thus, each section acts as a kind of palimpsest that supplants and complicates the previous one. Because of its obvious focus on maternity, the novel has often justifiably been read as a condemnation or subversion of the ideal "Mother Ireland" trope that has pervaded Irish literature. For example, Linden Peach argues that Morrissy's text "explores the

pervasiveness of the origins of a particular crime connected with the mother figure which, albeit in different ways, violates the sacredness with which mothering and motherhood are regarded in Ireland and Northern Ireland" (155). In addition to this reading, however, I would argue that the novel subverts the sacredness of the mother figure by showing how transgenerational trauma is inherited through the matrilineal line, while at the same time connecting this issue to the broader traumatic impact of the Troubles on the younger generation.[9]

   As in *Reading in the Dark*, the Troubles emerge only at the end of Morrissy's novel, when the protagonist has already entered young adulthood; yet, like Deane's text, the central character's secretive and repressive familial and personal history foreshadow, and can be linked to, the national outbreak of cyclical violence. However, critics have often been reluctant to label *Mother of Pearl* as a Troubles text, and some, like Peach, have dismissed the relevance of its setting, stating that "although Morrissy's novel is set in Northern Ireland, the environment is kept vague, and somewhat mythical, so that it could be read as 'somewhere' in Ireland. The novel is not so much concerned with an identifiable, geographical environment, but a larger ideological environment" (156) While it is true that Morrissy's novel is not explicitly political, the sectarian strife of the Troubles is repeatedly alluded to and, like the various phantom children who materialize throughout the text, it haunts the background of each narrative. In other words, the "ideological environment" is, in fact, distinctly related to the sectarian conflict.

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[9]   Moreover, the central plot in the novel also contains traces of the broader historical trauma of illegal adoptions in Ireland, a largely hidden scandal whereby an unknown number of children were forcibly removed from unwed or "unfit" mothers and adopted by families outside of Ireland.

In this sense, Morrissy suggests a parallel between the characters' obsessions with their personal pasts and their various attempts to create a stable identity and the nation's problematic relationship to its own history and the instability of its national identity. For instance, the emergence of the Troubles runs parallel to Pearl's personal narrative, as her kidnapping takes place when "the city had erupted, unable to contain its differences" (174).   Likewise, Pearl's biological father, Mel Spain, is the victim of an early sectarian murder, marking his children as "orphans of one of [the Troubles] first casualties," after he is mistaken for a police informer (231). Similarly, following an attempt to self-abort her own child, Pearl compares her situation to the division of a nation that is "at war with itself," with the north representing a place where, according to her mother, "they eat their young" (210). Thus, Morrissy suggests that, much like the characters in the novel, the renewed conflict in Northern Ireland is the product of a country that is unable to forge a cohesive identity because it is haunted by the past: specifically, the "lost" phantom of precolonial and pre-partition nationhood. In this way, Pearl's split subjectivity, the physical and psychological trauma she endures, and her obsession with the secrets and phantoms of her past mark the protagonist, like the one in *Reading in the Dark*, as emblematic of the troubled nation.

From the beginning, Pearl/Hazel Mary's birth is marked not only by a literal wounding, but also by a general atmosphere of haunting, absence, and curses. For instance, Pearl is conceived in an abandoned house that Rita describes as "forbidden territory. Haunted…A woman was said to have been murdered there, done in with a hatchet" (124). Likewise, Pearl is "cut out, forcibly removed" from her mother during a Caesarean section and, following a brief illness after her birth, she is defined by her

absence from the empty crib at the foot of Rita's bed, an absence that makes Rita feel "like a fraud, as if she were a child feigning illness who had been caught out" (145, 148). Similarly, Rita asserts that her child's illness is the result of a hex placed on her by the tinkers she inadvertently admitted into her home while she was pregnant, an incident which leads Rita to believe that her baby could "never properly" belong to her and that "the creature in the tent had been an imposter; no wonder she hadn't loved it. Hazel Mary, *her* Hazel Mary had died at the moment of birth. That was why they had whisked her away" (165). Furthermore, Pearl's repeated association with absence and a "curse" is also highlighted by the fact she is literally marked at birth by the strawberry-shaped birthmark on her chin, her only recognizable feature, since there is no "documentary evidence" of her lost childhood with Rita, and the sole trait that eventually identifies her as the missing Baby Spain.

Even the process of her naming becomes a complex web of slipping signifiers, since the child's original name of Hazel Mary comes about from a misrecognition of Rita reciting "Hail Mary" during her difficult labor. Thus, "Hazel Mary" becomes the first in a series of names that will be associated with the protagonist: Hazel Mary, Baby Spain, Pearl, Moll, and Mary. Similarly, Pearl is repeatedly referred to by both Rita and Irene as either a creature, a sprite, a phantom, an angel, or a "wizened old creature," yet never simply identified as an infant or a child. Throughout the initial two sections of the novel, therefore, Pearl is a child who is continuously defined as absent, lost, or misrecognized, like the various wards in Irene's sanitarium, where she notes that, because it had been converted from a working house, "everything there was named twice, like signposts in a lost native language" (18). Thus, the variability in her own name proves to be the first

characteristic that destabilizes Pearl's sense of subjectivity, a process that is further complicated by her eventual inheritance of traumatic secrets and phantoms from both of her maternal figures. As a result, her lack of subjectivity leads to uncanny repetitions and the incorporation of intrapsychic secrets, which, in turn, causes a split in her mental topography and her haunting by a phobia-inducing phantom.

Specifically, Pearl's tendency towards an uncanny repetition of Rita and Irene's experiences occurs in the context of institutionalization and physical wounding, both of which are subsequently connected to the various stigmatized illnesses, pregnancies, and phantom infants that populate the text. For instance, all three female protagonists pass through a variety of social institutions, experiences that are bookended by their contrasting memories of home life. Thus, as Anne Fogarty notes, throughout the novel, "the home is defined through counterpoint with the institution, whether it be the sanatorium, the hospital, the school, the asylum, or the university" (64). More importantly, however, two of the most prominent institutions in the text, the sanitarium and the hospital, are sites populated by absent and/or spectral children. Additionally, social stigmas and taboos are attached to both specific illnesses (such as Irene's tuberculosis) and "unwanted" pregnancy, which seemingly warrant such structures of exclusion and containment. Thus, as a result of Rita and Irene's individual experiences within these institutions, and the physical trauma they each receive while in its care, Pearl inherits a compulsive tendency to consciously and unconsciously repeat their wounding, coupled with a pronounced desire to identify with and belong to a home.[10]

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[10]   This is a characteristic she shares with the protagonist of Patrick McCabe's *Breakfast on Pluto*, whose own family lineage is similarly destabilized.

Following her diagnosis of tuberculosis, a disease that first emerges as a "shadow" on her lungs, Irene is disowned by her family and is sent to a sanitarium under the pretense that she is expecting "an unwanted child" (12). Here, the novel establishes its first correlation between a stigmatized illness and an unplanned or phantom pregnancy (a conflation that Irene will mimic in her later delusional pregnancy) since Irene's denouncement by her mother is indistinguishable from that of conceiving an illegitimate child. Morrissy writes:

> She had, by her illness, disgraced the household, her mother believed. It spoke of poverty, a lack of hygiene. Her brothers dared not visit her. They would have had to explain their absence to a mother obsessed with contagion. Instead they helped to scour her room and burn her bedding. What they remembered of her shamed them. (10)

Furthermore, the fabricated reason for her expulsion establishes the first of many references to "lost" or illusory children that will haunt the text and the three characters' lives. Likewise, Irene's expulsion from her family, resulting in her subsequent identification of herself as an "orphan," marks her, from the opening of the text, as one of the dispossessed. As Roberta Rubenstein points out, the eradication of any trace of her belongings from the family home "threaten[s] her very existence as a subject and render[s] her abject," a status that is reinforced by the "leprous gaze of those who had already given her up for dead" that she encounters on her way to the sanitarium (Rubenstein 271; Morrissy 13).

The emotional toll of this traumatic stigmatization is further reinforced during Irene's prolonged stay at Granitefield, where she sees her own guilt mirrored in the other patients, who all feel they have to "justify [their] illness" because "none of them… could accept the random hand of fate. It was all due to something they had done, or something they had failed to do" (17). More troublingly, for Irene, this sense of guilt or wrongdoing

leads to a paranoid fear that "they might be led away to some strange, neglected place and abandoned. Or worse," a phobia that is subsequently unconsciously transmitted to Pearl during her own early upbringing with Irene (19). Additionally, the psychological trauma that Irene experiences as a result of her marginalization from her family and community is reenacted in a physical wounding, the result of a surgery that removes several of her ribs. Irene describes this wounding as a form of violation, a "forced entry" that leaves her feeling "as if part of her protection against the world had been removed. It was not only the mutilation but the fact that her bodily home has been tampered with..." (14).

Therefore, Irene's loss of both her literal home and the violation of her "bodily home" leaves her in a state of vulnerability, one that asserts itself in her belief that there is "no one to save you but well-meaning strangers who cut you open and [leave] a wound," and a consequent lack of stability that she attempts to counteract through a series of constructed, and subsequently deconstructed, identities (21). For example, Irene initially forges a new role for herself by providing a sexual outlet for the tubercular male patients at Granitefield and, through the use of her sexuality, she reimagines herself as a "savior," a maternal figure who is following "her calling… her life's work" (34) . This identity is subsequently shattered, however, when she discovers that Charlie Piper, the first man she provided a sexual outlet for, has been referring other patients to her in exchange for material goods, thus negating her identification as a mother-figure, degrading her virtuous "crusade," and relegating her instead into the category of a common "whore" (37).

The second section of Morrissy's novel focuses on Rita, the birth mother of

Pearl/Mary, and her story displays several uncanny intersections with Irene's experiences

at Granitefield. Like Irene, Rita experiences a destabilization of her identity that is

particularly noticeable after her impregnation by and marriage to Mel Spain, an event that

causes her to see herself as having "no history," and leaves her feeling that "for a brief

time Rita Golden had lived and then she'd been killed off by getting what she had always

wanted. The boy from the Mansions" (132). As with Irene, Rita compensates by

appropriating a series of identities throughout the text, describing each new beginning as

a violent dismembering of truth and self: "To start again, she would have to rip and undo.

A stitch of memory here, a seam of longing there, all would have to be remade" (203).

For example, following the death of her husband, Rita forges a new image of herself

through her appropriation of a lover who she claims "saw *her*, not what had happened to

her. He knew nothing of her history" (179; author's emphasis). However, the violence

associated with this appropriating and casting off of identity is enacted on a physical

level, as it was with Irene, in the form of a literal wounding. For Rita, this violation

occurs during her labor, which results in a Caesarian section, where she imagines "she

was going to be split in two, she and the boat alike, sliced into two halves," recalling

Irene's own description of her previous surgery, which she similarly compares to being

stranded on a lifeboat in open waters (134).

Moreover, this physical sensation of splitting recalls Rita's own split subjectivity, thus

reinforcing the novel's earlier association between physical and psychological trauma. In

this sense, Rita's entrapment within the institution of marriage and the repeated

association of her pregnancy with an illness presents the inverse of Irene's situation: she

is literally institutionalized under the pretense of a false pregnancy and later enters into a sterile marriage following her release from the sanitarium. What ultimately links the two maternal figures, however, is the conflation between procreation and sickness; specifically, following the disappearance of her child, Rita becomes convinced that her baby was "part of some nightmarish aberration, the product of feverish illness," thus strengthening the text's association between Irene's tubercular condition and her rib removal with Rita's traumatic childbirth, both of which permanently mark their bodies and leave notable absences behind.

Pearl's narrative encompasses the third part of the novel and begins, as in Irene and Rita's sections, with the image of a physical wounding. As Pearl awakens in the hospital after a successful attempt to abort her own child, she notes "I feel bruised and strangely tender, like the survivor of a huge public calamity" (207). Likewise, Pearl's understanding of her own entrance into the world connects her with both Rita and Irene's wounds, since she recalls that she emerged as "a bloodied stump lifted out of her [Rita] like a part that didn't work, an appendix, *a spare rib*" (227, italics mine). This knowledge of her traumatic birth, as well as the repressed memories of her problematic early childhood with Irene, leaves Pearl feeling, compared to her sister, "pallid and podgy… and creepily unhealthy, as if I spent my entire life in an institution" (209). In fact, Pearl, like Irene, is also repeatedly passed through a variety of social institutions, from the hospital to the orphanage. As she notes when she becomes a nurse, "I swapped one institution for another," and her uncanny description of night duty as "like we are aboard a doomed liner, going down" further connects her to Irene and Rita's experiences in the sanitarium and hospital, respectively (257). In this sense, physical and

psychological wounding; the stigmatization surrounding maternity, pregnancy, and illness; and each woman's experiences in a variety of social institutions is what fundamentally links all three female protagonists. In turn, all three of these experiences serve to foster an atmosphere of secrecy, which engenders both the inability of each character to form a stable sense of self and the transmission of intrapsychic secrets from mother (or pseudo-mother) to child.

The crypt is both formed and defined by its relationship to intrapsychic secrets, by the "unspeakable words" that are buried within it and, as Abraham and Torok contend, "the fact of reality consists in these words whose covert existence is certified by their manifest absence" (160). In Morrissy's text, such intrapsychic secrets are centrally focused on the issue of missing or phantom children, whose "manifest absence" hints at just such a "covert existence," and reveals itself throughout the novel in the ventriloquism of pseudo-mothers. In fact, even before Irene's kidnapping of Pearl, absent children populate the early pages of the novel and haunt the halls of Granitefield. Here, Irene encounters women like the Mother of Boys, who repeatedly makes reference to her "five strong lads" that ultimately fail to materialize during her death, as well as Betty Long, who obsessively knits baby clothes that Irene suspects she "store[s]… away, a trousseau for the children she would never have" (18, 21). Even Irene herself falls victim to this fantasy of phantom children, such as when she compares her feelings for the various men she sexually services at the sanitarium to "the helpless fondness of a mother for her absent, roving son," a harbinger of much deeper psychological issues that develop after she leaves Granitefield (35).

Specifically, the consequences of Irene's repeated attempts to forge an identity, and the subsequent shattering of each illusory self she takes on, culminates in a delusional pregnancy that eventually materializes in the kidnapping of an actual child (Pearl) from the maternity ward. Prior to attaining this real child, however, Irene creates a phantom one when she deceives her husband, Stanley, about being pregnant. Stanley initially takes part in this shared delusion and, as a result, Irene notes, "between them they had formed a child destined to be lost. A pearl of great price" (63). This movement from fantasy to reality illustrates the theme of absence and presence that continuously haunts all three female protagonists. As Rubenstein points out, "Irene's desire for motherhood seems to be at least partly motivated by the need to repair her own history of institutionalization and rejection by 'rescuing' another baby" (49). Moreover, Irene's early attempts to "repair her own history" through marriage fail, in part, because Stanley is impotent and, thus, incapable of providing her with an actual infant. As a result, her sense of belonging in both the home and the larger community is destabilized; instead of coziness, for example, she finds a "functional absence" haunts her household, one that she attempts to ward off by compulsively filling empty spaces with a variety of trinkets and obsessing over the scars and "traces of her illness, her old illness" (51, 56). Stanley, who is oblivious to the "gathering of phantoms" taking place around Irene, assumes she is merely missing her original home, "though he did not know where home was" (49). Thus, Irene's early fabrication about her pregnancy serves as an attempt to fill this void, to create "a right and fitting union" between herself, Stanley, and the community, a feat she acknowledges no living, human child could possibly accomplish: "The child she had

conjured out of light and air had done all of this. Like a fairy or sprite (no earthly child could have done it) she had waved a wand and granted them a wish" (62).

When her lie is exposed, the household is further poisoned and Stanley vindictively reveals Irene's past illness to the community, a secret she has taken great care in protecting "for fear of being driven out again for being unclean" (63). Thus, Irene's false pregnancy and her sickness are conflated once again, as her impurity is tied to her inability to join the community by producing an actual child and the threat she presents as a former tubercular patient and a failed mother. Yet Irene's explanation for the "loss" of this child is not grounded in the "untruth she had told" but, rather, in what she deems as her failure "to sustain the dream of a child," a failure she directly contributes to Stanley's attempts to make her phantom child flesh and blood: "He had even given it a name, so that it had lost its wings and had fallen to earth. *He* had made it real" (65). Thus, in a repetition of her earlier illness, Irene's delusional pregnancy transforms itself into an obsession with a phantom child that is entirely her own, a Frankenstein-like creation that requires no paternity since it is created from her physical body. Precipitated by a visit from Charlie Parker, her former acquaintance and lover at Granitefield, Irene begins to "brood on her operation at Granitefield" (71). As a result, Irene eventually conflates her illusory "lost" child with a real "lost" offspring when she reinterprets her original wounding, the removal of her ribs, as resulting in a literal "child of her illness, Irene's first loss," one that would have been "torn from her, yanked out as her shattered ribs had been," recalling Pearl's own description of her traumatic birth (71-72).

Irene's reconfiguration of her original wound as a wound of childbearing results, ultimately, in her kidnapping of Pearl/Hazel Mary, thus making material or present what

was previously imagined or absent. Notably, the association between her stigmatized illness, her physical wounding, and her haunting by a "lost" child is directly implied when, just before entering the hospital from which she removes Pearl, she confuses the characteristics of labor and sickness: "Was this a maternal bloom, an anxious glow on the eve of birth? Or was it the old disease come back?" (78). While her crime is eventually revealed and Pearl is removed from her household, Irene's brief reappearance in the final section of the novel reveals that she is a character who remains haunted by the image of this "lost" child, imagining that she sees Pearl "every day, in fact, a child skipping ahead of her on a dusty street, arms spread wide greeting the future, a future Irene has relinquished" (281).

Unlike Irene's, Rita's pregnancy is not brought on by a delusion and she is positioned as the victim mother in the text, one who initially experiences deep feelings of guilt and shame in the face of "the terrible truth that someone had wanted her baby more than she had" (160). Yet, like Irene, Rita is also haunted by a "first loss" and the kidnapping causes her to fixate on a phantom child, a version of *"her* Hazel Mary" whom she believes was replaced by the "imposter" baby and justifies her lack of maternal instinct after giving birth (165). Thus, while Irene seeks to engender a presence from an absence by appropriating a real child, Rita creates an absence out of a presence by willfully transforming her missing baby into a spectral child, a "ghost from her past" (202). Likewise, the family members surrounding Rita aid in her creation of this delusion; her father, for example, regards "the whole episode as an illness, as if Rita had suffered a breakdown and had been sent to a sanatorium" (174). Similarly, in a repetition of Stanley's participation in Irene's delusional pregnancy, Mel, who Rita feels "did not wish

to be reminded of how badly he'd been duped" by the vanishing baby, crafts his own spectral version of the child, transforming the missing girl into the ideal image of the son he secretly longed for: "For years to come… he believed that one day his long lost son would return… He imagined opening the door one day to a fine young man, a sailor with a kit bag or in a soldier's uniform, who had been out adventuring in the world and had come back with tall tales to tell" (162; ellipses). In short, no one properly acknowledges or mourns for the real Hazel Mary, the actual child who has gone missing. Even when reunited with Hazel Mary/Pearl four years later, Rita proves incapable of reconciling the reality of this child with the phantom baby she has created, convincing herself that "this child and the lost baby were [not] the same. Something had been lost in between." To maintain this illusion, she crafts a separate identity for Pearl, one that is removed from Hazel Mary, and instead Rita chooses to become "the mother of three – the lost one, Stella, and now this one, her third" (214).

Like Irene and Rita, Pearl represents a character with an unstable sense of identity who is haunted by a "lost" or absent child. In this case, it is her mother's "Cupid baby," the stillborn sister that Rita fabricates, who, in fact, represents Pearl herself. As a result, Pearl's childhood and her identity are defined against that of this imagined "lost" sister, and, consequently, Pearl sees herself as "just a substitute, a pale imitation, as if I were the ghost taking her place" (233). Yet, Pearl also actively participates in this delusion by constructing an imagined childhood for this "Cupid baby," whom she names Jewel, one that is haunted by actual occurrences from her own forgotten past, such as her near-drowning, her final blackberry picking trip before she was taken away from Irene, and her vague remembrance of the name Stanley. Eventually, Pearl's over-identification with

Jewel causes a breakdown in her own subjectivity, a deterioration that is triggered by her unplanned pregnancy. As Fogarty points out, Pearl's self-inflicted abortion occurs "because her fantasy of an alternative, lost self is so intense that it displaces everything else" (65). In this sense, Pearl becomes another one of Abraham and Torok's "cemetery guardians," in that her unconscious protects the maternal intrapsychic secrets that are associated with her own problematic childhood and, by doing so, she is forced to create a spectral entity, one that she crafts as "my firstborn, my only child. No other baby could be allowed to take her place" (273).

Thus, by repositioning herself as the dispossessed mother of Jewel, Pearl resorts to a form of Endocryptic Identification, whereby she dissociates herself from the figure of the lost child mourning for the lost mother and, instead, exchanges her identity "for a fantasmic identification with the 'life' of an object of love, lost as a result of some metapsychological traumatism" (Torok 142). In essence, then, she reimagines herself as the object, rather than the subject, of such a traumatic loss and mourning: "I had left her behind, a little girl, *my* little girl, and now she was claiming me back. There she stood in a line of smocked orphans on parade waiting for the glassy door at the end of a long polished corridor to open and a young woman to arrive who would single her out from the ranks of the disowned. And that young woman was me" (271-2). Therefore, Pearl aborts her actual child in favor of this phantom child who materializes in visions where she continuously eludes Pearl's grasp. As a result of her phantomatic haunting, Pearl is forced to take on the burden of these maternal intrapsychic secrets, which leads to an split within her own mental topography, a consequence that is hinted at throughout the text by

the many references to the story of the Judgment of King Solomon, who threatened to divide a child in two in order to determine who was the "true mother" of the infant.

A further consequence of Pearl's phantomatic haunting can also be seen in her tendency to experience uncanny repetitions of Rita's and Irene's life experiences, a feature she shares with the unnamed protagonist in Deane's *Reading in the Dark*. For example, her first sexual experience in a hospital broom cupboard, where "we grappled with each other like terminal patients with nothing to lose," recalls the sexual therapy Irene administered at Granitefield, while Pearl's simultaneous invading memory "of a child conceived in a rotting house on a summer's evening" links her with Rita's first sexual encounter and Pearl's displaced conception. Additionally, the novel connects both Pearl's split subjectivity and her unconscious repetition compulsion to the theme of borders and border-crossing, an issue that is tied to her childhood, since Irene and Stanley temporarily raised her in the north before she returns to live with Rita in the south. Thus, when she marries her Northern Irish husband Jeff, she is seen as "consorting with the enemy; the very people who had killed my father," a clear echo of Rita's own feelings when she is reunited with Hazel Mary at the orphanage, and an image that Pearl will eventually come to internalize: "A traitor in their midst; a child who lived because Mel was dead. A child who could never be trusted" (214). Yet, while she grows into adulthood surrounded by such common disparaging tropes about the north (at one point, her mother even claims "we should cut them off and set them adrift"), her subsequent return to Northern Ireland after her marriage is marked by a sense of uncanny familiarity and she compares it to "a ruined and cryptic version of home. I kept on expecting to meet somebody I knew" (266).

Unlike the protagonist in *Reading in the Dark*, however, Pearl also exhibits an additional consequence of phantomatic haunting: the phobia-inducing phantom. As Torok notes, "phobic children communicate a *story of fear* in their symptoms: either a fear whose actual victims are their parents or, alternatively, a fear that the parents themselves had inherited and now transmit willy-nilly to their own reluctant offspring" (180-181; author's emphasis). One of the most prominent phobias that Pearl inherits stems from her "horror of being singled out," a fear grounded in the belief that to be distinctly identified could lead to her abduction (252). This particular phobia can be traced back to the atmosphere of her early childhood, when Stanley and Irene exhibited overprotective tendencies born out of "the fear, unspoken between them that she might one day be taken from them." As a result of her unorthodox upbringing, Pearl is passed off as an "unwanted baby, the product of sin" and becomes, in Irene's own words, "a well for both of their sunken secrets" (104). Thus, the "story of fear" that Pearl communicates later in life directly correlates to the unspoken anxiety that has been passed down from her "adoptive" parents: "As a child I was afflicted by an awful watchfulness. At school, I dreaded the unexpected knock on the door… If a stranger walked into a room I believed it was for me he had come" (216). Concomitant to this fear of abduction is also the fear of abandonment, a leftover memory trace of Irene's fear at the sanitarium and Rita's guilt and shame that her baby was taken because she failed in her maternal duties. As the nun in The Cottage Home (the orphanage where Pearl is reunited with her birth mother) notes, "the taint of having been left once seemed to haunt her charges" (201). This taint reasserts itself, for example, when Pearl recalls becoming separated from Rita in a grocery store, an incident which leads her to conclude that it was Rita, and not Pearl, who

has gone missing, thereby once again repositioning Pearl as the maternal figure who is sought out instead of the lost child who has been willfully abandoned.

Additionally, as Torok notes, one's haunting by a phobia-inducing phantom is not merely a catalyst for symptoms that are grounded in a return of the repressed, but instead functions "in order to move the haunted persons to expose a concealed and unspoken parental fear" (181).   In this sense, Pearl's phobias throughout the novel continually seek to undermine and destabilize the secretive and taboo atmosphere that has been engendered by both sets of mothers in connection with her infancy and early childhood. For instance, upon her reunion with her lost offspring, Rita immediately decides that "for the garment to be passed off as the real thing, the child must never be told that here, in the portals of the Cottage Home, her second childhood had begun" (203). Thus, the repression of certain central truths about Pearl's background only fuel the creation of the phantom that comes to haunt her in later life, a fact that is highlighted by her fear of her maternal grandfather's shoe store. Pearl explains:

> There, I imagined, standing in Grandfather Golden's hall were the caskets of hundreds of unknown babies, their names inscribed on the nether end. I was afraid to be there after dark, fearing that the dead children would call out in the night. And one, in particular, the ghost of my sister. I feared that one day I would find *her* name written there. There were other secrets in Grandfather Golden's house, I was sure of it. (223)

While, on the surface, Pearl's fear could be seen as the common irrational reaction of a frightened child, or even an inheritance of Irene's "lifelong dread of lonely places," the scene is complicated by the fact that the house contains the remnants of newspaper clippings concerning the "Baby Spain" case, the "other secrets" known only to Pearl's dead father, who collected and hid these clippings in a shoe box in the home's walls (11). Likewise, one of the names inscribed on the various shoe boxes is, in fact, Pearl, the long

forgotten name of the child who is now christened Mary. Thus, for Pearl, her creation of Jewel becomes, in her mind, a guardian against such fears, "a cross and garlic for the despair and frights I had ascribed to my childhood," while, ironically, Jewel proves to be, in fact, one symptom of the phobia-inducing phantom (249).

Pearl's final vision of herself at the end of narrative is as a "tabula rasa," a figure who has no sense of history or stable identity. Thus, returning to the opening image of the novel, and Irene's expulsion from her home, Pearl appropriates the version of herself that is projected by her family; therefore, much like the narrator's position at the end of Deane's novel, she imagines that she has "become the family secret. Shameful and dangerous like the shadow on an X-ray that speaks of death. A vessel of guilt, carrier of original sin, a child of Eve" (276). This vision, furthermore, is cemented by the fact that no documentary evidence exists to confirm Pearl's childhood with Rita, leaving a "blank" that she attempts to fill with a spectral presence that eventually consumes her entire identity. As Torok points out, "in the depths of the crypt unspeakable words buried alive are held fast, like owls in ceaseless vigil" (160). Thus, by the end of novel, Pearl's reality has become tainted by memories and "unspeakable words" that she cannot confidently ascribe to her own experiences and, in response, she, like Irene and Rita before her, comes to not only conflate the phantasmal with the real, but allows her phantomatic haunting to dictate her reality. In other words, while she imagines that, following her abortion, she has been "liberated from the shackles of a child that never was," she has actually relocated Jewel's memories to her pre-birth consciousness: "Those ghostly memories I ascribed to her, they're mine. They have always been mine. Memories not of this life, but of a life before. Before birth" (276).

In this sense, as Rubenstein points out, Pearl's narrative "functions as a kind of nostalgic mourning" that eludes the typical psychologically healing processes of working through, revelation, and resolution (275). Like the unnamed narrator in *Reading in the Dark*, she is also able to keep the secret intact, yet she never consciously learns the truth about her own history. Instead, she remains a character who simultaneously knows, yet does not know, her origins, as evidenced by the fact that she correctly imagines Jewel's true mother (Irene) as someone who has "grown hopeless with the passing years, for whom a child would be a miraculous favor granted by the message of an angel" (235). In a similar manner, she grants Jewel a father whose description uncannily corresponds to Stanley, she relocates her own drowning as a child to this spectral presence, and she even imagines Jewel herself as "tubercular…Weak lungs, a rickety walk listing to one side" (236). Yet by keeping the phantom's secret intact, Pearl enacts the "preservative repression" that Abraham and Torok identify as one consequence of phantomatic haunting. In short, the function of this type of repression works in a similar manner to the lesson Pearl learns about the eclipse while at school: "Because, my dear, there are some things we cannot bear to see. The fierce light of the sun would blind you if you gazed on it directly, so we look down on its reflection instead" (246). Ironically, upon hearing the name of a fellow classmate ("Stanley"), Pearl misses the eclipse entirely and realizes that it is "a secret that might never be repeated in my lifetime" (247). What Pearl is left with at the end of her narrative are, therefore, mere reflections of not only her own childhood trauma, but also the transgenerational phantoms she has inherited from both Irene and Rita, losses she is unable to introject.

While novels like *Mother of Pearl* are most often read in terms of the complex relationship between maternity and feminism in Ireland, such works also, as Fogarty notes, "produce complex meditations on the nature of individuation and depict the self as caught between the trauma and inarticulacy of repressed memory and the impetus to achieve growth in a sphere uncontaminated by the compulsive and regressive repetitions that form the basis of personal and familial identities" (62). I would add, however, that Morrissy's text also foregrounds the issues of unspeakable intrapsychic secrets and transgenerational phantoms within a historical framework that is deeply rooted in the Troubles. In fact, the entire impetus for the three narrative strands, the kidnapping of Baby Spain, is perpetuated because Irene's criminal act goes undetected due to the "violence perpetrated in the Four Provinces," which distracts several minor characters from connecting her with the missing child (85). Similarly, Morrissy's descriptions of the north finds direct correlation with Pearl's own traumatized subjectivity, such as when she describes the city she lives in as "a city of tribes, like twins divided at birth," and recalls the uncanny atmosphere she encounters after crossing the border from the Republic to the north: "It is another world, yet familiar, too, like the portrait of an ancestor frowning behind glass" (210-211). Even the tragedies of the Troubles, which Pearl reflects on through the images that her husband (who works as a police photographer) is tasked with documenting, find an affinity with the more explicit theme of encountering the ghostly remnants of the past. Morrissy writes:

> From the television I knew about random death on the street, a corpse in its own blood, discretely shrouded by a sheet or someone else's coat. But Jeff drew back the shroud and looked at it straight on… I feared for him; it was a version of closeness, I suppose, this sense of fear for the other. But it felt more like a haunting, a rehearsal for the dreaded loss. (269)

Thus, like Deane, Morrissy suggests that the characteristics that define Pearl's personal

and familial identities and lead to her phantomatic haunting are, in fact, rooted in a

broader social context that promotes the inarticulacy of past and current traumas and,

instead, creates a cycle of transgenerational hauntings.

V.

Patrick McCabe's *Breakfast on Pluto*, which was published the same year as the

enactment of the Good Friday Agreement (1998), follows the dysfunctional childhood and

early adulthood of Patrick/Pussy Braden, a transvestite prostitute who grows up in the

fictional border town of Tyreelin and who is (presumably) the illegitimate product of an

act of rape committed by the local parish priest, Father Bernard on his innocent teenage

victim, Eily Bergen. Set during the 1960s and 70s, and thus situated at the height of the

Troubles, McCabe's novel displays his signature neo-Gothic postmodern style and the

protagonist shares several distinct characteristics with the one found in McCabe's 1992

work *The Butcher Boy*. For instance, both Francie Brady and Patrick/Pussy grow up in a

border town reminiscent of McCabe's hometown of Clones in County Monaghan; both

texts are narrated through the point of view of an unreliable and, eventually, psychotic

protagonist who suffers at the hands of individuals and state institutions; and, in both cases,

familial dysfunction, coupled with national dysfunction, prove to be largely culpable for

the narrators' mental breakdowns. Thus, in each case, McCabe can be seen as, in Claire

Wallace's terms, "writ[ing] about madness, apparently through madness" (Lehner

Subaltern Ethics 157). Additionally, Francie and Patrick/Pussy each exhibit an unhealthy

fixation with the ideal mother and are prone to fantasies of vengeful violence when reality

problematizes their delusions. Likewise, just as Francie has been interpreted as an

embodiment of the "savior" his community deserves due to their negligence and lack of intervention in his life (as opposed to the vision of the Virgin Mary they pray for),[11] Patrick/Pussy can be similarly read as "a figure of the nation and its fate" (Mulhall 224). Yet while *The Butcher Boy* predominately takes place against the backdrop of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, in *Breakfast on Pluto*, Patrick/Pussy's story unfolds during the beginning and height of the Troubles; thus, the narrator's personal history is intricately tied to McCabe's broader condemnation of the Northern conflict and, especially, its effect on the younger generation coming of age during that time period.

Specifically, McCabe's vision of Northern Ireland's violence and its effects on the adolescent psyche is a notably dark one. He demonstrates this through the narrative of Patrick Braden by showing how he transforms from an anomaly within the community to an abject Other; from his Oedipal fixation on the mother and a murderous rage against the patriarchal figure to a complete psychotic breakdown in the face of sectarian violence; and as a character who ultimately ends as an exiled outcast with a pathological nostalgia for an idealized and unrealized past. Indeed, Tom Herron has noted that novelists like McCabe project a vision of post-independence Ireland "as essentially a contaminated or pathological entity" and argues that McCabe's "novels promote a view of the nation and its progeny as utterly incapable of adapting to changing times, as, indeed, thoroughly terminal cases" (171-72). Thus, in this novel, McCabe employs a unique narrative persona in Patrick/Pussy, one that crosses a series of literal and symbolic "borders" in order to

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[11]   For example, in "Francie Pig vs. the Fat Green Blob from Outer Space: Horror Films and The Butcher Boy," Laura Eldred argues that "Francie is the community's monster because he is what its vision of itself… cannot, and will not, accept…. McCabe suggests, however, that the ultimate source of abjection, and the ultimate monster, is the Irish nation itself" (66).

highlight how the Troubles inform, infiltrate, and prove to be a malignant influence on the mental well-being of the youth who grew up in the shadow of sectarianism.

Presented as a written record following his time at a mental asylum, and narrated as "The Life and Times of Patrick Braden," the most notable feature of McCabe's narrative is its consistent lack of reliability. As Wallace has noted, "it remains impossible to determine if any of the events… can be understood as outside of Pussy's perpetually attention seeking performance" (Lehner 174). Moreover, the novel's foregrounding of Patrick/Pussy's unreliability, with its conflation of fantasy and reality, accounts for the novel's darker undertones and its position as a decidedly postmodern text, where several potential interpretations coexist simultaneously. Most notably, however, the narrator's lack of reliability is also entwined with the novel's reliance on several common or even clichéd narrative devices found in traditional Troubles fiction, such as the conflicted relationship with the father, the fixation on the suffering mother, the best friend who joins the IRA and is killed (in this case as an informer), and the self-imposed exile of the protagonist who cannot mediate between the personal and the political, but with the added complication of Patrick/Pussy being a transgendered, and therefore transgressive, subject.[12]

Yet the fact that the novel is structured as a written account, one at least partly composed following his mental breakdown, is itself important. After all, this feature suggests both a way for Patrick/Pussy to inscribe his own narrative onto the nationally "accepted" one, but also suggests that this written record, which originates in psychoanalysis, serves as a text

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[12] One can see a similar kind of postmodern pastiche in Robert McLiam Wilson's *Ripley Bogle*, where the homeless narrator, self-exiled to London, crafts a fantastical tale that incorporates several Troubles clichés before admitting that his entire account is compromised and the reader is left in a similar state of tension between belief and disbelief.

for Patrick/Pussy to attempt to navigate the secrets, crypts, and phantoms that inform his development. In this sense, the reader comes to stand in for the now absent Terence, the psychiatrist who both prompted Patrick/Pussy to "write it out so I could somehow make sense of it all," and subsequently abandoned him during the course of his treatment (96). In essence, then, Patrick's "confession" can be seen as an attempt to translate what Pierre Janet calls "traumatic memory" into "narrative memory," or, in Patrick Mahon's reading, to underscore "the extra-subjective aspect of therapeutic language by repeatedly referring to the 'we' that must hear the next installment of Pussy's narrative" (450).

Thus, just like Patrick/Pussy's gender-bending and performativity, the memoir itself can be read as transgressive, particularly in the context of the Troubles. For example, not only does Patrick/Pussy's role-playing and appropriation of feminine signifiers suggest a way to elide gender binaries, but it also proposes a clear alternative to, and undercutting of, masculine paramilitary narratives, particularly those most commonly associated with republican groups like the IRA.[13] In a similar manner, Patrick/Pussy's ability to transgress such boundaries works to destabilize the tendency towards binary thinking that is often associated with the sectarian conflict, where categories such as Catholic/Protestant, Anglo/Irish, and Republican/Unionist are presented as unifying and fixed terms in order to promote a vision of communal unity and foster an us versus them mentality. By disrupting such categories, however, Patrick/Pussy draws attention to the artifice of these constructs, while simultaneously presenting a very real threat to his community; in this way, he

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[13]   As Caroline Magennis points out, for example, "the rhetoric of sectarian conflict is unashamedly masculinist and, at times, borders on the misogynist" (9)

eventually comes to signify "multiple personal and collective transgenerational traumas that must be repressed in the name of a delusion" (Mulhall 238).

One way in which McCabe clearly implicates Patrick/Pussy in the collective trauma of the nation is through the author's incorporation of a preface to the novel, which situates the protagonist in a specific geographical space and historical timeframe. Notably, Patrick/Pussy is born in a border town, located one mile from the partition, which McCabe describes as "a geographical border drawn by a drunken man, every bit as tremulous and deceptive as the one which borders life and death. Dysfunctional double-bind of border-fever, mapping out the universe into which Patrick Braden, now some years later found himself tumbled" (X). In this way, Patrick/Pussy's personal narrative of violence is contextualized within Ireland's own dark history, and McCabe details the historical atrocities associated with the location in order to suggest how sectarian violence is both deeply ingrained in and is also part of a repetitive cycle that has its origins long before the current conflict that the novel explores. Thus, McCabe condenses nearly two hundred and fifty years of violence, beginning with the fact that "in 1745 a crofter was garroted" and projecting the time frame beyond the confines of Pussy's own recollected story and towards the future, where in "1991, a Catholic man disappeared and was found in a ditch, a crucifix hammered into his head" (x). Likewise, Patrick/Pussy's fate is carefully tied to the realities of the border, which is itself described as arbitrary, yet exerts a lasting impact on the nation and the narrator, who consistently seeks to end "this ugly state of perennial limbo" in his own life (x). Ultimately, by ending the prologue with a reference to the Good Friday Agreement, McCabe is able to parallel the nation's desire for peace with his protagonist's longing for home, stability, and sanity.

However, Patrick/Pussy does not merely function as either a transgressive anomaly within the nationalist community or as a more general symbol of the nation's collective trauma. Instead, *Breakfast on Pluto* charts the disintegration of the protagonist's psyche as a result of exposure to sectarian violence, transphobia, and, most fundamentally, the dysfunctional family drama that defines his conception. Specifically, the secrecy and uncertainty surrounding the circumstances of this conception, coupled with his abandonment by his mother, is the originary trauma that Patrick/Pussy repeatedly and obsessively returns to throughout the narrative. While, on the surface, this situation would seem to enact a traditional Oedipal drama (rivalry with the father, fixation on the mother) and has been read by other critics in Lacanian terms as an alternative to or deconstruction of the phallocentric structure, Patrick/Pussy's problematized differentiation from the mother figure also has parallels with Abraham and Torok's ideas about the formation of a pathological dual unity. Specifically, this lack of differentiation and the repression of the mother's unconscious into one's own is seen in Patrick/Pussy's repeated attempts to reconstruct, in his imagination, his mother's supposed violation by Father Bernard and, in actuality, is relived through his own victimization by various men when he becomes a transgendered prostitute in London.

Because Patrick/Pussy lacks an authoritative account about his conception, due to both the continued absence of a mother figure and Father Bernard's lack of acknowledgement that Patrick is his son, he is forced to craft his own version of what transpired. This vision is notable because it remains stable and consistent in its details throughout his otherwise rambling narrative. Thus, as Patrick/Pussy would have it, the "*change in Father Bernard dated back to a single 1950s morning and to no other – the morning he inserted his*

excitable pee pee into the vagina of a woman who was so beautiful she looked not unlike

Mitzi Gaynor the well-known film star. And then arranged for her to go to London so

that there would be no dreadful scandal" (8). However, the degree of reliability in this

account is noticeably fragile, especially given the fact that Patrick/Pussy constructs this

recollection, and his overall image of his mother, from scraps of town gossip and

assumptions about his mother and father's actions. In particular, Patrick/Pussy's fantasy

regarding his mother's forced abandonment is a form of incorporation and Endocryptic

Identification; he imagines himself as the lost love object of the mother who mourns for

him, despite the fact that his mother never appears in the text and there are no hints that

she ever searches for him. In a similar sense, Patrick/Pussy's cross-dressing could be

read as a sign of conflating his own identity with the mother, who comes to resemble

Torok's "exquisite corpse" in his unconscious. It is telling, for example, that he

unfailingly imagines her as she was at the moment of his conception, rather than what she

might look like now, and he subsequently fills in this image with bricolage from popular

culture.

   Yet, while the narrator's main focus is always on a fixation with the mother,

Patrick/Pussy, who alternates between male and female roles (and thus, can be read as

both a son and a daughter), also exhibits a pathological obsession with the father figure,

specifically in terms of demonizing Father Bernard in order to maintain his idealization

of Eily Bergin. For instance, Patrick/Pussy admits that, while he is generally capable of

empathy, "there appears to be no similar generosity of spirit evident when it comes to my

treatment of Father Bernard" (58). Likewise, when he attempts to write about his father,

at Terence's insistence, his repressed hatred and rage devolve into a near psychotic

breakdown: "When Terence came in I was screaming his name (Daddy's – Bernard's – whatever the fuck you want to call him) and was tearing the pages into pieces, crying: 'I'll fucking kill him! I'll cut his fucking cock off and burn his church down with him in it!" (123). Thus, this form of impossible mourning that is associated with his mother's abandonment also masks the rage he feels against the father, and by extension the Church, who both reject him, and it may explain why his early written compositions fixate on the act of conception rather than the ongoing refusal of Father Bernard to acknowledge him as a son (or daughter).

As Torok notes, idealizations, such as the one Patrick/Pussy constructs of his mother, tend to mask repressions and, in this case, his idealization is tied to the secret possibility of his mother's willful abandonment and the uncertainty surrounding his lineage. As a result, Patrick/Pussy cannot introject the loss of his mother and she, instead, is transformed into an "exquisite corpse" who is revived repeatedly through his idyllic reunion fantasies. Likewise, if, as Torok argues, such incorporation "creates or reinforces imaginal ties and hence dependency," this trait can be seen in Patrick/Pussy's obsessive desire throughout the narrative to find a home and a sense of belonging (114). Specifically, such fantasies alternate between his being the beloved child, the mother figure who gives birth to countless adoring offspring, and the domestic wife to a doting husband. For example, Patrick/Pussy's adoration of his first lover, the politician he nicknames "Dummy Teat," is largely grounded in the fact that Patrick/Pussy "loved the cottage he'd put me in. It had belonged to his mother" and because of Dummy's tendency to cry out "Mammy" while sucking on Patrick/Pussy's thumb (33-34). Similarly, Patrick/Pussy is seduced by his later provider Bertie when the latter sings a

song entitled "Welcome Home." In fact, most of Patrick/Pussy's interactions with others can be read as an attempt to form a pseudo-family and each, inevitably, reenacts the abandonment that is the original trauma.

As these idyllic fantasies develop and are subsequently destroyed, however, they are also increasingly connected to acts of uncontrollable violence, thus foreshadowing Patrick/Pussy's later vengeance fantasies following his complete mental breakdown. For instance, after developing an unhealthy obsession with local boy Brendan Cleeve, Patrick/Pussy responds to Brendan's slight by setting a rival's hair on fire, justifying the act in terms of his pathological need for acceptance. McCabe writes:

> It's just that somehow I'd managed to work it all out so perfectly in my mind, with him and me together at last in the house I'd always dreamed of, our *Chez Nous* picture on the wall ('this is our little home') with its lovely twining flowers and everything spotless for him when he'd come home from work, putting his arms around you with a sort of definiteness that said: 'You belong here! Here and nowhere else!'' Instead of brown glass marble eyes that bored right through you and said: 'Who are you?' No! Said: 'Who or *what* are you?' (193)

Such hallucinatory wish-fulfillments reflect Torok and Abraham's notion that fantasies are inherently narcissistic, in that they seek to transform the external world as a means to avoid inflicting pain on the subject; in this case, Patrick/Pussy's violent response works to thwart the male gaze that reinscribes his abject status on his physical body (*"what* are you?"). Moreover, the repression that is masked by such idealizations continues to haunt Patrick/Pussy's psyche, just as secrets that are buried in a crypt can return to haunt the subject and lead to strange or incomprehensible behaviors. This fact is particularly evident in Patrick/Pussy's reaction when he encounters the unwanted children in his village, "babies they never bothered to wash, never even lifted them out to cuddle once in a while, why because they didn't want them!," and in his failed attempts to prevent local girls like Martina Sheridan from suffering unplanned pregnancies (188). Here, the

repressed secret of his mother's willful abandonment, and his own rage at this possibility, is conflated with his displaced concern for Martina's potential illegitimate child, as seen in his reaction of violently shaking the girl while proclaiming, "She should never have just gone like that! For without her, how can I ever belong on this earth? And that is exactly, exactly, what it would have been like for Martina Sheridan's baby if she had one" (102).

Compounding Patrick/Pussy's inability to introject the loss of his mother and the fantasies he constructs to ward off this personal trauma, however, are the series of external traumas he experiences as both a prostitute in London and as a Northern Irish subject during the sectarian conflict. In particular, Patrick/Pussy's prostituted body, while sustaining the temporary wish-fulfillment for acceptance and love, also serves as a reenactment of his mother's physical violation and his rejection by a community that increasingly wants nothing to do with him. For example, while working as a prostitute, Patrick/Pussy encounters "Silky String," a client who almost strangles him to death while, tellingly, a song by Mitzi Gaynor (his mother's supposed doppelgänger) plays on the radio. As with most of the traumas he suffers, Patrick/Pussy's narrative is notably absent in terms of reflection on this incident, yet he does hint at its long-lasting impact in his usual matter-of-fact tone: "I would really like to be able to say that, like everything else, time began to pass and eventually my wounds healed. But, I'm afraid, getting throttled by the likes of Silky is not something you get over quite so easy" (71).

In a similar manner, Patrick/Pussy's memoir details several local deaths that occur during the sectarian conflict, most often documenting victims from his own generation and social sphere. Yet, though he acknowledges the pervasiveness of violence in his

social world (noting, for example, that "every time you picked up a paper, someone else had been shot or maimed for life"), Patrick/Pussy continually adopts a detached stance when reflecting on the political violence (20). Remarking on his best friend Irwin's increased involvement in the paramilitaries, for example, he contends that "I, of course, was much too preoccupied with my own personal revolution to be bothered with anything so trivial" (22). Even the events of Bloody Sunday seem to elicit little outrage, with Patrick/Pussy "shamefully not thinking about the dead victims or their relatives but what combination of my luscious goodies I should go and try on first!" (39). However, the political continues to encroach on his personal world, and this feigned detachment can, therefore, be read as yet another instance of performativity. After all, it is unlikely that Patrick/Pussy could be this disinterested, given that his first lover dies in a sectarian car bombing, his best friend Irwin is executed by the IRA, and his former classmate, Pat McCrane, is gruesomely killed by a loyalist group that bears a strong resemblance to the Shankill Butchers. Thus, just as Patrick/Pussy represses the abandonment by his mother through incorporation and Endocryptic Identification, he also seems to repress what is happening in his social world in the interests of maintaining the illusion of national unity and an unquestioning loyalty to Mother Ireland. In other words, as Caroline Magennis notes, "Northern Ireland can be read as a stunted form of the oedipal conflict, a wish to subsume into the 'mother' of national rhetoric, with a sense of patriarchal abandonment" (95).

Yet, there are clues throughout the text that Patrick/Pussy is much more affected by these acts of sectarian violence than his unemotional description would seem to suggest. For example, the death of Laurence Feely, a mentally-disabled Catholic boy who is killed

by loyalist paramilitaries, is initially summarized by the protagonist in his usually detached manner: "I think it was the first Down's syndrome boy shot in the Northern Ireland war. The first in Tyreelin, anyway" (47).   Tellingly, however, this particular death coincides with Patrick/Pussy's decision to leave Northern Ireland in 1972, and the text suggests that this murder affects him so much because the Feely boy, like Patrick/Pussy, is viewed as an outsider and an abnormality in the nationalist community. Notably, for example, Feely has a similar obsession with celebrities as the protagonist and, as Jason Buchanan notes, "Laurence's inability to properly separate the virtual, or imaginary, from the real makes him an easy target for the violent ritual," and the same could be said of the protagonist (72).   In a similar manner, Patrick/Pussy's later revenge fantasy can be read as a violent return of the repressed, revealing just how much he has been affected by these losses, since he imagines enacting a unilateral vengeance on the Loyalist and Republican killers of both Pat McCrane and Irwin, respectively.

Yet the lack of reliability that contaminates Patrick/Pussy's entire narrative also makes his reconstructions of and reactions to such deaths suspect, particularly in terms of the narrator's own ambiguous relationship to republican paramilitary organizations. During his later psychoanalysis with Terence, Patrick/Pussy contends that, "I know I hadn't been feeling well but you couldn't have described me as '*mad*' or anything like that. Terence said that all that was wrong with me was that I was hypersensitive to the things that were going on around me and I think he was right" (103). Such "hypersensitivity" may, in fact, account for the reason that Patrick/Pussy resorts to constructing elaborate recreations of Pat McCrane's death and Irwin's execution, two events for which he was not present. More troubling, however, are the reconstructions of sectarian violence, scattered

throughout the text, that have no correlation with personal experiences or losses. For instance, at one point Patrick/Pussy crafts a third-person, supposedly imagined, scenario in which several British soldiers are lured away from a pub by honeypots working for the IRA, a detailed account that intrudes on the personal narrative and is seemingly divorced from any actual event so far recollected in the novel: "In one of the soldier's heads there was a faint echo of Barry Blue singing. 'Fucking scum,' the men say as they stop the Cortina to dump them on the waste ground and go off to a club for a drink" (101). In a similar manner, Pussy also recreates a scene of republican paramilitaries preparing to plant a bomb, one that betrays a fairly detailed knowledge of IRA vernacular: "First there was gelignite to be unwrapped – with special care of course – after all, we didn't want anyone to be getting nitroglycerine sickness (or 'NG Head' as the lads called it), the hands to be clipped off pocket watches and the one hundred and one different things that you had to do when you were on active service" (145). Both of these instances suggest that, at minimum, Patrick/Pussy is well aware of typical sectarian tactics and raise the possibility that his narrative potentially conceals a more active involvement in sectarian politics, one that belies his assertion of being "an ordinary transvestite prostitute, not the slightest bit interested in politics at all" (143).

While McCabe leaves his protagonist's involvement in paramilitary activities intentionally ambiguous, both the personal and the political eventually conspire to bring about the deterioration of Patrick/Pussy's psyche, first through his role-playing with his adoptive mother Louise, and later during his eyewitness account and subsequent imprisonment following an IRA bombing in a London pub. In this way, as Stephanie Lehner notes, the narrator's "detachment from reality always appears in association with

patriarchal or patriotic violence; namely, with regard to her mother or sectarian

atrocities" (176). Early in the novel, one can see a form of escapism in Patrick/Pussy's

attempts to appropriate the images of specific American and British pop culture icons,

such as Audrey Hepburn, Doris Day, or Dusty Springfield and, in this way, he is able to

create what Ake Persson describes as a "complex palimpsestuous identity" (53).

However, the subversive nature of such role-playing takes a decidedly traumatic turn

when Patrick/Pussy meets Louise, a woman mourning the death of her half-Irish son

Shaunie, and he is drawn into a play-acting scenario whereby he dresses as her child and

becomes "engulfed by all [her] powdery warm flesh" (92). Despite the initial appeal of

the situation, which allows Patrick/Pussy to momentarily recreate the illusion of a union

with his lost mother, the protagonist senses the disturbing undertones of this momentary

fantasy. McCabe notes:

> The only thing about it being that somewhere in the back of my mind, I kept thinking: 'You shouldn't be doing this, as you well know. She's not your mammy. If she wants you to be her son, that's fine. But she's not your mammy. Your mammy was special. Even if she did dump you on Whiskers Braden's step and leave you forever. Even if she did do that, no one – no one! – could ever take her place. (93)

Thus, recreating this illusion of the mother-child relationship not only further hinders

Patrick/Pussy's ability to introject the loss of Eily, but it also recalls how, according to

Torok, such temporary fulfillment is met with condemnation and repression in the

psyche.

Compounding this internal censure, however, is the "horror of transgression" that

Abraham and Torok note occurs when the child fails to keep the parent's intrapsychic

secret intact, a moment that is played out when Louise, based on Patrick/Pussy's

idealized description of Eily, appears dressed as his mother. This moment of uncanny

repetition is, in fact, so traumatizing for the protagonist that he later recalls Terence

asking him, "was that the first time you felt whatever it is that holds you to the ground beginning to slip away? And I said yes it was, even though I'd felt the same after Silky – but had forgotten all about it for up until then I felt solid as a rock" (114). Thus, rather than serving as a liberating or subversive performance, Louise's appearance as Eily furthers the internal splitting already present in Patrick/Pussy's psyche and merely serves to remind him of the loss he has failed to introject. Moreover, the sudden apparition of his mother triggers feelings of both shame and guilt, largely grounded in his perceived betrayal of speaking the unspeakable and, thus, transgressing against the "exquisite corpse" that resides in his unconscious: "Why did I tell her about Mammy? Why did I have to *tell* her?" (114).

Following his rejection of Louise, Patrick/Pussy's second traumatic experience moves beyond the personal to the political, when he finds himself "practically beside the point of detonation" during an IRA bombing in a London pub (114). While the narrator has already been exposed to the outcomes of sectarian violence in Tyreelin, this event is marked by not only a sense of detachment, but also, in Caruth's terms, a "belatedness" that does not allow it to be assimilated in either time or consciousness. For example, Patrick/Pussy recalls a previous bombing when he "arrived just for the end of it"; yet, in a foreshadowing of the violence he will directly experience, he recalls the image of "a woman in some tattered rags [who] kept laughing at a joke. Except nobody was telling her one" (72). Notably, when the narrator becomes an eyewitness, and eventual suspect, in the later bombing, he is transformed into this same woman, in an unconscious and uncanny repetition of the former scene: "It was only then she noticed her Christian Dior tights were torn to ribbons… If anyone had been observing Puss, they would surely have

said: 'Why is she laughing, for heaven's sake? Doesn't she realize she ought to be

dead?'" (141).

In this sense, Patrick/Pussy's exposure to a direct act of sectarian violence acts as a

parallel to his direct exposure to the image of Eily Bergin during his role-playing with

Louise, and, thus, further contributes to the process of psychic splitting that is already

apparent throughout his narrative, a fact that is most obviously seen in the transition from

first to third-person narration during and following his exposure to the bombing.

Moreover, just as Louise's appropriation of his mother's image traumatizes Patrick/Pussy

because it literalizes the loss of his mother, his exposure by the police to "the

photographs of those he had disfigured and destroyed – all because of politics" confronts

him with the carnage of the various deaths that he has attempted to repress throughout the

Troubles. As a result, the narrator experiences a complete psychotic breakdown while in

police custody, not only feeding the police "lies about feeling oppressed and being a key

figure along in the IRA English bombing campaign," but also displacing his fury about

these sectarian deaths onto his previous rage against his elusive father figure (95).

McCabe writes:

> All they saw was a teenage bombing suspect bouncing himself off the walls and about
> to do some serious damage, not to mention repeatedly screaming: 'I'll kill him! I'll
> kill him! I'll burn his church and him along with it! They'll pay, you'll see! All of
> them!' before slipping to the floor and whimpering for a while. (153)

Therefore, following the incident with Louise and his exposure to the bombing, the

personal and the political become conflated in Patrick/Pussy's mind, both contributing to

the creation of his ultimate fantasy of "embark[ing] on some crazy hallucinatory

vengeance trail!" (182).

The narrator's subsequent detachment from reality and the mental ramifications that he experiences following these two traumatic incidents are exemplified through the progressive deterioration of his psyche following his release from police custody and his eventual return to Tyreelin. For example, the effects of his "horror of transgression" and exposure to Louise's performance results in his approaching strangers on the street and addressing them as if they were Eily Bergin. Yet, as Mahon notes, "since there is no longer a 'one-and-only Eily Bergin' but only a signifier, she gives rise to 'the endless perpetuation of the subject's desire,' which is manifested in the text by Pussy's seeing Eily everywhere" (Mahon 462). Likewise, on his flight back to Northern Ireland, Patrick/Pussy becomes aware of the fact that the role-playing performance normally reserved for his clients has now seeped into the public sphere: "For although I knew that the act I was putting on for him, fiddling with rings and batting lashes and so forth, whilst I might have done it in *hotel-room* privacy with a customer, up until then, would never have, in a million years, in public, never, never, never!" (183; author's emphasis). Additionally, he admits to withdrawing into a narcissistic state, becoming "obsessed with myself – changing my clothes three times a day for heaven's sake," in an effort to block out his best friend Charlie's pain over Irwin's death (184). Lastly, his fragile mental state is characterized by fits of "suddenly bursting into tears" and a general sense of "feeling weepy" upon seeing any perceived sign of contamination in his home, while at the same time capitulating that "I should have been as happy as Larry – it wasn't as if I'd been

through anything like Charlie, having to look at someone I loved with a hole in his head that you could put your fist into" (187).[14]

Yet, despite his assertion that he has not "been through anything like Charlie," who lost a loved one during the sectarian conflict, Patrick/Pussy's narrative reveals a steady series of traumatic events, both personal and political, which coalesce in an elaborate revenge fantasy. As Judith Herman notes, such fantasies are "often a mirror image of the traumatic memory in which the roles of perpetrator and victim are reversed… The victim imagines she can get rid of the terror, shame, and pain of the trauma by retaliating against the perpetrator… The victim imagines that revenge is the only way to restore her own sense of power" (189). Thus, Patrick/Pussy is reborn in one final hallucinatory moment of role-playing as the Lurex Avenger, a political terror who rejects both Terence's advice that "'You'll have to learn to forgive'" and the hallucinatory Eily's proclamation that "'Somehow we've got to forget and forgive'" (124, 153). Instead, Patrick/Pussy reveals how such impossible forgiveness eludes language and exists outside of his narrative confines, declaring that, when considering the possibility, "I couldn't and the more I thought of it the more the blood came coursing to my head so that whatever I'd write I'd find myself clutching the pencil so tight I broke the lead how many times I don't know, hundreds" (124).

While some critics have correctly linked Patrick/Pussy's conception of "politics-as-stench" to his "desire to remove the poisonous stench of politics from Ireland," this final

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[14]   This fear of contamination can be interpreted as a regressive symptom that originates with his disgust at the unsanitary conditions of his foster home: "'You could have given me something! But no! All you ever gave me, all you ever handed down was the smell of piss and clothes nobody ever bothered to wash!'" (60).

fantasy is also an enactment of Abraham and Torok's theory about "demetaphorization," whereby a subject who is in the throes of impossible mourning and incorporation openly adopts the literal meaning of words that are causing the sense of shame and humiliation (Mahon 446-447). Specifically, the fact that Patrick/Pussy is himself seen as an aberration, a "filth" who contaminates the community because he erodes binary distinctions, could account for his adoption of an alter-ego who violently asserts a presence: "To the town of her birth she now returns, to visit every hill and dale, there her mark to leave, not one eye its sight which does retain to say: 'I do not see her!' for such will not be possible whilst amongst you now she walks." (171). Thus, Patrick/Pussy ultimately crafts an elaborate fantasy in the final pages of the narrative that enacts revenge on a personal level against the abandoning father, but also on a national level against the community that rejected him and traumatized his generation. In this idealization, Patrick/Pussy becomes the "Stench-Banisher, Perfume-Bringer, Flower-Scatterer, Ender of the Darkness, she who shall wrench this place and the people from the shadows into light!" (155). By leaving his mark, Patrick/Pussy is thus able to make his presence known, a revenge against all those who have seen him as an absence: his mother, his father, and the community who would ask "*what* are you?"

Yet, despite the protagonist's seemingly noble goal of eradicating both the personal and the national trauma of the past, to "take it away, as though it had never been, the smell and stench that down the generation had a tainted valley filled!," Patrick/Pussy's delusion is also noticeably problematic, in that it conforms to the same pattern of reciprocal violence that Patrick Grant has termed the "iron circle" of Irish history (154). As Grant points out, such acts of retribution, whether real or imagined, "can rapidly

become pathological, and one criterion of psychopathic behavior is that those exhibiting

it have no conscience about the violence they commit, and no empathy for the victim,

who is regarded not as a person but as a despised object" (45). In this sense,

Patrick/Pussy's fantasies of burning Father Bernard's church to the ground, opening fire

on an IRA bar, and eradicating the loyalist paramilitary group led by Big Vicky can be

read as less subversive than they might initially appear since they, in fact, project an

image of the protagonist as mirroring the same lack of empathy as the community who

rejected him in the first place.

Patrick/Pussy's position at the end of the novel, therefore, is also markedly

troublesome and is encapsulated by his exile from Tyreelin, his replication of his

mother's image on his physical body, his retreat into the pop culture magazines of the

past (where he "look[s] yet again for Mitzi and that old bubble-cut of hers"), and a final

fantasy about giving birth to his own son (199). While some critics, like Mahon, have

argued that McCabe's final image is meant to be affirmative, revealing how the narrative

"opens up the possibility of a reconfigured Irish nationalism that is no longer shamed by

the name of the father or uncritically reproduces the name of the father in an effort to

assure itself a line of pure descent that would originate in the land," they often focus only

on this moment of imagined childbirth while overlooking the fact that Patrick/Pussy's

actual position at the end of the novel reveals a clear lack of progression (465-66).[15] Not

only does the protagonist retreat to a familiar delusion through an escape into pop culture,

but his incorporation of his mother's image onto his own body, even wearing the same

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[15]   Jason Buchanan, for example, argues that Patrick/Pussy's childbearing fantasy "reincorporates Braden
back into the Irish community" despite the fact that he is literally positioned as an exile (74).

"housecoat and headscarf" that he imagines she wore during her sexual violation, suggests a clear failure of introjection and, hence, regression into a nostalgic past. Thus, at the end of the narrative, Patrick/Pussy is revealed to be in the grips of not only an impossible mourning for his lost mother, but also for all the victims of sectarian violence, himself included, and, in this way, as Mulhall suggests, he is, at best, "keeping faith with abjected lives and histories… that might otherwise be conveniently forgotten in the flight to chimerical postnational utopian futures and the premature resolutions they enforce" (226).

VI.

Trapped within the "traumatic paradigm" of Irish history, the protagonists in each of these *Bildungsromans* are forced to deal with the difficulty of eradicating a phantom and, by extension, the problematic nature of working through transgenerational trauma. Specifically, all three narrators are raised in a familial and social atmosphere that promotes secrecy and, as a result, they inherit the gaps and silences that characterize their upbringing and each subsequently forms a crypt within his or her unconscious to house the secrets of the lost or the dead. Additionally, each central character is prone to uncanny repetitions of the actions and behaviors of the previous generation, a fact that hinders the process of working through trauma because, as Anne Whitehead points out, "repetition is inherently ambivalent, suspended between trauma and catharsis" (86). The novelists explored in this chapter thus situate their character's individual responses to trauma within a broader historical and national framework in order to show how the ongoing sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland fuels a continued pattern of pathological responses. As Linden Peach asserts, such contemporary Irish fiction "usefully refocus[es]

our attention upon the close relationship between what is hidden and the individual or national consciousness in which it is concealed" (54). All three protagonists, therefore, become ensnared in the "iron circle," which is largely seen as responsible for fostering the ongoing atmosphere of betrayal, recrimination, and sectarian hatred that characterized the Troubles.

Moreover, while each of these novels was published towards the conclusion of the conflict, the novelists are keenly aware of how the issues of the past continue to exert an influence in the present. As Michael Ignatieff argues, even in post-conflict societies, "the past continues to torment because it is not past. These places are not living in a serial order of time, but in a simultaneous one, in which the past and present are a continuous, agglutinated mass of fantasies, distortions, myths and lies" (110-117). This disruption in the "serial order of time" and the preponderance of such "distortions" can be seen in the novels' stylistic use of chronological collapse, temporal dislocation, and the prevalence of myths and fantasies, which intrude on the protagonists' psyches. Additionally, if, as Caruth contends, "history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas," then the traumatic experiences of each individual narrator is implicated in the broader historical sufferings of the family and the community (24). For example, in *Reading in the Dark*, the secrecy and betrayal surrounding Uncle Eddie's disappearance foreshadows the emergence of the sectarian conflict. In particular, this one event is situated within the larger issues and repressions that plague the nationalist community: failed independence, their abhorrent treatment by the RUC, and their general tendency to rely on fictions and myths to mask communal traumas, which permeate the unnamed narrator's psyche. Likewise, in *Mother of Pearl*, Pearl's physical movement between the

north and the south reveals the uneasy tension between the two nations and her split

subjectivity can be read as a byproduct of growing up against the backdrop of the

conflict. Lastly, in *Breakfast on Pluto*, Patrick/Pussy's experience with familial

dysfunction, coupled with his exposure to sectarian atrocities, situates his personal

narrative in the realm of the political, despite his assertions that he is immune to any

interest in politics. Ultimately, then, each novel coheres to Caruth's interpretation of

Freud's death drive, which, she argues "recognize[s] the reality of the destructive force

that the violence of history imposes on the human psyche, the formation of history as the

endless repetition of previous violence" (63).

Yet all three protagonists, despite their positioning in these texts as a victim, also

prove themselves to be survivors. However, their survival comes at the cost of their

psychological well-being and leads to fractured relationships with their families and

communities, thereby recalling Caruth's question: "what does it mean for consciousness

to survive?" (61). In Deane's novel, for instance, the narrator's survival is predicated on

his conscious decision to suppress his knowledge of the family's history, despite the fact

that the emergence of the Troubles suggests the very real consequences of such a

suppression. Similarly, in Morrissy's text, Pearl imagines herself as a reborn "tabula

rasa," but she simultaneously remains in the throes of a phantasmal haunting that leaves

her unable to assimilate her own background and childhood. Finally, in McCabe's novel,

Patrick/Pussy survives by escaping into a nostalgic past that precludes his experiences

with his dysfunctional lineage, his community's transphobia, and his direct and indirect

exposure to sectarian violence. Thus, following Caruth's concept of history as trauma,

each narrator experiences "the endless attempt to assume one's survival as one's own"

(64). While each attempt is fraught with problems, and none of these efforts ultimately

provide a working through of individual or national trauma, the protagonists' ability to

survive is, ultimately, positioned as final challenge to continue living in what, effectively,

becomes a war zone. In this sense, these child protagonists act as precursors to the adult

narrators who must deal with the ongoing historical legacy of the Toubles, one that is

marked by Derrida's concepts of "archive fever" and "impossible forgiveness," which I

will examine in the following chapter.

Chapter Two: "No other memory than the memory of wounds": Recovering the Archive

and Finding Forgiveness in the Post-Peace Process Northern Irish Novel

With the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, the thirty year span of violence known as
"the Troubles" was ostensibly brought to a peaceful conclusion, and Northern Ireland has
been tentatively established as a post-conflict transitional society. Yet the social,
cultural, and political ramifications of the Troubles, which left over 3,000 people dead,
40,000 wounded, and countless others suffering from ongoing psychological trauma,
have only recently been explored in Northern Irish prose fiction written both during the
peace talks and after the signing of the Agreement. As a historical event of trauma, the
Troubles are inevitably connected with questions about articulation, representation,
memorialization, and reconciliation. Thus, it is not surprising that one of the debates
currently taking place in Northern Ireland involves issues about how to address the past
(if at all), how to forge a collective memory, and what kind of forgiveness, if any, can be
achieved through various forms of institutional and non-institutional intervention. As
Tom Herron has noted, "It is perhaps only when violence has ended that trauma suffered
and perpetuated can begin to be more fully comprehended" (19). However, the question
of how to begin to approach such comprehension remains a contentious and divisive
issue, even after the peace process.

In part, the difficulty of locating a suitable means to confront the past stems from the fact that the Good Friday Agreement itself was notably vague in terms of how the nation should deal with past traumas in order to avoid repeating these same sectarian conflicts in the future. Therefore, while the Agreement sought to "acknowledge and address the suffering of victims" and to build a "peaceful and just society as a true memorial to the victims of violence," there was little attention given to the practical methods through which these admirable goals could be achieved (6). In an attempt to address this oversight, various political and community efforts have been established to concentrate on the ongoing issues of victims and provide services to the public, such as the formation of the Historical Enquiries Team, the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund, and The Victims Commission. Additionally, several cross-community projects and consultation groups have been formed, which endeavor to address historical traumas across the sectarian divide, such as Healing Through Remembering and the Eames Bradley Commission. Despite these efforts, however, there has been continual tension and debate within Northern Ireland that centers on issues ranging from the public's access to archival records, the efficacy of inquiries, and the necessity of finally addressing certain "unacceptable" taboos or contested topics that emerged following the Troubles, such as collusion, the fate of the disappeared, and the early release of prisoners who were serving sentences in connection with the activities of paramilitary groups.

Colin Graham stated that "[t]he beginning of the Troubles is the beginning of a lost narrative time, while the peace is the beginning of stories, testimony and tentative hopes for restitution" (180). This chapter will explore how the recovery of these "lost" narratives and their relationship to restitution is examined in four novels that were written

in the decade following the Good Friday Agreement: Sebastian Barry's *The Secret Scripture* (2008), Glenn Patterson's *That Which Was* (2004), Eoin McNamee's *The Ultras* (2004), and David Park's *The Truth Commissioner* (2008). Jacques Derrida's theories about the function of archivization and the "impossible madness" of pure forgiveness are a useful framework through which to analyze these texts since each of these writers explores issues of collective amnesia, marginalized narratives, and the problematic concept of reconciliation when a nation has not fully dealt with its traumatic past.

Derrida's understanding of the archive is a useful tool in exploring these particular texts because all four deal explicitly with the role of official versus unofficial narratives in dictating what is emphasized and remembered following the aftermath of a conflict and the implementation of a peace agreement. As such, underlying each of the novels explored here is a central question regarding the possibility, or impossibility, of forging a shared narrative about events that eludes the easy binary of victim and perpetrator. Each author presents, instead, a narrative vision that is more aligned with what Kevin Hearty deems "outward-looking 'alternative eyes,'" through which "entrenched positions over *what* happened and *who* is to 'blame' for the past can be tentatively disengaged from" (1059). Moreover, Derrida's conception of archivization is grounded in how the archive perpetuates state authority and power, as well as the counteracting force of memory as a potential disruption to the archive, and this duality is explored in the intersection between state-sanctioned official records and individual remembrance that characterizes each text.

I.

Based on a lecture Derrida gave in 1994 at an international colloquium on the history

of psychoanalysis and first published as *Mal d'archive* (or "Archive Fever: A Freudian

Impression"), this essay brings together several of the philosopher's previously

articulated concepts of spectrality, encryptment, repression, and memory-traces. Derrida

begins his exploration of how we order, register, interpret and preserve the past by raising

the issue of the term "archive," which he argues has itself not been archived well enough

to serve as an authoritative point of departure. Instead, he contends that the term bears the

traces of its origin (*arche*) and "shelters itself from this memory which it shelters: which

comes down to saying also that it forgets it" (9). As a result, Derrida suggests that the

"radical evil (*mal*)" that can emerge in cultures that depend on archives originates from a

failure to distinguish the trace from its original. In other words, such evil can emerge

when we forget that, in the archive, "we have only an impression, an insistent impression

through the unstable feeling of a shifting figure, of a schema, or of an infinite or

indefinite process" (19, 24). Avoiding this form of "radical evil," therefore, relies on

conceding that the *arche* is not something that can be accessed and in understanding that,

likewise, the archive should not be conflated with living memory. Instead, the archive

should be understood as a trace of both the *arche* and of memory, whether individual or

collective. Thus, the archive functions much like Sigmund Freud's model of the Mystic

Writing Pad, whereby a permanent trace of the original writing is retained and "is legible

in suitable lights," which is itself a useful metaphor for the way the unconscious

functions (211).

Additionally, according to Derrida, the meaning of the term "archive" is inextricably

linked with exteriority, since it initially referred to a physical location corresponding to

"the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded" (10). As a result, since there can be "no archive without outside;" it always requires inscribing a trace of the past in some external space, which is, in turn, controlled and interpreted by guardians (14). This fact is particularly relevant to the problem of the politics of the archive, since whomever controls it, usually the state or some institutional authority, shapes and promotes a certain version of the past, one that is often devoid of stories or memories that do not conform with or that problematize the "official" national record. Thus, as Derrida contends, "effective democratization" is wholly dependent on being able to participate in, have access to, and interpret the archive (11).

In its most extreme form, then, "archive fever" is the result of an overwhelming desire for authoritative control of the "official record." As such, this desire inevitably involves a coinciding urge to erase any traces of the Other, whose contributions to the archive, often in the form of a "spectral response" or a "spectral truth," represent a threat to the *archons'* ability to promote and control collective memory (42, 55). In this scenario, "the law of the archontic, the law of consignation which orders the archive" is always violent because, as Derrida notes, the attempt to establish an authoritative version of archival records (the One), at the expense of protecting it from the dangerous memories of the Other, inevitably results in "murder, wounding, traumatism" (51). What is excluded from the archive, therefore, is generally the result of promoting a unified national narrative that is based on eradicating or forgetting the stories of the marginalized or the silenced victims of the past, thereby promoting a kind of collective amnesia in the populace.

This tendency towards violence is, furthermore, linked to a simultaneous tension between the desire for conservation and the desire for destruction of the archive, a desire

that Derrida links to the function of the death drive. According to Derrida, the death drive's calling is aimed towards destruction of the archive and the initiation of amnesia, ultimately "aiming to ruin the archive as accumulation and capitalization of memory on some substrate and in an exterior place" (15). This drive towards destruction, however, is always tied to its opposite tendency, since without the death drive, there could be no subsequent feverish desire for conservation. As a result, to suffer from "archive fever" is not merely to suffer a form of illness, but rather can be interpreted as "burn[ing] with a passion" for conservation of the archive, to "run after the archive, even if there's too much of it." Thus, as Derrida points out, "no desire, no passion, no drive, no compulsion, indeed no repetition compulsion, no 'mal-de' can arise for a person who is not already, in one way or another, en mal d'archive. (57) In this sense, the death drive presents an infinite threat to the archive, since its aim is towards amnesia and the eradication of memory; at the same time, Derrida argues that no "passion" for the archive, for conserving the traces of the past that challenge the "official record," can exist without this same destructive tendency.

Despite this inclination towards annihilation, Derrida does not suggest that the archive is inevitably doomed to merely replicate the past. Instead, he links the archive to the future; specifically, he argues that it raises the "question of the future…. Of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow" (27). In the sense that the archive is self-perpetuating and infinite, "the archivist produces more archives," it is never a closed system and, therefore, "opens out of the future" (45). Ultimately, it is this openness of the archive, its very infinitude, that confronts us with the ethical and political responsibility

of constructing a responsible remembering, whose goal is, in Paul Ricoeur's terms, "to memorize the victim of history – the sufferers, the humiliated, the forgotten..." (10-11).

Derrida's linking of the archive to a future "promise" and "responsibility" anticipates, in many ways, the central issues emerging in contemporary Northern Ireland regarding the need for a comprehensive archival record of the Troubles and, at the same time, the problematic relationship of counter-narratives (or counter-memories) to such a collective history. This tension, for example, can be seen in the development of state-funded projects like the Conflict Archive on the Internet (CAIN), whose recent section entitled *Victims, Survivors and Commemoration* was met with apprehension due to what was seen as its conflation of all the "victims," non-combatants and combatants alike, of the conflict into one detailed digital collection. Simultaneously, grassroots, community-based counter-archives, such as Belfast Exposed, have attempted to draw attention to the prioritization of certain narratives, as well the gaps and absences that are an inevitable process of archivization itself. Belfast Exposed, for example, is purposely uncatalogued and unindexed, thus promoting "browsing as a non-hierarchical and unprejudiced means of interacting with the archive" (Blanco 61).

The hindrance towards establishing and documenting a commonly accepted (and communally acceptable) collective history is not only rooted in continuous political disagreement over the past, but also in the difficulty of establishing anything resembling a shared narrative among the various groups of Northern Ireland. As such, many archival projects have chosen to focus on the collection of a variety of oral histories, reminiscent of the Shoah Foundation's compilation of Holocaust survival narratives. In other words, the possibility of a large-scale storytelling project is often posited as a viable alternative

to more traditional forms of archivization, thus allowing for the "effective democratization" that Derrida advocates.

This introduction of personal memory into collective memory is also the focus of the four novels explored here, specifically with regards to how such counter-narratives can challenge public amnesia and upset an established victim hierarchy. More importantly, however, each author also explores not only whether "effective democratization" is the inevitable outcome of such collective histories, but also how the intersection of the personal with the official or communal can problematize the notion of forgiveness. As such, it is worthwhile to briefly examine Derrida's theories regarding the paradox of "impossible forgiveness" as an extension of his concluding remarks about the "promise" of the archive.

II.

In his 1999 lecture, and subsequent essay, "On Forgiveness," Derrida explores the contemporary tendency to conflate forgiveness with related, but distinct, terms, such as "excuse, regret, amnesty, prescription, etc." and to use it as a normalizing force that serves the interests of post-conflict societies (27). Derrida specifically addresses what he sees as the "internationalization" of the term that divests it of its Abrahamic religious context and results in an effacement of its traditional assumptions. By contrast, Derrida argues for the inherent paradox found in the concept - namely, "forgiveness forgives only the unforgivable." In other words, he claims that true forgiveness is only achieved in forgiving what is akin to a mortal (rather than a venial) sin and it is, thus, "a madness of the impossible" since it is not tied to conditions of transformation and/or repentance of the guilty, or reconciliation between the victim and the accused (33). In other words,

Derrida situates his concept of "pure" forgiveness as contrary to the one delineated by

Vladimir Jankelevitch, who originally argued that forgiveness is reliant on the moral

transformation of the perpetrator and the acknowledgement of wrongdoing. Instead,

Derrida states that pure forgiveness cannot be conditional, and insists instead that it is not

reliant on the necessity of apology or repentance by the perpetrator. Forgiveness, in

Derridean terms, must remain "exceptional and extraordinary, in the face of the

impossible" (32) Thus, just as there is a tension between the desire for conservation of

the archive and a simultaneous drive towards its destruction, there is a similar tension

between conditional and unconditional forgiveness and, likewise, ethical and responsible

political action must acknowledge this dichotomy.

Using the Truth and Reconciliation Committee in South Africa as an example, Derrida

goes on to argue that forgiveness must also remain apart from, or heterogeneous to,

political and judicial rationality because forgiveness must involve a clear engagement

between the self and other, the perpetrator and the victim. However, when there is a

mediation of forgiveness (whether institutional or not), there is always the introduction of

a third party, and this inevitably corrupts forgiveness. When such mediation occurs,

Derrida claims, "one can again speak of amnesty, reconciliation, reparation, etc. but

certainly not of pure forgiveness in the strict sense" (42). Therefore, while Derrida

understands the need for nations to confront their pasts and offer conditional forgiveness

in the name of justice and "moving forward," he argues that this trend cannot be

considered as, and should not be conflated with, pure forgiveness; for him, at best, it only

amounts "to a therapy of reconciliation" (41).

Lastly, Derrida acknowledges that there will likely always exist a tension between conditional forgiveness, one that is closer to amnesty and reconciliation, and the form of pure and "impossible" forgiveness that he outlines. However, as he states, these two poles, while operating in separate spheres, are also reliant on each other. In other words, it is between these two extremes that "decisions and responsibilities are to be taken" because, despite their irreconcilability, the discourses concerning either pure or conditional forgiveness are dependent on each other if they are to have any meaning (44-45).

As a result of this aporia, forgiving, like the archive, has no finality; instead, it remains a permanent rupture or wound that continually cries out. According to Derrida, "a 'finalised' forgiveness is not forgiveness; it is only a political strategy or a psychotherapeutic economy" (50). While Derrida ultimately does not offer a resolution with regards to the impasse between these two notions of impossible and possible forgiveness, admitting that he remains "'torn'" between an ideal model of pure forgiveness and "the reality of a society at work in pragmatic processes of reconciliation," he nevertheless concludes that an acknowledgement of both is necessary for responsible action to take place (51).

<div align="center">III.</div>

In his 2008 novel *The Secret Scripture*, Sebastian Barry delves into his own family's secretive past in an attempt to explore how the stories of the marginalized and forgotten figures in Irish history have been expunged from the archival record of the nation. Specifically, his inspiration comes from his mother's recollections about a lost relative who was institutionalized and who, according to Barry, remains a shadowy and

contentious figure in his family's history: "I once heard my grandfather say that she was no good. That's what survives are the rumours of her beauty. She was nameless, fateless, unknown. I felt I was almost duty-bound as a novelist to reclaim her and, indeed, remake her" (O'Hagan). In his attempt to "reclaim" the figure of his marginalized great aunt, Barry reconstructs a fictional account of Roseanne Clear, a one-hundred-year old woman, a victim of Ireland's "architecture of containment," who has been relegated to a mental asylum for the last several decades and who now attempts to write down an account of her traumatic past as a final testimony of her existence.

Thus, while the novel does not deal directly with the contemporary Troubles or Northern Ireland after the peace process, it does trace the development of the Troubles in the 1920s, following the war for Irish Independence and the subsequent civil war that emerged after the partition. As such, the novel can be seen as a form of what Neal Alexander calls "retrospective fiction," which "recreat[es] a particular moment in the past in an effort to illuminate the North's contemporary predicament" (274). Moreover, as Tara Harney-Mahajan points out, the novel "enters into a timely and highly charged debate ongoing in Ireland about social justice, the complicity of society, and questions of reconciliation and forgiveness" (60). I would add that it is a particularly relevant text in addressing the peace process in Northern Ireland because it raises several of the prominent concerns prevalent in Northern Irish society today: collective amnesia, confrontation with a personally and historically traumatic past, and the repression of memories and narratives that are deemed unacceptable or "dangerous" to the ongoing and future peace process. Additionally, as Roy Foster notes, Barry's works tend to present "a gallery of characters whose lost lives reflect the fractures and losses of Irish

experience…. they appear on the stage as 'ghosts patched with histories'" (183). Thus, as with the other novels explored here, Barry fits into the overall sensibility that governs many of the contemporary Northern Irish writers in his focus on spectral figures who unsettle the archival record.

The most unique and significant aspect of Barry's novel in terms of this unsettlement is found in his narrative technique, which alternates Roseanne's own written statement about her life with that of her psychiatrist, Dr. Grene, who writes down his observations and assessment of her, and incorporates various other documentation, official and unofficial, which permeate this overall framework.   Through the use of this technique, the text can firmly be placed within the genre of the trauma novel, which Robert Garrett argues is "a work that balances narration and narrative, a story that both describes an external, violent action and portrays the mind's attempts to remember it" (5). Thus, the novel presents a confrontation not only between Roseanne's account of herself and Dr. Grene's attempts to "assess" her, but also traces how her narrative contaminates his own as he grows more obsessed with locating the facts and unlocking the secrets of her story, in a process that recalls Barry's epigraph to the novel: "that love of truth, which in some minds is innate and immutable, necessarily *leads to a love of secret memoir and private anecdotes*" (my emphasis).

Additionally, while Roseanne's personal narrative is contrasted against and problematizes the "official" records about her life and institutionalization, questions about the reliability of her own memories are also raised; thus, the novel comes to interrogate how historical truth is constructed and questions if such "truth" can ever be ascertained with any degree of certainty. Ultimately, by dramatizing this particular

confrontation, Barry recalls Ricoeur's statement that "history truly begins only with the confrontation with and between testimonies and, in particular, with testimonies that were reduced to silence by archivization" ("Memory, History, Forgiveness" 12).

Roseanne, a self-described "remnant woman" and marginal figure whose story has been usurped by other people's accounts of her represents one such testimony that has been "reduced to silence" in the archival record. Institutionalized after the annulment of her marriage and an unplanned pregnancy that occurs out of wedlock, Roseanne's fate is largely controlled by Father Gaunt, a Catholic priest who maintains a presence throughout her early life and whose condemning deposition haunts her narrative. As a result, the intricacies of Roseanne's personal story remain obscured in the authoritative record, as Dr. Grene notes when he tells her that the file concerning her institutionalization is "quite ruined and unreadable" and "has been attacked in a most interesting fashion. It would not shame an Egyptian tomb. It seems to fall apart at the touch of a hand" (26). Yet, Roseanne's individual case is also imbedded in the broader context of Irish history, specifically in terms of how it reflects the fate of countless women who were sent to the Magdalen laundries and other mental asylums for social transgressions, rather than mental illness.

By placing her individual experience in this social context, Barry illuminates a tendency in Irish history to suppress from collective memory those narratives that are deemed unacceptable or dangerous to the official record. This trend towards discarding what is deemed socially problematic is emphasized throughout the novel in the repeated images of discarded waste. For example, Roseanne recalls that the river in Sligo "took the rubbish down to the sea, and bits of things that were once owned by people and pulled

from the banks, and bodies too, if rarely, oh and poor babies, that were embarrassments, the odd time. The speed and depth of the river would have been a great friend to secrecy" (3). Similarly, the piano at the asylum where Roseanne is currently a patient is "assailed by woodworm" and eventually "thrown out on a skip with an enormous unmusical clang" (17). Thus, by "reclaiming" Roseanne's story, Barry is also able to connect it to the general fate of women who were deemed social "misfits" and discarded, or "thrown out," from Irish historical records.

In essence, then, the novel can be seen as an attempt to reintroduce those individuals who are, in Roseanne's terms, "put … outside the frame of the photographs of life" (195). As a result, Roseanne becomes a representative for the forgotten who bear no trace or photograph, and more broadly, a product of a collective attempt to repress a national traumatic past by refusing to introduce narratives like hers into the national archive. The danger of such repression is noted by Dr. Grene, when he states, "[t]he fact is, we are missing so many threads in our story that the tapestry of Irish life cannot but fall apart. There is nothing to hold it together. The first breath of wind, the next huge war that touches on us, will blow us to the Azores. Roseanne is just a bit of paper blowing on the edge of the wasteland" (183).

Yet, as Barry shows throughout the novel, these "missing threads" that are expunged from Irish history continue to exert their influence in the present, often by manifesting themselves in hauntings that recall Derrida's "spectral truths" or memory traces, which return despite the *archons* attempts to eradicate them from the archival record. Notably, we see this tendency in the repeated ghost stories that populate Barry's text. For instance, Roseanne recalls a story told to her by her father, who spent a night at a boarding house,

where he was repeatedly awakened by the groans and breathing of a ghostly presence and

experienced "a terrible sense of hunger." Upon waking the next morning, he discovers

that the house has been left abandoned "for the reason that a woman had killed her

husband there, locking him in a basement room and starving him to death. The woman

herself had been tried and hanged for murder" (6-7). Not only does this fantastical

narrative suggests a personal trauma that the community is wary of claiming as their own,

but the reference to "a terrible sense of hunger" has some resonance with both the

national traumas of the Great Famine and the 1981 Hunger Strikes in Northern Ireland.

In a similar manner, Dr. Grene, whose estranged wife dies during the course of the

novel, believes he is haunted by her presence in the upstairs bedroom. In both cases,

Barry suggests that the cause of such spectral figures is tied to feelings of both grief and

guilt, whether one's own or those associated with a communal tragedy that has not been

recognized or has been actively removed from collective memory, such as when a

shopkeeper tells Roseanne's father that the woman's house would "ideally be

demolished" (7). As such, these spectral truths bring to light the simultaneous desire to

confront the guilt of the past and mourn for these losses, while also displaying a tendency

for enacting amnesia as coping mechanism, a fact that Dr. Grene notes during one of his

haunted moments:

> Part of me longed for her to be inside the room, but a far greater part dreaded that
> same thing, dreaded it like the living are obliged to dread the dead. It is so deep a law
> of life. We bury or burn the dead because we want to separate their corporeality from
> our love and remembrance. We do not want them after death to be still in their
> bedrooms, we want to hold an image of them living, in the full of life in our minds.
> (168)

Thus, just as individuals like Roseanne are relegated to the margins, traumatic events are exorcised from consciousness, both individual and collective, yet both refuse to remain silent.

As a remedy against such silence, Barry posits the importance and almost compulsive need for narration. However, as Roseanne's personal history makes clear, there is an overwhelming temptation towards maintaining what is hidden and secret. For example, Roseanne hides her written testimony under the floorboards of her room and reveals a notable reluctance to address Dr. Grene's direct questions about her past. Given her personal history, Roseanne's hesitancy to unveil her personal narrative and her subsequent belief that "the greatest virtue is silence" is understandable, since she no longer can ascertain who is "friend or enemy" (127). However, she also expresses reservation because she understands the responsibility that testimony demands: "That strange responsibility we feel towards others when they speak, to offer them the solace of any answer" (29). This "solace," furthermore, forces the teller to confront his or her own traumatic past, which is problematized for Roseanne by "[t]he rats of shame bursting through the wall I have constructed with infinite care over the years and milling about in my lap…. That was my job to hide it then, hide those wretched rats" (80). Yet, concomitant with the desire for secrecy, Barry suggests that there is also a simultaneous compulsion to speak, to learn to "narrate otherwise," in Ricoeur's terms, in order to properly mourn the losses, whether real or illusory, that have been endured ("Memory, History, Forgiveness" 23). Thus, Roseanne crafts her story on "unwanted paper" in an attempt to, for once, be the author of her own narrative, to move away from being a passive observer to an active documentarian, and this action attempts to leave a mark of

the past on the present, to introduce her story into the archival record, because, as she acknowledges, "a person without anecdotes that they nurse while they live, and that survive them, are more likely to be utterly lost not only to history but the family following them" (11).

Yet Barry complicates the concept of recovering collective and individual memory, a central problem in the text since both Roseanne's written account and the official story of her past are biased and fraught with conflicting information. Thus, while Roseanne's version of her personal history is told with a seeming attempt at fidelity, she herself admits that "such stories are only effective if the teller feigns absolute belief – or indeed saw such wonders truly" (10). Therefore, the central question in the novel is concerned with whether Roseanne feigns her memories or whether the "wonders" she narrates have factually occurred.

Ultimately, what Barry suggests is that unreliability itself is a proof of Roseanne's sanity, since, as Dr. Grene points out, only a "psychotic person" never questions the reliability of their own memory and "supplies answers to everything, whatever their truth" (121). Instead, the novel follows Ricoeur's point that "we cannot tell a story without eliminating or dropping some important event according to the kind of plot we intend to build" (9). In fact, Roseanne repeatedly acknowledges her own lack of trustworthiness and admits that her memory can best be described as "like a box room, or a lumber room in an old house, the contents jumbled about, maybe not only from neglect but also from too much haphazard searching in them, and things to boot thrown in that don't belong there" (201). Thus, while the unreliability of Roseanne's own memory problematizes the text, Barry suggests that strict adherence to memory, or the "absolute

fascist certainty of memory," as Dr. Grene's conference paper describes it, is not necessarily a conclusive indication of historical truth (178).

Moreover, complicating both personal and historical memory are the traumatic events that continue to be suppressed from or altered in official records, just as they are repressed from Roseanne's individual consciousness and sublimated onto acceptable memories. For example, Roseanne's repeated denials that her father was a member of the RIC police force is compromised by documentation suggesting otherwise. Similarly, unable to confront the reality of her father's sectarian murder, she instead transposes his death onto a pleasant childhood reminiscence. However, the ongoing nature of trauma and the tendency of such traces to continue haunting both individual and collective consciousness is seen in her simultaneous inability to reconcile his death within her narrative and her obsessive return to his murder: "I am standing there, eternally, straining to see… if for no other reason than for love of him. The feathers are drifting away, drifting, swirling away. My father is calling and calling. My heart is beating back to him. The hammers are falling still" (22). Thus, Roseanne's preference for secrecy and silence can be seen as a response to the "dread" she experiences at the idea of openly answering Dr. Grene's questions during her assessment because it threatens to reawaken these traumas in her conscious mind. As such, Roseanne engages in a method of willful forgetting, negating such unacceptable memories through amnesia, such as when she represses the sexual abuse she underwent at Sligo Mental Asylum: "It is not the first place I was put, the first place was – But I am not concerned with recrimination" (31). However, as Cathy Caruth has noted, such "unassimilated" traumas "return to haunt the survivor later on," a fact that contributes to the unreliability and conflation that occurs

throughout Roseanne's narrative, such as the attempted rape by Joseph Brady and her inadvertent responsibility for Willy LaVelle's death (4).

Yet, while Roseanne's memory is unreliable and problematized by the traumas she suffered, Barry suggests that the archival record is equally incapable of establishing a factual account of history. Instead, historical truth throughout the novel is presented as, in Roseanne's terms, "not the arrangement of what happens, in sequence and in truth, but a fabulous arrangement of surmises and guesses held up as a banner against the assault of withering truth" (55). In fact, historical certainty is largely shown to work like flawed individual memory, repressing elements that fail to conform to what is acceptable in the national consciousness, a consciousness that is itself largely controlled by political and religious authorities. Thus, following the Troubles of 1922, the North is "left out of the whole matter" of independence. Additionally, Roseanne's father, a Presbyterian, is "thought to have no place in the Irish story" (36). However, the most significant way that Barry addresses the power of the *archons* to shape collective memory occurs in his portrayal of Father Gaunt (a man Roseanne describes as "sacrosanct, pristine, separate, as if separate from the history of Ireland itself") and, by extension, the Catholic Church (56). As Beata Piatek points out, following Irish Independence, the Church increasingly assumed power and authority and, to cement their status, "they introduced a kind of collective 'amnesia,' dismissing from the nation's memory and the nationalist constructs the misfits who failed or rejected to conform to their ideology" (156). One such misfit is Roseanne, who refuses conversion and whose physical beauty is taken to be a sign of temptation, promiscuity, and even nymphomania by Father Gaunt, who subjects her to a formal religious inquiry and declares her mad in order to annul her marriage:

'It is a monumentally complex undertaking. Something like this is never granted lightly. Deep deep thought at Rome, and my own bishop of course. Weighing everything, sifting through everything, my own deposition, Tom's own words, the elder Mrs. McNulty who of course has experience of the troubles of women, in her work... The courts sit in careful judgment. No stone unturned…'You may rest assured every possibility of justice has been afforded to you.' (223-24)

Father Gaunt's declaration of "careful judgment" and "justice" suggests the authoritative power that comes with control of the archive and, thus, reveals how narratives that do not conform to the nationalist ideology, like Roseanne's, are banished from both the official record and collective memory.

Believing that his formal inquiry within the church proves his charge of nymphomania against her, Father Gaunt is also responsible for constructing a deposition of her case, one that is instrumental in bringing about her institutionalization. As Dr. Grene's own discovery of this document points out, it presents an imposing testimonial, since, unlike Roseanne's own written account, it is "clerical, thorough, and convincing." Furthermore, it acts "like a forest fire, burning away all traces of her, traversing her narrative and turning everything to ashes and cinders. A tiny, obscure, forgotten Hiroshima," which recalls Derrida's point about the archival violence that occurs when the One attempts to eradicate the Other from the official record. Yet, Dr. Grene also detects that there is an "anxiety throughout the document," that it is "highly voyeuristic, morally questionable to read" (230). Thus, Father's Gaunt's attempts to contain Roseanne's narrative within his authoritative account and the subsequent "anxiety" that results from the inevitable failure of such containment relates to the broader attempts to expunge certain narratives from Irish history. For example, Dr. Grene recalls similar attempts at collective amnesia during the Civil War, when "the Free State army….burned almost every civil record to ashes… wiping out the records of the very nation they were trying to give new life to,

actually burning memory in its boxes" (253). Likewise, Roseanne recounts the historical

realities of "secret murders, secret shootings, that no one ever recorded or remembers"

(128). Yet these attempts at containing such memories and narratives inevitably breed a

form of collective "anxiety," since such suppressed elements have a habit of retaining

their traces in the archival record, thus transforming Ireland and Irish history, as

Roseanne's husband Tom notes, into a metaphorical "madhouse," no different from the

one Roseanne has been consigned to for most of her adult life (171).

Set against this tendency towards archontic law and collective amnesia, Barry charts

the development of Dr. Grene from a detached figure, an analyzer of memory and

history, to a conscientious archivist who comes to recognize the necessity for responsible

remembering. Beginning the novel as a self-described "reluctant taker of notes," and

admitting that he has never "delved into [Roseanne's] life," Dr. Greene struggles to

maintain distance from his patient's assessment and his own initial efforts at

documentation are an attempt to merely produce a "professional, semi-at any rate,

account of things, the last days perhaps of this unimportant, lost, essential place" (26, 47).

Likewise, his initial investigation into Roseanne's case reveals his reliance on original

sources and "official records"; thus, he begins as an archivist who relies entirely on

archontic authority, one who privileges the original over the trace: "I found here the

remnant of some sort of deposition… It was faintly typed, probably from an old-

fashioned carbon that crinkly blue paper put in under the top copy in a typewriter. I am

hoping that Sligo might have the original" (120). In a similar manner, he initially

believes Father Gaunt's deposition is convincing because of its clarity, educated rhetoric,

and meticulous adherence to details. Most telling, however, is Dr. Grene's admission,

after he uncovers Roseanne's history of sexual abuse at Sligo Mental Hospital, that he "probably would have been inclined to do the same" in terms of covering up the crime and suppressing the evidence (275).

However, as Dr. Grene develops a growing interest in piecing together Roseanne's narrative, he finds himself in the grips of an archive fever that transforms his assessment into a quest to uncover her "true history or as much of it as can be salvaged" (121). Specifically, following the death of his wife, the psychiatrist's investigation constitutes a "form of grieving," whereby piecing together Roseanne's traumatic past becomes intertwined with expunging the guilt he feels over his estranged marriage (275). While acknowledging the danger of delving into the past, in particular the fact that remembering could bring about "further mental mayhem and trauma," Dr. Grene's increasing fixation transforms him into, following Ricoeur, a "conscientious historian" and he comes to realize that both accounts of Roseanne's past, the official record and her unreliable version, contain "useful truths" that are not necessarily synonymous with "factual truth" (280). Furthermore, his epiphany about the need for preservation and the lack of certainty in terms of historical fact extends beyond Roseanne's individual testimony: "I recognize that we live our lives, and even keep our sanity, by the lights of this treachery and this unreliability, just as we build our love of country on these paper worlds of misapprehension and untruth" (293). Ultimately, his transformation allows Dr. Grene to recognize the instability of archontic authority, to privilege Roseanne's untruth over Fr. Gaunt's truth because "the former radiated health," and to recognize "the mystery of human silence" that characterizes the narrative traces that exist outside the archival record (298).

Thus, while Dr. Grene begins the novel seeking redemption for his personal traumatic

history and an impossible forgiveness from his deceased wife, he instead seemingly

receives both of these gifts from Roseanne when he proclaims her "blameless,"

apologizes "on behalf of my profession," and is the recipient of Roseanne's question: "I

wonder will you allow me to forgive you?" (291-92). However, the conclusion of

Barry's novel, including the rather contrived discovery that Dr. Grene is Roseanne's lost

child, has not been without controversy, specifically in terms of Roseanne's saintly act of

collective forgiveness and Barry's appropriation of a female victim's voice. For instance,

Harney-Mahajan argues that while Barry may feel "an authorial duty… to speak for those

that cannot speak," we, as readers, should remain "aware that this is always a substitute

for what can never be spoken by the sufferers themselves" (70).   Similarly, Roy Foster

maintains that "Barry's vision is a dark one" because redemption is repeatedly revealed

to be "located in a universe ruled by history rather than religion" (195-6). While I

disagree that the vision Barry promotes at the end of the novel is "dark," or that he is

somehow willfully substituting his fictional voice for those female victims who cannot

speak, I do agree that the extension of forgiveness from Roseanne to Dr. Grene, an act

that is highly suggestive of a collective forgiveness by marginalized figures, particularly

female victims, in Irish history towards their oppressors, is problematic. Specifically, this

personal reconciliation between patient and doctor, mother and son, cannot carry the

significance of such a broad attempt at pardoning historical wrongs. Additionally, while

Roseanne's act, on the surface, may seem to be a "madness of the impossible," it

ultimately cannot be seen as a moment of "pure forgiveness" because, as Derrida notes,

"each time forgiveness is at the service of a finality, be it noble and spiritual (atonement

or redemption, reconciliation, salvation), each time that it aims to re-establish a normality… by a work of mourning…then the 'forgiveness' is not pure—nor is its concept" (31).

Despite these flaws, however, *The Secret Scripture* remains a useful and relevant text that addresses the problems that arise when confronting both personal and historical traumas, the benefits of reincorporating banished narratives into the archival record, and the necessity for responsible remembering to take place in order to move forward as a nation. In this sense, the most significant message of the novel is not found in its final act of forgiveness, but rather in the simultaneous actions of testifying and witnessing and the way the novel dramatizes what Cathy Caruth describes as "the story of the way in which one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound" (8). Thus, in Dr. Grene's encounter with Roseanne's testimony, and in his ability to acknowledge the complexity of historical fact and the infinitude of the archive, he becomes both a responsible witness and an archivist who, in Roseanne's terms, incorporates "things merely hinted at" that "become in the new telling by a second hand solid, unprovable, but raised up even higher into the realms of miracle. So that all and sundry might take comfort from it" (11).

III.

Glenn Patterson's 2004 novel *That Which Was* is notable as one of the first texts to address the contentious and often taboo topic of collusion between loyalist paramilitaries and British security forces, an issue that continues to fuel conspiracy theories and points to narratives about the Troubles that are often repressed from collective consciousness,

particularly in Patterson's own Unionist community. As such, the novel is deeply

concerned with the subjects of memory and amnesia, both individual and collective, in

the context of what has been marginalized or suppressed from the official history of the

conflict. Furthermore, these issues of remembrance and forgetting find a corresponding

tension in post-peace process Northern Irish society as a whole, as seen in the

contradictory desires of either delving into the past or resisting repressed memories that

return and come into conflict with "acceptable" forms of commemoration. Although the

novel takes place during the years directly leading up to the peace process, Patterson

argues that troubled memories and ostracized histories are particularly relevant in the

years that followed the Good Friday Agreement:

> [I]t made many people feel that there was an end, and many people felt that we had
> drawn a line under the past; but I think what happened a half-dozen years after that
> was that the peace wasn't, actually, as complete as we imagined that it would be. The
> present is bedeviled still by issues that have to do with the past and there was a
> question of how have we accounted for the *actions* of the past. (Hicks 107)

Thus, by setting *That Which Was* in the years that brought about the peace talks,

Patterson focuses on what has been suppressed in both collective memory and national

narratives about the past and, subsequently, on how these memories have a habit of

haunting and returning, with the full force of the return of the repressed, in the present.

From the opening of the novel, Patterson depicts a society that is simultaneously

divided along sectarian lines, and also obsessed with documenting its past in the form of

commemorative events and inquiries, such as the reexamination into the incidents of

Bloody Sunday during the Saville inquiry in the late 1990s, a real world event that

unfolds as a backdrop throughout the story. The society that Patterson depicts is one

that, like the *East Belfast Community News*, "recognizes its limits" and "does not imagine

itself a single, harmonious community" (3). Instead, there are increased tensions, both

across the sectarian divide and internally between loyalist factions within the Unionist community, which are barely contained and always threaten to spread outward throughout the city at large. As a result, the dominant way the past is dealt with recalls what Patrick Grant describes as the "iron circle," which is characterized by mutual recrimination and an "anonymous mechanism of reciprocal exchange," since there are still continual reoccurrences of reciprocated violence and reprisal killings (17). This tendency is seen, for instance, when the release of paramilitary prisoners from Long Kesh triggers vigilante forms of justice, such as when "a former loyalist prisoner had been found dead at the foot of a cliff in north Antrim. Police said they were not looking for anyone else in connection the incident. The enormity of the deeds come home" (18). Thus, while cross-community efforts are attempted, they are often occluded in the face of identitarian politics and widespread beliefs about victim hierarchies, a situation that one character succinctly describes: "If it had been one of ours done it to one of them they'd have an inquiry and all set up by now. Look at Derry…Them ones only have to ask and they get" (91). Therefore, while ostensibly taking place at the tail end of the conflict, Patterson's novel shows a society that is still wounded by the events of the past and one that, therefore, has difficulty coming to terms with the present.

As a Protestant minister, Patterson's protagonist, Ken Avery, is well aware of his community's need for acceptable collective memories and proper forms of commemoration, while also acknowledging the necessity of facing the troubling aspects of the past that problematize what is "acceptable" and "proper" in order to enact a responsible remembering. Throughout the text, Avery stands as a figure of reason, one who has "a foot – a face – in both camps," stating that "these inquiries are for all of us,"

and attempting to make his congregation acknowledge difficult truths about how the loyalist factions in their own community committed atrocities that are not part of the "official" narrative of commemoration (133, 92). As Ryszard Bartnik notes, Avery "is an epitome of the stance adopted by Patterson [who] understands that memory is hardly likely to be neutral and most often is eclipsed by political coloring" (172). Avery, in fact, foreshadows the central dilemma of the work when, at the onset of the novel, he publicly states during a radio broadcast that he does not believe in quoting passages from the Bible verbatim, since "knowledge and memory were not the same," sparking an outcry in the Protestant Unionist community. However, for this community, acceptable forms of memory and patriotic rhetoric are important precisely because they offer stability and cement a nostalgic and idealized image of the loyalist population in the national consciousness, which dangerous forms of knowledge threaten to disrupt.

Therefore, rather than acknowledging the truth claims about possible collusion between British Security Forces and loyalist paramilitaries, who they tend to interpret as a fanatical anomaly within Unionism, they prefer to commemorate "the glorious memory of the members of this congregation who gave their lives in the service of their country. Their names were repeated in black biro on a card beneath the lectern light. Avery scarcely needed to glance down to read them" (151). As Peter Mahon points out, "good" memory can be separated from "bad" memory in Patterson's novel because "good" memory "cherishes the sacrifice of the security forces by sticking to the 'facts,' while "bad" memory questions the conduct of the security forces, needs to be supplemented by other (re)sources, is 'textual' and 'breeds' in an uncontrollable and threatening manner" (68). In essence, the Unionist community's reliance on "good" memories, at the cost of

enacting a widespread political amnesia, places them in the grips of an "archive fever" that refuses to admit the "bad" memories of the Other into their "authoritative" account of the sectarian conflict.

However, just as what is repressed in the unconscious returns to haunt the individual, Patterson's novel suggests that "bad" memories can only be held at bay for so long. Therefore, into this society suddenly intrudes Larry, a mysterious figure who approaches Avery with the claim that he has "blood on his hands" and suffers from "flashes…Like waking nightmares" that replay a sectarian killing he believes he was involved in but cannot remember because "someone" has "tamper[ed] with my brain" (12,14). While Larry's story initially seems implausible, and Avery attributes it to the "classic reluctance to accept responsibility" of a recently released former paramilitary prisoner, its fantastical nature is reminiscent of the general atmosphere of paranoia and mistrust that the Troubles engendered. As Patrick Grant points out, "rumours and fantastic stories have been pervasive throughout the Troubles as a means both of expressing common anxieties and of suppressing uncomfortable truths" (58).   The "uncomfortable truths" Larry represents include not only the specter of collusion, but, more generally, the collective "bad" memories that have been repressed or marginalized from the "official record" and throughout the text we see acceptable memories contrasted and disrupted by Larry's ghostly presence.   For example, Avery notes that Larry's story "didn't fit any pattern that [he] could discern" since it does not follow the traditional stereotypes of loyalist killings that have entered the national consciousness: "the fake laundry, the massage parlor.., the brave – or foolhardy – SAS captain, captured deep in enemy territory and buried

somewhere so deep that to this day no trace of him had ever been found" (106).[1] Thus,

Larry's introduction into the narrative and Avery's corresponding obsession with his

story upsets the idea of a definitive version of the past and points to the anxieties and

"uncomfortable truths" that collective amnesia wards off.

   In a sense, like the Unionist community, Larry and Avery also become caught up in an

"archive fever," chasing after Larry's own uncertain memory traces. While certain

aspects of Larry's tale point to some credibility, such as the scar across his forehead and

the accurate descriptions of the murders he allegedly committed, the uncertainty that

plagues Avery's investigation into Larry's past is complicated by the flaws in his

narrative. For instance, Avery's doctor friend Tony reveals that Larry's scar is "not in

the right place" for such a brain surgery meant to induce amnesia; Larry's ex-wife claims

he was in a motorcycle accident that accounts for his mental illness; and the remarkable

nature of Larry's overall account aligns him with what Tony calls, ""Fantastic

Confabulators, people who, for one reason or another, go way beyond compensation and

even over-compensation. They can experience memories… completely unconnected to

anything in their past lives" (94). Thus, Avery's individual investigation parallels the

broader dangers of a collective attempt to inquire into a traumatic national past, one that

breeds not only amnesia but also conspiracy and paranoia, in a form of "over-

compensation." Yet as Freud points out in "Delusion and Dream in Jensen's *Gradiva*,"

every delusion contains "a grain of truth" and "[i]f eventually it is able to penetrate into

consciousness, this time in a distorted form, the sense of conviction attaching to it is

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[1]   This reference to a disappeared SAS captain seems to be a direct allusion to Robert Nairac, who is the subject of Eoin McNamee's novel *The Ultras*, examined later in this chapter.

over-intensified as though by way of compensation and is now attached to the distorted substitute of the repressed truth" (262). Ultimately, then, the text suggests that the veracity of Larry's distorted personal history is less important than what he, as a figure, represents, which is the need for alternative narratives, the repressed truth, to penetrate the national consciousness and be incorporated in the archival record of the Troubles.

This interpretation of Larry as a kind of spectral figure who haunts the national consciousness and draws attention to what is collectively repressed is strengthened by the fact that his appearance causes Avery to ruminate on other narratives of the Troubles that elude easy explanations or closure in the official record. One such specific personal occurrence is the death of Avery's former lover, Joanna, who was gunned down in her car during the height of the conflict. As Avery notes, "theories were put forward… but no organization claimed responsibility and no arrests were ever made" (33). Like the sectarian murder that Larry professes to have committed, Joanna's death is defined as "one of the most baffling episodes in the three decades of violence" (59). In essence, then, what Larry's story brings about is a reexamination of these "baffling" incidents, which continue to elude justice and are prone to being repressed from national modes of commemoration and political rhetoric because they complicate pat and easy notions about "coming to terms" with the past. This tension is further highlighted when Avery is the subject of a lawsuit by the Kirkpatricks, the family of a Catholic boy who was injured during one of his cross-community soccer matches. The family's decision to drop the lawsuit, due to fear of the medical community uncovering former instances of physical child abuse, works as a useful metaphor for the dangers that both the individual and the community must face if responsible and ethical action is to take place in the present. As

Avery notes, this fear of discovering "[h]istorical injuries. Unreported injuries" is a

strong motivating factor in the tendency towards and preference for collective amnesia

(174).

As a way to address these "unreported injuries" in the past, Avery decides to bring

Larry's story out into the light, believing that "in the shadows you were at a double

disadvantage: you could see nothing clearly and no one could see what was done to you"

(215). In effect, he holds his own inquiry, going to the press with Larry's accusations of

collusion and memory tampering, asking Larry to come forward, and, later, privately

recording his "testimony," a move that Bartnik perceptively claims is "analogous with the

proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission commenced in South Africa

after the collapse of the apartheid regime" (168). Believing that the act of taping Larry's

story "would provide a different sort of focus," Avery is able to unlock the gaps or

"blockages" in Larry's memory, causing Larry to reveal a rather familiar (and even

clichéd) narrative about abuse at the hands of the British security forces and being

coerced into acting as an IRA informer, but with the added twist of working as a double

agent and having his memory erased after committing a sectarian killing. Larry's

confession, however, is fraught with complications and, just as he haunts the collective

unconscious of the community, his story is revealed to be contaminated by the

stereotypical narratives and depictions of the Troubles found in popular culture. For

example, a colleague of Avery's later divulges to him that many of the details from

Larry's personal history share an uncanny similarity to the incidents recounted in Jim

Sheridan's film *In The Name of the Father*, itself a fictionalized retelling of the Guildford

Four, who were falsely convicted of an IRA pub bombing in 1974. Additionally, Tommy

Powers, the bar manager of the café where the killings that Larry alleges he committed took place, later reveals to Avery that Larry merely worked at the establishment and left moments before the murders occurred, after having brief contact with the victims. Larry's memory, therefore, conflates witnessing the event with acting out the event and his personal history is contaminated by popularized narratives that have entered the collective unconscious, complete with collusion, IRA informers, double agents, and memory "tampering."

Prior to discovering the extent of Larry's deception, Avery believes he can use Larry's confession to bring the "difficult truths about the past" to light, both by directly confronting his congregation with his allegations and by publicly exposing Larry's story during Bill Clinton's historic 1995 visit to Northern Ireland to support the peace process (239). Seeking justification for the introduction of these "bad" memories into the realm of public inquiry, Avery frames his mission in a religious context: "And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me; they and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this very day" (238). However, his call for a responsible remembering confronts two obstacles. First, when he attempts to bring these "difficult truths" to the attention of his congregation, so that they might "face them with dignity that they may *go forward* with dignity," he is met with shouts that transform into "a chant. *Shame, shame, shame*" and his congregation walks out in protest, led by Michael Simpson, an RUC officer who was himself the victim of an IRA bombing (239-40; author's emphasis). In essence, rather than acknowledgement and understanding, he is met with defiance and is scapegoated with the charge of "shame," an accusation that the congregation resists acknowledging is aimed at

themselves for ignoring the issue of collusion within their own community. Avery's attempts are further obstructed when, upon attempting to bring Larry's story to public knowledge during the Clinton visit, Avery discovers that Larry has been responsible for blackmailing him and concludes that he is, in fact, a "liar." At this moment, Avery himself succumbs to the desire for reciprocal violence, stating that he "wanted very much to make [Larry] suffer in some way" (262). As if in response to this subconscious wish, Larry commits suicide, electrocuting himself on a nearby power station, whose ominous hum has been heard throughout the narrative, and his death momentarily illuminates Belfast in a "blue flash" (263).

If Larry's individual memories and guilt were indeed fictitious, as the text suggests, then the novel posits the question of what these falsehoods say about the need for collective memory, an honest assessment of the past, commemoration of the dead, and the possibility of forgiveness. Peter Mahon has argued that "Larry's death is obliquely presented as collective in the text: the bright blue flash of Larry's electrocution… illuminates the 'whole city'" (69). However, while Larry's suicide may appear to briefly enlighten the entire city of Belfast, the text suggests that this "illumination" perhaps "extended no further than [Avery's] field of vision" (263). After all, as the novel repeatedly shows, Belfast is more prone to blackouts than moments of illumination. In the end, the veracity of Larry's story is irreparably undermined and, additionally, the tape containing his "testimony" is destroyed. Yet, tellingly, a trace of his story remains: "its contents, though, were vivid enough in Avery's memory for him to be confident… of narrating passages, if not verbatim then at least with a degree of fidelity" (269). Additionally, the novel offers one final twist when Avery, who had earlier asked Tony to

uncover Larry's medical record, receives a note from his friend that once again brings into question both the truthfulness of Larry's claims and the possibility of an overreaching conspiracy in a single word: "Nothing." Thus, the novel ends on a note of ambiguity, leaving us with Avery's final questions: "What was it? A double-cross? Tony's idea of a joke? I really can't say" (275). In this sense, Patterson's text functions much like the infinitude of Derrida's archive, producing more archive, resisting closure, and opening out into the future.

In the end, therefore, Avery's involvement with Larry brings us back to the issue of forgiveness and the possibility of responsible remembering, two ideas that are directly tied to the Dali Lama's speech, given in 2000 at the Belfast Amnesty International Human Rights Celebration and attended by Avery in the novel, on the subject of "What is Justice?": "Justice, he said, is all individuals looking after others' rights. It sounded like the answer to a problem more mathematical than moral, a simple formula that cut through the reams of cant and equivocation. Justice was a thing you did, not demanded. QED" (118). In essence, this is what Avery's own experience with Larry has taught him and, therefore, Larry's spectral appearance works to bring to light what the Unionist community has largely ignored, even if Avery is, by the novel's end, the only recipient of this knowledge. It is tellingly, for instance, that Avery's immediate reaction when he first sees Larry among his congregation is that he has been "anointed," causing Avery to spontaneously and inwardly say "forgive me" (7). Similarly, Avery initially interprets Larry as suffering from a "classic reluctance to accept responsibility" and claims that "if he was in denial then he was in a pretty advanced state" (13). However, this desire for forgiveness, coupled with the disinclination to admit responsibility and, instead, remain

in an advanced state of collective amnesia is actually a commentary not on Larry as an individual, but on the Unionist population as a whole. Larry's appearance, therefore, forces Avery and, by extension, his community to face the future dilemma of coming to terms with their own actions in the past, thus exemplifying the prediction that Tommy Power makes to Avery at Larry's funeral: "when the whole rest of the world's packed up and gone home we'll still have to account to ourselves for the things done here out of sheer malice" (271). This idea aligns with Patterson's own tendency towards skepticism about conspiracy theories and public inquiries, which he claims impede the realization that "a lot of what was done was motivated by hatred" and "we have to take responsibility for all this" (Hicks 117).   In short, Larry's presence forces the community to face difficult questions about marginalized narratives and the tendency to focus on one group's own victimhood at the expense of cultivating an understanding that would allow for commemoration of the dead on both sides of the conflict.

Thus, what Patterson ultimately imagines is not necessarily a "pure" forgiveness following Derrida's concept, but a kind of mutual understanding that functions in a similar manner in that it moves away from merely seeking closure, reconciliation, or retribution. Instead, this form of understanding would stem from a collective attitude that would be open to including "bad" memories into the national consciousness and leveling, rather than relying on, a hierarchy of victims. Such an attitude towards victimhood, however, remains deeply ingrained in the public psyche, as Avery notes when he states, "even now plenty of people would tell you the victims of such infighting were no great loss to anyone: a few less for the police to worry about. Trying to ensure that every death – every life – was accorded equal significance remained one of the

hardest battles to fight in this country" (46). Yet if Larry is the specter who brings to light the complications of this attitude, then Patterson does offer the reader models that illustrate what his form of mutual understanding and "justice" would look like in both Avery's dream vision and David McKittrick's *Lost Lives: The Stories of the Men, Women and Children who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles*, a 1600 page obituary published in 2001 that documents each individual life lost during the conflict.

Both Avery's dream and McKittrick's text highlight the need for collective remembrance, one that is purged of identitarian politics, political rhetoric, and the distinction between "good" and "bad" memories in the national consciousness. For example, in Avery's dream vision, he imagines waiting at a bus station for Joanna to arrive, where "all 'the Troubles' dead were being allowed home for the weekend. Temporary release." The dead who populate the station arrive appearing "weary, but full of stories," and Avery is awoken when an unfamiliar woman's voice says to him, "You obviously didn't want badly enough" (107-8). Notably, Avery's vision is a collective one, since it highlights that "all" of the victims of the conflict share the same space and each one carries the burden of his or her own story that demands to be told. Likewise, the unidentified woman's warning stresses that, in order for this kind of communal story-telling to take place, there must be a fervent desire, an "archive fever," that, in Derrida's words, means "to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away" (57).

Like Avery's dream, McKittrick's text also highlights a means of coming to terms with past traumas and, thus, forging a future that is based on reciprocal understanding because it is grounded in a mutual commemoration of the dead on both sides of the

sectarian divide. As Bartnik notes, this form of understanding "appears even more important than forgiveness because… it comes into being after having set aside political sympathies or cultural partialities" (171). In its very structure, *Lost Lives* enacts this method of removing political and cultural barriers that threaten to promote certain kinds of "victimhood" above others, since it gives "details of all the people killed in the thirty-three years since 1966." As such, it is noticeable as a "work of great integrity and restraint, entirely without sensationalism or sentimentality, a labour of the authors' true love for their fellow Northern Irish men and women" (56). Thus, in order for Avery's dream or this nonfictional model to be translated into actuality, Patterson suggests that one must be willing to confront and reinscribe the wounds of the past, the "bad" memories that continue to haunt the collective imagination, into the national narrative. To do otherwise, the novel warns, is to fall into willful forgetfulness and communal amnesia.

Ultimately, while *That Which Was* reveals the difficulties inherent in delving into and confronting historical trauma and these dangerous memories, and while Larry's individual case is never entirely resolved within the world of the text, Patterson does offer a guardedly optimistic message, one that suggests forgiveness and understanding are achievable on a communal scale. For instance, despite Avery's public shaming and his final encounter with Larry, it is revealed that "[f[rom the random sample encountered that afternoon it appeared that in time his congregation might be inclined to be forgiving" (274). While this pardoning is neither absolute, nor does it come close to Derrida's conception of a "pure" forgiveness," it does perhaps represent the first tentative steps towards a broader understanding and an attempt to acknowledge responsibility. In

essence, this inclination suggests that, even if Larry's appearance and death have not significantly altered the community, his introduction of "bad" memories into the collective psyche has at least been recognized. While this acknowledgement may not mark a monumental change, it does suggest a positive possibility for the future, one that could eventually bring both communities into the kind of understanding that Avery experiences when performing a baptism: "At that moment no one could doubt that God created all of his children equal. It was humankind's tragedy that it worked so hard at obliterating that fact" (19).

<div align="center">IV.</div>

In his 2004 novel *The Ultras*, Eoin McNamee moves away from the fictional conspiracy theories depicted in Patterson's text and, instead, focuses on a particularly notable case of the disappeared, one that continues to raise questions about both collusion and the missing victims of sectarian killings in Northern Ireland today. Following his familiar technique of employing historiographic metafiction to explore the more problematic aspects of the Troubles, McNamee blends fact and fiction to recreate the circumstances surrounding the paramilitary activities and mysterious disappearance of Robert Nairac, an SAS officer who attempted to infiltrate the IRA and who has been linked to various sectarian killings that have traditionally been attributed to loyalist paramilitaries, most notably the assassination of John Francis Green, a leading member of the PIRA, and the Miami Showband killings that took place in 1975. Therefore, McNamee's choice to focus on Nairac's case highlights a particularly contentious moment in Troubles history, both because his shadowy activities on the border and his questionable link to various organizations (including M15) have resulted in a variety of

conspiracy theories and because the uncertainty surrounding his disappearance and alleged death at the hand of the IRA is an exemplification of the collective paranoia that was both rampant during the height of the conflict and continued to reemerge after the peace agreement.

In particular, Nairac's disputed affiliations and the unanswered questions that surround his disappearance mark him as a kind of phantom, or in Derrida's terms a *revenant*, which continues to haunt the memories of the individuals associated with his clandestine activities and infiltrate the collective amnesia surrounding the historical facts about the Troubles. In essence, Nairac's positioning in the text recalls what his father, an eye doctor, tells him about certain visual phenomenon: "He remembered his father told him about images that imprint themselves on the back of the eye and do not fade, phantom images, shadowy and equivocal" (21). In a similar manner, Nairac remains such a "phantom image" imprinted on Troubles history and his alleged death is further problematized because it exists apart from, or in contrast to, the "official" narratives that typically define sectarian killings. As the fictional protagonist Blair Agnew, a former RUC officer and one of Nairac's co-conspirators, states, he is attracted to Nairac's story and death because "there was a newness to the crime, a modernity to it…. There was a sense of cognitive dissonance which was missing from the other border killings. The culvert bomb, the multiple victims, the historical carnage" (21). The "cognitive dissonance" of Nairac's disappearance can be accounted for because of the various conspiracy theories put forth about his possible escape at the hands of a shadowy British organization and "the most compelling evidence," which suggests his body was, in actuality, disposed of in a nearby meat processing plant by the IRA (4). In other words,

the inability to conclusively link Nairac to any particular organization, coupled with the mysterious nature of his disappearance, transforms him into a spectral figure, one who takes on near mythical qualities and evades the archival record. As such, Nairac's story becomes, in essence, a memory trace and his presumed murder eludes the "official record" since it cannot be explained by documentation or contained in the archive. Ultimately, this lack of coherence and finality results in several characters attempting to reconstruct an authoritative account of his history; as a result, these characters fall victim to an obsession with following the traces of Nairac's existence and, thus, to an overwhelming "archive fever," which is repeatedly presented as a form of madness.

However, such "archive fever" is not only evident in the aftermath of Nairac's disappearance, but is seen as originating during the height of the Troubles with Nairac himself. As one character describes him, Nairac is a "committed and lethal archivist," and this characteristic is depicted in his continual obsession with the cartography of the border, with documenting and replicating variations of Northern Irish accents, with inventing elaborate personas and stories about himself, and with his notable tendency to gather together and exhibit photographs of the carnage he is implicated in (191). In particular, Nairac's obsession with maps is a recurring motif in the novel and, as Agnew notes, Nairac "seemed to be able to trace lines on the map that no one else could see. He was able to establish strange but credible contexts" (89). This fixation with examining maps of the border, and with drawing and following their secret traces "as if there were another, more detailed legend elsewhere. One that gave reference points to the shifting nature of the place," suggests that Nairac seeks some kind of ultimate meaning or origin in the maps that he believes exists beyond the level of mere cartography (165).

However, the more closely he examines them, with an increasing obsession that is reminiscent of the repetition compulsion, the more these markings become "less clear" and, towards the end of the novel, just before his fateful final mission, Nairac realizes "he was approaching the terrain in the wrong way. He added nothing to these maps. He was looking for mysteries in them, ancient pathways, mystic linkages" (234). This attempt to seek the mystical in the cartography of the border suggests that Robert, in essence, is an archivist who confuses the archive with the *arche*, the trace with the original, and this misperception brings about precisely the kind of "radical evil" that Derrida warns against. In essence, Nairac seeks to uncover the "mystery" or the greater meaning of the conflict by examining one trace of it, a representation of the border that is itself arbitrary and cannot be conflated with or contain the complexity regarding the nature of the sectarian conflict.

In a similar manner, Nairac also compulsively collects photographs from various crime scenes that he allegedly has been involved in and, significantly, he pins these on the wall next to the maps, in an attempt to discover "correspondence between the exposed veins and nerve fibres of the body and the map, energy flows… He tried to look beyond the carnage. He thought he might be able to detect the Vedic channels" (234). Likewise, when he shows Agnew his arsenal, which consists of weapons "with the serial numbers etched off with acid," Agnew notes that what Nairac seeks is the "unattributable, the deniable," believing that "it was necessary to move quickly on from the act of violence itself…. You had to get to the meaning of the thing" (172). In his obsession with maps and photographs, with the "unattributable" archival remnants of violence that he assumes hold "the meaning of the thing," Robert turns himself into a kind of archive, a depository

of data, documents, and evidence, which also incorporates his varied attempts at regional

accents, elaborate cover-stories, recitation of patriotic songs, and "extensive local

knowledge" (88). However, his intricate efforts only serve to reveal the limits of the

archive, since they are always, at best, a trace of the original. Despite his bragging about

the accuracy of his accents, they are never entirely correct, just as he never fully grasps

the "meaning" behind the maps, the photographs of carnage, and the acts of violence he

initiates. For instance, as Agnew notices, while Robert swears continuously, "there was

something awkward in the way he swore, stilted, as if he had learned the words late in

life… You had the feeling that he was working too hard at the sentence. The

constructions seemed labored over and unwieldy" (173). In the end, the traces he

attempts to pinpoint continue to elude meaning, and Nairac's refusal to acknowledge this

disparity is what transforms him into the "committed and lethal archivist" of the text.

In this sense, Nairac's confusion between the *arche* and the archive and his need to

gather together a definitive and authoritative account that exposes the "mysteries" of the

sectarian conflict recalls Derrida's warning about archival violence that is done in the

name of the One against the Other. This tendency towards violence within the archive is

evident when Nairac appears at RUC headquarters to photograph the aftermath of an IRA

ambush on a group of undercover British security operatives. As an observing character

notes, "Robert seem[ed] to be a master of this, barely visible figures resolving themselves

from obscurity, tremulous imagery, the half-uncertain smile, and the photograph itself…

already freighted with qualities closely aligned with nostalgia, the longing for a thing

which perhaps was never there" (190). In attempting to again "look beyond the carnage"

Nairac enacts an archival violence against the marginalized and silenced victims whose

deaths elude any attempt to gather authority and meaning from the "official record."

Additionally, as Derrida states, by creating a clear distinction between the One and the

Other, "the One forgets to remember itself to itself, it keeps and erases the archive of this

injustice that it does… The One makes itself violence. It violates and does violence to

itself but it also institutes itself as violence" (51). This duality between instituting

violence and doing violence to oneself is evident in Nairac's own clandestine activities,

which hint at "cross-border incursions, extra-judicial assassinations, the beginnings of the

ruinous narrative of Robert's activity along the border," and his simultaneous

acknowledgement of a kind of death wish, as seen in both his refusal to abandon his final

mission even after he has been exposed and in his repeated premonition that "he would

die in this place" (112, 8).

Like Nairac, Blair Agnew, McNamee's fictional protagonist, is an archivist who is

attempting to get at "the meaning of the thing" by charting and documenting Nairac's

border activities and discovering the outcome of his disappearance,   However, unlike

Nairac, Agnew comes to recognize the limits of the archive and also seeks to introduce

dangerous memories into the collective consciousness and official narrative of the nation,

specifically those memories that are prone to repression due to collective amnesia. In the

process, Agnew, like Nairac, falls victim to his own *mal d'archive*; however, his purpose

is in stark contrast to the SAS captain's. Specifically, Agnew's version of *mal* does not

suggest the "radical evil" of Nairac's archive fever because it represents "not an illness,

but a cure, which saves us from patri-archontic architects who would control our cities

and our archives, who have most dangerously confused their own archival readings with

the *arche* itself, who even claim to have photographic memories" (Caputo 277). Thus,

unlike Nairac, who desires to see "beyond the carnage" and cartography of the conflict, and who, in the process, confuses his "archival readings with the *arche* itself," Agnew's attempts to document the past are, as Eamonn Hughes notes in his review of the novel, "less concerned with fact than with tracking the generation of narrative possibilities" (140). In essence, Agnew's archive fever consists of an attempt to open up the archive to the future and an eventual recognition that no definitive account or historical "truth" is possible.

Like Nairac, however, Agnew's growing *mal* begins to resemble a form of madness, prompting him to voluntarily spend time in a mental asylum where, "he began to feel it slipping away from him. He tried to make them see the connections, putting Robert at the scene of a number of different atrocities, trying to make them understand the logic of these killings differed from the logic of other killings" (10). While his alleged psychosis is largely feigned, full of "outrageous lies" that he tells his psychiatrist and a conscious attempt to "develop the persona of a man on the edge of unravelling," it is nevertheless a tangible madness that is grounded in "archive fever," a fact that is reinforced when Agnew begins to "spend time with the paranoids. He found that there were areas of agreement between them, matters of common concern" (39). Thus, like Larry's story of collusion and mind control in *That Which Was*, Nairac's status as phantom and Agnew's attempts to reconstruct meaning from the various "narrative possibilities" breeds an atmosphere of conspiracy and paranoia that both affects the individual and reflects the larger impact of the Troubles on present day attempts to deal with the past.

While the growing compilation of documents about Nairac's case that Agnew keeps in his caravan attest to his "archive fever," this tendency is already established earlier in the

novel, before Nairac's disappearance and during the height of the conflict. For example, during house raids, Agnew displays a notable tendency for removing photographs from the homes so that he can "spread them out on the kitchen table" where he "gave them histories, devised small, poignant events occurring in childhood. He ascribed qualities of quiet heroism to the women, cited examples of selflessness. He found that he couldn't stop adding incidents to their lives" (65). In this sense, Agnew's obsessive focus on both "narrative possibilities" and his concomitant desire to provide a voice to the marginalized and silenced victims of sectarian violence is already well established before he falls into the grips of his later fixation. Therefore, Agnew's subsequent accumulation of documents on the Nairac case merely represents another, but more fervent, attempt to chase the traces of the archival record, searching for meaning and purpose in what he terms "new fields of speculative discourse" and attempting to locate "the power of the hidden" (238).

Moreover, Agnew's compulsive desire to chase after the archive stems from a motivation to confront and come to terms with a traumatic past, both his own and the national one. For example, he is described by his daughter Lorna as looking "like a man carrying secret contraband of years something he'd smuggled into today from all those years ago" (179). Thus, Agnew's archive fever originates in a personal attempt to ward off the "border emptiness" and "tugging void" that has resulted from his own implication in and responsibility for conspiracy and murder, and it is thus inextricably linked to his involvement with Nairac's own shadowy activities (227). However, unlike Nairac, Agnew does not merely seek to "look beyond the carnage," but rather to compile and interpret it, in an effort to get at the "subordinate but nonetheless compelling truth about

the whole affair" and the responsibility he feels he bears to the archival record is compounded by his realization that "he was the only one still alive with any real knowledge of that period (238, 231). Thus, while he is accused by a former RUC colleague of attempting to "find forgiveness for yourself by chasing a dead man," Agnew's motive seems to go deeper than merely seeking individual forgiveness for his personal crimes; instead, he admits to "assembling a dossier that he could use against himself" (14). With this recognition of archival violence, Agnew's particular compulsion can be interpreted as a means of atonement for his own role in committing violence against the Other and, more specifically, for his own complicity in silencing and marginalizing certain narratives and memories from the official record. As such, like Dr. Grene in *The Secret Scripture*, he takes on the role of Ricoeur's "conscientious historian," one who "endeavours to see that growth prevails over destruction, and that traces and archives are preserved and kept alive" (10).

Lastly, David Erskine, who is a novelized version of Fred Holroyd, a British Army Intelligence Officer, is another variation of the archivist, one who symbolically represents the *archons*' attempts to control the "official record." In particular, this regulator functions by promoting certain narratives and repressing others and is often linked throughout the novel to questionable moral and legal practices, such as establishing fake brothels to entrap potential political targets. Additionally, like Agnew, Erskine's obsession with controlling the archive extends to the fictionalized profiles and evidence he creates for his agency's intended targets: "Sightings of targets at known trouble spots by unnamed witnesses. Spurious forensic evidence linking them to explosive finds. He added unnecessary detail for authenticity… The more detail you gave, the more it seemed

that guilt accrued" (111). Likewise, Erskine establishes a publishing firm whose sole

purpose is to spread propaganda and incite continual paranoia and distrust in the

populace, while at the same time fostering a voyeuristic fascination with images of

sectarian murder and violence. For example, as Erskine notes, the books contain

photographs of the "maimed, of the shot, of percussive-type high-explosive injuries,"

with the intent that the public succumb to a "shameful curiosity, to bring the books home

and hide them in the garage, in the shed, in the hidden places… the photographs lingered

over, the loathsome secret thing" (62). Erskine's tactics also involve planting fantastical

stories in the media about satanic ritual, coupled with establishing "standard criteria" for

news stories that value "narrative qualities" over veracity. What Erskine's methodology

suggests, following Derrida, is that political power is only maintained through control

and interpretation of the archive and, by extension, control of the narratives that are

allowed to enter the public discourse.

One consequence of this regulation, as McNamee repeatedly shows, is the need to

actively prevent certain "bad" memories and narratives from infiltrating the archival

record. For example, Agnew's documented confession after his involvement in the

Miami Showband killings is entirely controlled by the authorities, such as when he is told

to omit Nairac from his statement because "the narrative thrust was being obscured" and

he "raised too many unanswered questions" (142). By contrast, the "official" account of

Nairac's activities and his death is put forth by the Townson report, which attempts to

provide an authoritative and conclusive answer to Nairac's allegiance and death, despite

the fact that "Townson claimed he had not made the statements ascribed to him, none of

which he had signed" (227). As the "sole account" of Robert's death, however, these

documents are privileged in the archival record, while Agnew is told that his problematic

statement "was probably in a basement storage facility, a vast fluorescent-lit archive with

metal-frame shelving, poorly indexed" (143). Thus, by focusing on who controls the

archive, and what is privileged in the documentation at the expense of what is repressed,

McNamee confronts the ethical problems of attempting to reconstruct a truthful account

of the Troubles from the archive itself, an issue that he suggests hinders the possibility of

a confrontation with the past and impedes attempts to move beyond the country's

traumatic history because it disallows for responsible remembering.

Instead, as the Nairac case reveals, what exists outside the archive continues to elude

comprehension and control, leaving behind a trace, a "spectral truth," that refuses to

remain repressed. This hauntedness, in turn, leads to a "radical evil," where the

authorities succumb to their own mal d'archive that, as with the example of Nairac

earlier, leads to (in Derrida's terms) the "archontic violence of the One." This

consequence is a lesson that Erskine eventually learns after he begins to openly question

Nairac's clandestine operations and is, subsequently, framed for murder and placed in a

mental asylum. In essence, the violence of the One is turned back on him when he

becomes an Other by drawing attention to narratives that do not align with the "standard

criteria" he helped establish. One such narrative centers on the existence of The Ultras, a

mysterious faction of individuals who work between organizations and exist "beyond the

sphere of deniability" and, thus, outside of any "official record." The State's

simultaneous need for such a clandestine group and the necessity for denying its very

existence is illuminated when Erskine is told by his former boss that the Ultras are merely

"the product of the fevered left-wing imagination. A nonsense of post-colonial theorists"

(244). This deniability, coupled with Erskine's own recognition that such a group represents "a dark, ordering artifice," shows how such "unacceptable" narratives and memories are transformed, like Nairac, into a spectral truth. This spectrality, in turn, causes both an escalation of paranoia and troubles the collective memory of the populace, as seen in the rise of "transcendent episodes" being reported in the field after rumours of the Ultras and Nairac's activities begin to surface: "A soldier claimed to have seen a boy he had shot during a riot… At the scene of a convoy ambush with multiple casualties on a lonely dual carriageway, motorists reported a phantom truck… bearing down on them and then suddenly disappearing… " (89). Thus, these traces not only return to threaten the stability of the archive, but also manifest themselves as actual "phantoms" within the collective national psyche.

The tension between establishing an authoritative account and the reappearance of what eludes the official record thus fuels several of the individual characters feverish attempts to continue chasing the traces of archival *revenants*. Agnew, for instance, becomes increasingly fixated on the final resting place of his confession, feeling that "such documents demanded a more dramatic context, something old and cavernous where fragile ancient scripts were kept, scholarly, pored over. A place of hushed voices with humidity meters and temperature-controlled vaults" (143). Thus, through his investigation into Nairac's case, Agnew comes to recognize the importance of documentation and preservation as a means to give testimony and bear witness to those aspects of the past that the *archons* would suppress and thus relegate to collective amnesia. However, as Agnew's inquiry shows, the infinitude of the archive itself has a continual tendency to overwhelm any attempts to establish a "true" or comprehensive

version of history. He states, in reference to Nairac, "'all that paper and he is just one man. Just one. There's thousands more.' Agnew paused, lost in awe at the notion of so much paper, the vast and rustling mass of it. The reams and folios. The quartos" (143). As such, McNamee's novel suggests that those in mal d'archive are concurrently obsessed with finding patterns within the archival records and driven by the kind of "death wish" that Derrida outlines, which comes about from confronting the sheer "awe" of the archive's infinitude and yearning for its effacement as place of consignation.

Nowhere in the text is this tension between preservation and destruction more apparent than in the figure of Agnew's daughter, Lorna, who is described as a "huddled archivist" and who slowly becomes infected by Agnew's own obsessive tendencies. Lorna begins the novel already in the grips of a physical illness, in the form of her anorexia and subsequent suicide attempts, which suggest not only a tension between control and annihilation, but can be interpreted as the physical manifestation of collective psychic wounds that she inscribes onto her own body. For example, as Agnew observes, her physical frame reminds him "about the whole range of insightful disorders that teenage girls had brought into being. Variations on themes of self-harm" (18). In essence, these "insightful disorders" and "themes of self-harm" provide a broader commentary on what has been inherited from the traumatic past and inflicted on the present generation. As a result, Agnew notes that Lorna is "aware of the power of the hidden, of that which was removed from the common gaze" (140). In a similar manner, as the novel progresses, Lorna exhibits behavior that aligns her with Agnew's mal d'archive, in that "they were both in pursuit of something coded, allusive" (20). Specifically, in contrast to the accumulation of authorized documents in Agnew's

caravan, McNamee establishes Lorna's diary as a means of transcribing what remains hidden or secret, and thus eludes the archival record. Described as a "forbidden text" and "a document that had lain unopened in an archive for decades" by Agnew, Lorna's diary both exists outside the archive and is one more product of the "radical evil" that occurs when past accounts that have been excluded or repressed from the official record return to haunt the present. Thus, just as her narrative voice (the only one written entirely in stream of consciousness) offers an alternative to the other voices in the novel, Lorna's diary stands as an alternative archival record that becomes increasingly contaminated by the amnesiac evasions and guilty secrets that define the history of the conflict.

Over time, Lorna infiltrates Agnew's amassed archive and begins to incorporate this documentation into her own diary, seemingly in an attempt to discover some kind of definitive verity about her father, whom she knows has not confronted "the full truth about his past" (104). Specifically, she mimics her father's increased obsession with the Nairac case and begins stealing "certain parts of information he had collected in relation to Robert," a tendency that Agnew acknowledges and proclaims as having "begun to take on a terrible meaning" (140). This "terrible meaning" manifests itself in her fixation on Nairac's photograph, which she keeps hidden within the pages of her diary, and her simultaneous fascination with gaining an understanding about what has become hidden from the official record. For instance, she writes, "I don't know how men can be ultra" and "maybe that is the meaning of the word ultra. That you are ultra secret and do not give anything away no matter what. That they look and look and cannot find you" (255). Aligning Nairac's photograph with her diary, therefore, suggests an affinity between the two characters, in that both represent elements that confront authoritative memories about

the past and symbolize how repressed narratives retain traces in the archive. Thus, if Lorna is read as a representation of how collective memory will be passed down to future generations, McNamee tellingly presents her as "haunted," "informed in the matter of amnesties, of pardon granted" and "intent on full disclosure" (180, 228).

Lorna, Agnew, and Nairac all exhibit a form of archive fever that is problematized by the lack of "full disclosure" with regards to the past and, as a result, each character becomes fixated on the notion of documenting "the jurisdiction of the unseen" (140). This link is strengthened by the parallels between Lorna's own written narrative and Nairac's story, such as when Lorna, in her "Last Will and Testament," states, "in science they made us cut up frogs the sinew the membrane the eyes…. I thought it would be sick still *it is good to see the way the eyes work*" (254; emphasis added). Lorna's reference to eyes and sight recalls Nairac's own attempts to see "beyond the carnage" and establish meaning as a means to ward off metaphorical blindness and Agnew's search for "narrative possibilities" in the archival records. Thus, all three characters share an obsessive tendency that recalls the advice of Nairac's father:

> He spoke to him about disorders of the eye. There were visual phenomena, bright lights, flashes, floating black specks. The processes of seeing were fraught. It was important that you paid attention. It was important that you attended to the details. It was important that you were watchful. People came to him who had been careless about variations in their vision and he had watched them descend into blindness, the world fading away from them. (7)

In this sense, each of the variations of archive fever experienced by the characters comes up against the problem of locating that which is marginalized and unseen and each is threatened by a descent into blindness, one that results from the temptation to succumb to collective amnesia and to a destructive drive that seeks to eradicate the archive itself.

Ultimately, the unseen and hidden prove too much for Lorna and, echoing Nairac's own death wish, she commits suicide by drowning herself in the sea and leaving behind her diary as a form of testimony for Agnew to read. Therefore, Lorna's final act serves as an acknowledgement of the very real threat of the death wish that is always present when one is in archive fever. Specifically, the text suggests her destruction comes about because of an inability to carry the full burden of the past: "I know where the pain is they gave me a new young body but they put old bones in it said there you go girl try to creak around in those bones see how it feels" (254). Consequently, her confrontation with the "old bones" of history culminates in an inability to reconcile the varying narratives of the past in the present and she, thus, succumbs to a form of archival violence that enacts, in Derrida's terms, "the violence of forgetting, superrepression (suppression and repression), the anarchive, in short, the possibility of putting to death the very thing, whatever its name, which carries the law in its tradition" (51). Her death, furthermore, recalls for Agnew "a sadhu's immersion in the sanctified waters for purposes of cleansing, for purposes of purification" (252). As such, Lorna's suicide can be read as a kind of self-sacrifice to cleanse the community, an act whose symbolism entreats a confrontation and coming to terms with what is secret, hidden, or forbidden in the past in order for a working through of trauma to take place. As Agnew notes, her diary finally serves as both a warning and an entreaty that "someone would see things for what they were. That someone might give testament" (110). Thus, while Lorna surrenders to her own death wish, her final testimony remains as a statement of opposition against the tendency towards collective amnesia.

At the end of the narrative, Nairac's death continues to elude the archive, a result of seemingly endless narrative possibilities, a botched criminal investigation that hints towards conspiracy, and an "official" account that has "proved mutable, open to interpretation." Even when Agnew attempts to move away from the "written record" and speaks to a supposed eyewitness at the meat plant, no finality or meaning is gained. Ultimately, then, Nairac's disappearance remains problematic for the *archons*, the authorities who "wanted to stop it intruding into their sphere. They were the keepers of mystery. They were the holders of the secret." Thus, Nairac's position at the end of the novel remains much as it was at the beginning; he continues on as a phantom, "a source of persistent rumour," who points to the spectrality of repressed and traumatic collective memory and leaves the archive as, at best, a "tainted place" (251). In this sense, McNamee's text maintains the same form of ambiguity found in Patterson's novel, albeit with a darker vision regarding the possibility of forgiveness or reconciliation in Northern Ireland following the peace process. Specifically, *The Ultras* suggests that terms such as forgiveness or justice are impossible to broach if there is not, in Ricoeur's terms a "duty to remember," which "consists not only in having a deep concern for the past, but in transmitting the meaning of past events to the next generation" (9). Failing in this duty, McNamee suggests, ultimately creates a future where the "processes of seeing" remain "fraught," and encourages an erosion of the traces of the past that will continue to exert a destructive force on collective and individual memory.

<div align="center">V.</div>

In *The Truth Commissioner*, David Park constructs an elaborate what-if exercise that imagines a truth commission, one that is modeled on the South African model, taking

place in Belfast during an unspecified time in the future.[2] Through a series of disjointed

individual narratives, Park focuses his story around four different men, all of whom are,

to varying degrees, implicated in the disappearance of Connor Walsh, a fifteen-year-old

IRA informant whose case is one of the first to be presented at the commission. Thus,

these narrative strands all eventually coalesce around the truth recovery process; it is

what fundamentally links the lives of the various characters to one another and it is what

holds the narrative together structurally.

However, Park's intentional fragmentation of the narrative, a stylistic choice that is

meant to cause disorientation in the reader, also mirrors a fundamental problem that is

inherent in the truth recovery process itself - namely, the attempt to archive and bring

together a variety of diverse stories in order to construct a master narrative about the past.

As Derrida notes, such attempts are a hindrance to the concept of forgiveness, since they

attempt to impose normalization and, more problematically, are prone to excluding or

marginalizing narratives that do not serve the nation's reconciliation process.

Additionally, as he notes in "Archive Fever," "there is no political power without the

control of the archive, if not of memory." Therefore, Park's novel demonstrates both the

ethical limitations of the archive, which, according Paul Ricoeur, "the conscientious

historian must open up… by retrieving the traces which the dominant ideological forces

attempted to suppress," and the impact that this manipulation and lack of openness has on

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[2]   This link between the two nations seems intentional, given that the cover image of the Belfast
Agreement was, in fact, proven to be a photograph taken in Cape Town; Stefanie Lehner notes, "it is
noteworthy that the image represents a historical vacuum that evokes a prelapsarian state of unity and
harmony suggested by the Christian notion of reconciliation" (66) and Colin Graham states, "The
unintended analogy with post-apartheid South Africa is as close as the official documents, tactics or
policies of the Process and its administration can come to a coherent view of 'identity' in Northern Ireland"
(172).

the commission's attempts to foster forgiveness and reconciliation across the sectarian divide (16).

The initial confusion of Henry Stanfield, the commissioner of the title and a "conscientious historian" almost against his will, reflects the confusion inherent to the truth recovery process itself. Stanfield confesses that, looking over the vast archives of material, "he feels a desultory randomness about it all, a sense of fragmentation that bodes badly for those charged with putting it all together, for those whose job is supposed to be to shape it into meaning" (24). Thus, while Stanfield might appear to be the quintessential *archon*, one who is tasked with ordering, interpreting, and preserving the influx of documents and testimonies from the conflict, he is continually faced with the problem that, in Derrida's words, "order is no longer assured" (11). Park similarly positions his readers as truth commissioners from the beginning of the novel, as they too attempt to shape the narrative into some meaningful whole, just as the truth recovery process attempts to construct a cohesive national narrative out of individual cases. In essence, by uniting the reader with Stanfield's own uncertain position in the truth recovery process, *The Truth Commissioner* exposes how the claims and rhetoric associated with truth commissions, and by extension similar inquiries, come up against the limitations of both the archive and unconditional forgiveness.

Furthermore, Park, like McNamee, deliberately chooses to focus on a case of the disappeared (albeit a fictionalized one), a particularly problematic aspect of Troubles history and a hindrance to both the archive and forgiveness, since, as Derrida posits: "who would have the right to forgive in the name of the disappeared victims? They are always absent, in a certain way ("On Forgiveness" 44). This inclusion of an aspect of

Troubles history that is notably shrouded in secrecy and absence suggests the need for a

shift away from stories that simply reinforce the overall master narratives of post-conflict

nations and towards narratives that reflect the singularity of individual experience. By

using the case of Connor Walshe as a unifying feature of his various narrative strands,

Park highlights an absence that seems to make forgiveness impossible precisely because

of the lack of closure. As Tom Herron notes, "Connor Walshe only begins his

presencing, his haunting once the TRC begins its operations: there is absolutely no

evidence presented to us that he exerts any influence (in the form of memory, of guilt, of

mourning, or contrition) on the men who will eventually, and against their wishes, be

haunted by him in the most devastating manner" (25). Therefore, the case of Connor

Walshe represents one specific instance of both, in Derrida's terms, the lack of "finality"

in forgiveness and the simultaneous infinitude of the archive itself.

    From the outset of his novel, the most consistent attitude Park establishes towards the

truth recovery process and its potential for pure forgiveness is a wary cynicism. This

attitude is particularly attributable to Stanfield, his Truth Commissioner, who embodies

the public authority of the law, but who continually stands apart from his work with a

detached, but critical gaze; for instance, he believes, rather erroneously, that having "an

Irish Catholic mother and an English Protestant father allow him to straddle both

tribes…. And he has no personal or political baggage to be unpacked by either side."

Additionally, his motives for taking on the position are largely ones of self-interest, since

"what he enjoys most is thinking of the book that will surely come out of it and already

he's batting ideas around for the title – *The Whole Truth*, *Nothing but the Truth*…

perhaps even *The Freedom of Truth*" (19). In fact, it is largely through Stanfield's

perspective that Park is able to point to the questionable motivations, rhetoric, theatricality, and purpose that undermine the forgiveness that is possible in a juridical context, all of which are aspects of institutionalized reconciliation that Derrida claims corrupt pure forgiveness and promote a collective amnesia through control of the archives.

Therefore, while Park, like Derrida, suggests that the impetus for instituting a truth commission can be undeniably noble and even justifiable, he is likewise careful to avoid idealizing a process that is inherently flawed in terms of its motivations for wanting to mete out forgiveness in the name of national unity. Thus, Stanfield's view of the entire process questions the necessity of digging up the nation's sordid past, likening it to the memorable image of "an old manged, flea-infested dog returning to inspect its own sick" (25). Similarly, all of the other characters connected to Connor's disappearance suppress, repress, or sublimate their guilt onto either a fictional past or a utopian future, tactics that serve to avoid their own culpability. For instance, Michael Madden, a former-IRA member who was present during Connor's death and who has since fled Ireland, suppresses any vestiges of his former life in his quest for the American dream and his belief that this dream affords the possibility of starting anew. Additionally, James Gilroy, the man who Madden will ultimately accuse of committing Connor's murder (and, ironically, the current Minister for Children and Culture), projects himself into a nostalgic, idealized past, where he is a simple family man," devoid of responsibility for his former actions as an IRA leader. Lastly, James Fenton, a former RUC detective who initiated Connor into the world of informants, attempts to sublimate his feelings about past culpability through alternative forms of atonement, such as volunteering at an

orphanage in Romania (itself a site of problematic reconciliation with its own past). In other words, as Herron points out, none of the men responsible for Connor's fate consciously think about the incident or experience any clear sense of guilt or responsibility until the TRC begins its investigation. All of them, instead, either mythologize the past, excuse their individual roles through conventional rhetoric (such as claiming to have been "soldiers" fighting in a war), or imagine for themselves a future that, as Madden puts it, will allow him, without admitting culpability, to "start afresh, step into the future clean and entitled to the happiness that it promises" (228). In essence, none of these men ask for forgiveness and, therefore, according to Derrida, this should disqualify them from receiving conditional forgiveness, which is reliant on repentance and conversion.

However, as the novel suggests, politics and truth seek radically different ends when it comes to forgiveness. This fact is reflected in the text with the sardonic treatment of the rhetoric associated with the truth recovery process. This rhetoric, at least according to Stanfield, largely consists of empty phrases about healing and national unity, as well as endless meetings in South Africa to learn about the "need for ubuntu, the African philosophy of humanism" (11). As Derrida and Park suggest, this rhetoric serves two problematic functions. First, as Derrida notes, it has a tendency to conflate forgiveness with related concepts, such as amnesty and regret, which should remain distinct. Second, as Park points out, such rhetoric has a tendency of oversimplifying the truth recovery process, of reducing it to clichéd slogans, such as the South African TRC's motto of "revealing is healing."

Additionally, Park, like Derrida, links the issue of political power to the control of the archive and, thus, to control of collective memory, as several attempts are made throughout the novel to suppress Gilroy's name from the commission's investigation into the Walshe case. Stanfield, in particular, is forced to face this conspiracy when confronted by two mysterious individuals, who are presumably representatives for some special interest in the British government. While Stanfield rather tentatively asserts that the commission "stands free from political bias and pressure from any source," he is quickly dispelled of this idealistic notion when he is blackmailed, using pornographic photographs of himself with a prostitute, and urged to "understand the broader picture" in terms of how these various secretive political entities wish to shape Northern Ireland's future (257). As one of these men reveals to Stanfield at this meeting, "the one problem I find here is that they will give up anything – their wives, their money, their self-respect – before they'll give up their past. And this makes constructing the future a little difficult, as you can imagine" (256). In essence, this desire for control of the archive is inextricably tied to a control of the national narrative, since the inclusion of certain memories and the exclusion of others will have a bearing on how the future of Northern Ireland is constructed. Thus, Stanfield's role as an *archon* becomes increasingly problematic throughout the text, as his ability to control the archive is repeatedly challenged by competing forces, whether from the government or the victims' families.

Yet perhaps the biggest issue with the conflation between pure forgiveness and the rhetoric of truth recovery is that it exposes a gap between the idealized national narrative that the commission establishes and the more complex and fragmented reality of individual victims and their families. This paradox is poignantly expressed in Park's

novel when comparing the "official" language of the Truth Commission with the reality of the proceedings, which tend to devolve into a ritualized formality or a barely contained spectacle. Stanfield's scripted opening speech before each case, for instance, hits all of the familiar and contrived buzzwords for post-conflict transitional nations: "societal healing," "confronting our past, "reconciliation and understanding," "building a better future," "communal atonement" and "closure" (316). By contrast, the actual perpetrators in the proceedings, like Madden, are subject to a variety of interventions and preparations, from memorizing scripts that downplay their responsibility to following the advice of experts in courtroom presentation, thereby reducing the seemingly noble endeavor into what one of the characters calls, "a ritual, a quick appearance.... it's easy, painless. In and out," while another compares to being "a bit like the dentist's" (237, 313). The theatricality underlying these procedures recalls Derrida's point that, despite the best intentions, "the simulacra, the automatic ritual, hypocrisy, calculation, or mimicry are often a part, and invite parasites to this ceremony of culpability" (29). In other words, these proceedings give a whole new meaning to the phrase "show trial."

Thus, there clearly exists a gap between the ideal and the real, between the ritual of forgiveness and the reality of the unforgivable, and between the possibilities and the limitations of the archive. This gap, or tension, then, begs the question of how it affects the bereaved victims who take part in this "ceremony of culpability." As Stanfield is drawn deeper into the process of truth recovery, his cynicism is transformed into outright disillusionment. Specifically, he notes that what the victims and their families desire is a kind of justice that is beyond the jurisdiction of the truth commission, which is predicated on "formulaic, pre-learned responses" and "get-out-of-jail cards that avoid personal guilt

or moral culpability." As a result, Stanfield notices "the void" that engulfs the bereaved, "when they understand that this is all they will be given and they realize it's not enough" (246) With this observation, Park criticizes superficial notions of conditional forgiveness implicit within an uncritical interpretation of the past that renders victims further marginalized or silenced.

This realization is particularly true in instances when the bereaved have no desire to forgive, a fact that amnesty easily elides. One of the most compelling moments in the text that highlights Derrida's ideas about the tension between conditional and unconditional forgiveness occurs with just such a marginalized figure. As Stanfield hears the scripted testimony of an unnamed perpetrator, where there has been the standard "admission of responsibility, an apology, and even a seemingly sincere little appeal for forgiveness," the deceased victim's wife lunges forward with a knife in her hand, a knife that "Stanfield can't be sure but thinks...comes from inside her Bible" (243). While the attack is quickly dispelled, this disruptive moment is representative of what Derrida calls "the enigma of the forgiveness of the unforgivable, there is a sort of 'madness' which the juridico-political cannot approach, must less appropriate" (55). In other words, the literal chaos that erupts and disrupts the commission is expressive of the fact that certain forms of forgiveness remain inaccessible to law or politics, a fact that is reinforced by the final image of the woman standing "perfectly still, the knife dropped to the floor, with the appearance of the catatonic, unseeing, unhearing, unresisting as she's led away" (243).

The image of the knife contained inside the woman's Bible is perhaps the clearest metaphor Park employs to express Derrida's admission that conditional and unconditional forgiveness must always exist as "irreconcilable but indissociable" poles.

If, as Derrida claims, the concept of forgiveness is based on an Abrahamic religious heritage, then it seems at odds with the forms of reconciliation the commission is asking the woman to give, in essence to "sum up her feelings about her husband who on a summer evening twenty years earlier opened his front door to his killer" (242). Thus, as both Park and Derrida seem to acknowledge, on the opposite spectrum from a pure forgiveness that is based on pardoning the unforgivable lies a more primitive conditional forgiveness that can only be sated with a punishment of the guilty. The ritualistic atonement offered by the truth recovery process, however, fails to offer its victims access to either form.

Yet despite the various attempts to manipulate, control, and impose an interpretation on both the commission and, by extension, the archive, the novel does suggest that a reciprocal influence occurs, one whereby access to the archive infiltrates collective memory or contaminates those associated with it. Specifically, from the beginning of the TRC, there is a sense of these proceedings evoking a return of the repressed for those who are present or called before the commission and this return can be linked to the tension between the simultaneous impulse to preserve and destroy the archive. One of the most obvious examples occurs to Stanfield, who states that "each day as he sits in the chamber he feels himself imbibe some more of the toxins that seep from the buried corrosive and carcinogenic emotions that have been given permission to come to the surface" and fears that the continuous exposure to communal trauma will "insidiously take up permanent residence inside his head" (247, 249). Likewise, Fenton, who initially feels angry that the request to appear before the commission has "intruded on his privacy," has repeated visions of Connor's face "swooping towards him out of the

darkness" (284, 289). Similarly, Madden, when summoned before the TRC, relates this "letting loose the spores of the past" to "the anthrax scare, of envelopes seeping with white powder. Of contamination" (229).

This "contamination" is linked to a certain hauntedness, embodied by Connor, who is a spectral figure throughout the novel, but one who exerts an increasingly powerful force as the narrative progresses. Specifically, Connor's position as a ghost that haunts the various other characters is tied to his story as a spectral truth that haunts the "official record" of the archive itself. As Derrida notes, "[a]s if one could not, precisely, recall and archive the very thing one represses, archive it while repressing it (because repression in an archivization), that is to say, to archive otherwise, to repress the archive while archiving the repression…" (43). Thus, Connor's story, while repressed from the "official record" remains archived in both the memories of the individuals connected to his death and in the "unofficial" traces of his presence that defy the limits of archivization.

Park further problematizes this relationship between the specter and the archive towards the end of his novel when, during the hearing about the Walshe case, the family's advocate plays a tape of the boy's final interrogation by IRA members. Throughout the text, Connor is a spectral figure who haunts the narrative and exists only on the margins of consciousness for the other characters, a momentary hint that the past will return with the full force of the repressed and impel them to face their own culpability. However, when the tape is played, Connor is momentarily transformed from a specter, an absence, into a powerful presence in the courtroom and the effect is palpable. This moment highlights Derrida's assertion in "Archive Fever" that "the

phantom continues to speak. Perhaps he does not respond, but he speaks. A phantom

speaks. What does this mean? In the first place or in a preliminary way, this means that

without responding it disposes of a response, a bit like the answering machine whose

voice outlives its moment of recording" (42). However, rather than the communal

atonement that the commission strives for, Connor's tape brings about "a collective

embarrassed shame" for the listeners, who "know they're listening to the voice of a boy

who's about to die and they know that their presence intrudes even all these years later....

They want the tape to stop" (328).

Connor's presence here stresses Derrida's point about the complicated positioning of

the disappeared in such truth recovery processes. He explains, "The disappeared, in

essence, are themselves never absolutely present, at the moment when forgiveness is

asked for" (44). Thus, Connor's recorded voice, his presence which only serves to

highlight his absence, unsettles the entire procedure. His voice does not belong in this

theatrical space precisely because he disrupts pat or clichéd notions about forgiveness and

reminds listeners and readers why pure forgiveness is not possible in this judicial context.

As Tina Kirss points out, "The realm of 'ghosts,' ghostliness, and spectrality refers to the

intermittent symptomatology of the larger story refused by public actuality….

Revisionary history writing and the institutionalization of commemoration evade and

foreclose the ghostly, since these efforts often serve nationalist or identitarian projects"

(22). Therefore, Connor's disembodied voice suggests the voices of the marginalized and

silenced, those whose narratives exist outside the "normalizing" and official narrative of

institutional truth recovery. Yet, by unsettling the script, or the ritual, of the proceedings

in this way, Park highlights the need for alternative narratives that take into account the disempowered and disaffected in this process.

Ultimately, one must ask what Park's novel suggests about the nature and possibility of forgiveness. In particular, does Park seem to reflect Derrida's oscillation at the end of his essay between the possibility of unconditional, pure forgiveness and the reality of conditional forms of repentance? I would argue that the many ambiguities and open-ended nature of the narrative seem to suggest so. While Connor's family does attain some degree of truth (regarding the identity of his murderer and the possible location of his discarded body), neither conditional nor unconditional forgiveness is extended. As Madden notes, after his unscripted testimony implicates himself in the death of the boy, the family's faces "are closed to him and give no response or recognition to his words" (331). Rather than experiencing a sense of closure or healing, Madden comes to the realization that there is no "casting off" his culpability, but only a "sense of shame" that will brand him wherever he goes (351). In this same vein, the narrative withholds closure, even after all four narrative strands coalesce around a single case. While Gilroy is fingered as the murderer, his version of the truth differs drastically from Madden's and he never appears before the commission in the timeframe of the novel. Similarly, Fenton is left contemplating suicide in his car after giving his testimony, wondering what it is like to "sleep in a forest, to sleep in a secret place that no one else can find," thus connecting his fate to Connor's own (357).

The bringing to light of trauma, therefore, and the subsequent forgiveness and closure deemed necessary to "move forward" (both as an individual and as a nation) is withheld and Park instead ends his novel with images of both destruction and silence. Following

the explosive revelations at the commission hearing, the archives literally collapse, being

set on fire by an unknown assailant in a symbolic gesture that highlights the limitations of

institutional truth recovery, recalling Derrida's point that there is always a desire to

reduce the archives to ash in order to both eradicate dangerous memories and to begin

anew without the constraints of the past. As Stanfield muses about the cause of the

destruction, he tellingly suggests that perhaps it is the "collective fusion of so much

smoldering pain in some kind of spontaneous combustion" (369). Likewise, he

anticipates a reciprocation of the conspiracy and paranoia that are already present during

the truth commission, stating, "[t]here'll be an inquiry of course and for the rest of their

bitter, corrosive history each side will blame the other and each year a new and

blossoming conspiracy theory will apportion blame" (369). While the act of destruction

is ultimately meaningless in a practical sense, since "all the files have been scanned and

their contents now sleep in the hard drives of computers, out there in cyberspace beyond

the reach of destruction," the open-endedness and ambiguity which mark the final

moments of the text suggest that while some degree of "truth" recovery is possible in

such an official context, it is not an ideal model for forgiveness to take form (369).

Thus, the novel chooses to end in silence, at the bog where Connor's body is

supposedly interred before the machinery arrives to locate his remains. Notably, this is a

place that "is not somewhere that humans ever come," one that will only accommodate

"the liquid burble of some invisible tongue" (371-2). While Connor's case has been made

public, and his own words have brought his spectrality into the collective memory of the

commission, Park suggests that this revelation is not necessarily adequate when dealing

with Northern Ireland's tumultuous past. After all, as Derrida points out, simply entering

the archival record does not eradicate the mysteries and secrets of the past: "The

dwelling, this place where they dwell permanently, marks this institutional passage from

the private to the public, which does not always mean from the secret to the nonsecret"

(10). However, I disagree with critics like Tom Herron, who assert that the novel

ultimately says little about the nature of forgiveness and truth:

> The fact that it *is* fantasy, that the scenario it imagines is unreal, does not exist, and will, in all likelihood, never exist produces an undoubted sense of tragedy in that it seems only in the world of imaginative writing that the dead, the utterly lost are permitted to have their say. However, the text's indexing of the contemporaneously 'real,' most notably the new Bloody Sunday Inquiry, engenders, as I prefer to see it, a cautiously optative disposition towards such valiant truth-finding attempts, no matter how flawed or compromised they may appear to be. This is not to assert, however, that reconciliation, nor that even more difficult absolute gift, forgiveness, follow on from whatever version of truth emerge in the chamber of the TRC: indeed, the novel has absolutely nothing to say on either. (29)

While Herron asserts that Park's novel "has absolutely nothing to say" on the question of

forgiveness or truth, I would assert that, instead, Park's novel is a "haunted" text that,

according to Kirss, represents "sites where narrative is resisted, where the assumption of

the inadequacy or healing potential of narration is questioned. 'Haunted' texts do not

pretend that people and cultures can be 'delivered' of ghosts 'merely' by telling stories

about them" (27).

<div align="center">VI</div>

In the decades during and following the Troubles, a common view regarding the

output of Northern Irish novelists is that they have become simultaneously obsessed with

resurrecting the traumas of the past, whereas their texts, in general, have been seen as

largely inadequate in terms of dealing with the ongoing effects of the sectarian conflict.

Such a view is exemplified in Mick Heaney's 2010 assessment of Troubles fiction in *The*

Sunday Times, which recycles the familiar argument that, while poetry has proven capable of capturing the complexity and nuance of the conflict, "novelists have been defeated by the Troubles." Specifically, Heaney targets contemporary novelists like Eoin McNamee and Glenn Patterson (while giving a reprieve to David Park's *The Truth Commissioner*), claiming that "the dearth of achievement has been most glaring among contemporary novelists" and that non-fictional works, such as memoirs or *Lost Lives*, "dwarf all but the most accomplished novels." However, I would argue that contemporary writers such as Barry, Patterson, McNamee, and Park are not merely interested in replicating a literary repetition compulsion in their explorations of historical traumas; rather, they are keenly aware of the need to address and critique "the deliberate injunction to move on" that manifests itself throughout the language of the Good Friday Agreement (Lehner 273).

The novels discussed in this chapter excavate the past as a means to reflect on the issues that this "injunction" and the language of reconciliation in general tend to evade: the suppression of narratives that problematize the image of national unity; the propensity for collective amnesia that "moving on" engenders; and the need for a dissolution of a victim hierarchy. In other words, rather than being obsessed with any one particular version of history, these novelists, by focusing on archive fever and the paradox of impossible forgiveness, adhere to Chakravorty Spivak's contention that the invisible and the unspeakable must be acknowledged:

> You crave to let history haunt you as a ghost or ghosts, with the ungraspable incorporation of a ghostly body, and the uncontrollable periodicity of haunting… It is not, then, a past that was necessarily once present that is sought. The main effort is to compute with the software of other pasts rather than reference one's own hallucinatory heritage. (70)

In this sense, each novel discussed in this chapter interrogates all totalizing versions of history, including the one that presents the Troubles as simply another cycle in the continuous and reciprocal pattern of violence that has marked Ireland and Northern Ireland for centuries. Instead, each of the aforementioned texts opens up the possibility for multiple variations to exist simultaneously, thus giving voice to narratives that have been repressed or forgotten in an attempt to foreground a unified, nationalist message.

Thus, these authors all contend that there is way to be "haunted" by history that is not reductive or detrimental and, in this way, they present a counter-narrative to the view presented by the novelists examined in my first chapter, where child protagonists are perpetually haunted by familial and communal secrets and histories that they cannot resolve or work through. Ultimately, while there are no easy solutions for reconciliation posited in these works, the authors' combined explorations of addressing problematic issues in Irish history, such as the architecture of containment, collusion, and the limitations of the truth recovery process, reveal a shared understanding of the fact that, as Patricia MacBride puts it, reconciliation is "a hard process rather than a warm slogan" (Keynote Address, *Ireland and Victims Conference*).

One notable feature of all the texts explored in this chapter that warrants mentioning is their incorporation of characteristics that are typically found in the thriller, particularly in terms of their focus on uncovering a past crime or secret and their adherence to certain traits often found in the noir genre. For example, in *Secret Scripture*, Dr. Grene functions as a kind of detective figure, while Irish history exerts a "malignant omnipresence" and shared guilt is a common theme (Lehner 112). Likewise, Glenn Patterson has discussed his own use of the "thriller idiom" in recent years, while McNamee's *The Ultras* has been

noted for its "noir undertone" (Lehner 108). Lastly, *The Truth Commissioner* has been

identified by Shameem Black as building "on a long tradition of late twentieth-century

thriller novels that deal with Ireland's Troubles period" (59). In fact, noir's interest in

psychology, its exploration of guilt, and its focus on isolated or marginalized characters

all share an affinity with the subject matter of many Troubles texts, particularly if one

interprets the genre as, in Lee Horsley's terms, "the voice of violation, acting to expose

the inadequacy of conventional cultural, political, and also narrative models" (12). Thus,

while the novels focused on in this chapter were promoted as "serious" rather than

popular fiction, they do reveal how the thriller genre, and the Troubles thriller in

particular, have impacted the literary landscape in Northern Ireland, and it is this genre

that I will explore at length in my third chapter.

Chapter Three: "New Languages Would Have To Be Invented":

The Troubles as "Trash" and the Postmodern Troubles Thriller

Simultaneously representing the most popular (in terms of sheer quantity) and the most profitable genre to emerge from the Troubles, the thriller holds a unique and often controversial position with regards to Northern Ireland's literary output during and after the sectarian conflict. Mirroring, and often conflated with, the preponderance of romance and domestic fiction that came about during the 1970s and 1980s, the thriller genre came under a similar, if not more intense, scrutiny, largely because its international popularity meant that the Troubles thriller emerged as the dominant fictional model through which outside audiences came to understand Northern Ireland's historical conflict. This fact has opened the genre up to criticism concerning its literary value, its simultaneous exploitative use or total avoidance of historical context, and its failure to fully address the complexities of the conflict. For instance, Elmer Kennedy-Andrews contends that "popular fiction writers cashed in early (and continue to do so), exploiting the Troubles to cater for a mass market which feeds voraciously on thrillers and romance" (7). Similarly, Alan Titley argues that "the value of most of what has been written on Northern Ireland in this genre does not lie in its literary content" (18), and Charles Fanning, in *The Irish Voice in America* (1990), dismisses the "lucrative, popular genre" of crime fiction "because of its concern with formulaic plot, action, and resolution rather than with ethnic self-definition" (10). As these examples suggest, most of the critiques surrounding the

Troubles thriller are grounded in a dual assessment that questions the value of the genre itself and, more specifically, its (in)ability to sufficiently address historical traumas.

The fact that this particular genre elicits such controversy and negative critical attention is not entirely surprising, given the historical development of the thriller in Northern Ireland. Specifically, the emergence of an international literary market that was interested in the Troubles was precipitated by a preponderance of thrillers that were written by British authors, predominantly journalists or soldiers who had been stationed there during the height of the conflict.[1] In this sense, the development of the genre is inextricably linked with the imposition of British stereotypes about the Irish, a tendency that itself has a long and problematic history rooted in colonial rule. As a result, such early thrillers were often guilty of eschewing authenticity in favor of promoting the Troubles as a primitive family feud, one that was grounded in specific Irish traits. Joseph McMinn, for instance, notes that the British journalists who covered the conflict and were seeking authenticity in their works, nevertheless lacked "social intimacy" because "they never really write out of people's experience of the war, since their occupation demands that they remain outside direct involvement and sympathy" (114). Likewise, in a more problematic sense, the consistent depiction of the Troubles in such early thrillers sets up a simple binary between Republicans/Unionists, who are depicted as entrenched in an atavistic struggle, and the British security forces, who have been placed into the position of a neutral referee.

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[1] Journalist Gerald Seymour's *Harry's Game* (1975) and former SAS sergeant Andy McNab's Nick Stone series are two notable examples of this trend.

As a result of its historical development, and the replication of colonial Othering found in its depiction of the warring factions, the common critical view of the thriller genre among Irish literary scholars is perhaps best summed up by the label of "Troubles Trash," a term that can be traced back to J. Bowyer-Bell's 1978 article "The Troubles as Trash: Shadows of the Irish Gunman on an American Curtain." Here, Bowyer-Bell lays out several of the most common charges against the genre's adoption of the Troubles as a viable backdrop, and his condemnations have come to characterize the overall negative treatment of this subgenre of Troubles fiction. Thus, "Troubles Trash" thrillers are accused of being either melodramatic, clichéd, or voyeuristic in their depiction of violence. Additionally, they are categorized by their employment of stock characters and stereotypes, such as the IRA Godfather, the gunman who undergoes moral reservations about his devotion to the cause, or the heartless fanatic who is characterized as a "Mother Ireland-fixated psychokiller" (Magee 1).[2] These stock figures, furthermore, helped to strengthen the genre's overall message about the origins of the conflict itself: "Ireland is a 'mad' place; the people are 'irrational'; the gunman is 'sick'" (Titley 28).

More generally, however, these novels are charged with exploiting Northern Ireland as a setting where such violence inevitably occurs, while at the same time ignoring the complex historical and political conditions that had a hand in bringing about the conflict. This criticism is best exemplified by the fact that, as Eamonn Hughes points out, Tom Clancy's bestseller *Patriot Games* (1987) "uses events in the North to drive its plot, but

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[2] As Martin McLoone points out, "Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the image of Francis Coppola's *Godfather* films was often invoked by British ministers to describe the activities of the paramilitaries in Northern Ireland, especially the IRA. This was in line with official policy, which was to criminalise their activities" (62).

not one scene is set in Northern Ireland" (6). Similarly, Gerry Smyth contends that these

types of thrillers "invariably eschew historical explanation in favour of individual

intervention and psychological motivation" (114), and McMinn claims that such thrillers

"represent the lowest form of social/political awareness in this selection – their values

indistinguishable from those of *The Daily Express*" (117). In this sense, "Troubles

Trash" is seen as merely replicating earlier thriller conventions established during the

Cold War; the viable threat posed by the Communist agents in those works are now

reworked into the threat of the IRA or generic republican terrorist. Aaron Kelly

summarizes this general critical attitude towards the genre's understanding of historical

complexity, stating that "international thriller writers use the North as an empty

receptacle voided of its own historical specifics, in which to repress and resolve their own

historical dilemmas" (24). As such, the location of these works is often interpreted as a

superficial choice on the part of the writer, whose historical knowledge about the conflict

is, at best, minimal and, at worst, completely inaccurate.

Yet, despite these critiques, "Troubles Trash" has also gained critical attention

because, due to its international appeal, it remains the prominent literary mode through

which the rest of the world came to understand this particular historical crisis.[3] As a

result, the thriller genre itself has come under scrutiny, often being accused of being

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[3]   Some of this international appeal can also be explained by the popularity of and critical attention given
to films (thrillers included) about the Troubles, which range from works such as Carol Reed's *Odd Man
Out* (1947), the first feature film to attempt to deal with the conflict, to Neil Jordan's highly praised *The
Crying Game* (1992) and Marc Evan's controversial adaptation of *Resurrection Man* (1998). Interestingly,
many of these films, particularly those released prior to the peace process, have been subject to similar
criticisms as "Troubles Trash" thrillers. *Odd Man Out*, for instance, was dismissed by some critics as a
"British manifestation of the American gangster genre" that aligned the IRA with organized crime
(Donnelly 388). Similarly, the use of common tropes about the sectarian conflict, found in both thriller
texts and films, caused film scholar Martin McLoone to proclaim that "cinema in general today [about
Northern Ireland]… has lost its ability or its potential for radical political and social analysis" (84).

inadequate to the task of examining both historical traumas and the aftermath of such traumas in a transitional or post-conflict society. For example, due to what many critics see as the thriller's reliance on cliché and stereotype, the genre has been accused of promoting the "wide circulation of unhelpfully simplified ideas and images of the Northern Irish conflict" (Kennedy-Andrews 41). In fact, the aforementioned early thrillers do conform to a notable pattern: the nationalist cause is seen as valid and reasonable—until its occlusion by IRA extremists—while the issue of unionism and, more specifically, the involvement of loyalist paramilitaries is generally avoided altogether. As scholar Bill Rolston points out, such avoidance is problematic because the omission of loyalism promotes a "skewed idea of what's going on here" (2). Moreover, early Troubles thrillers often conformed to the conventions of the genre, which assert that, fundamentally, "the world does not contain any inherent sources of conflict: trouble comes from people who are rotten, but whose rottenness is in no way connected with the nature of the world they infect" (Palmer 511). In this sense, such "Troubles Trash" often reduces the IRA to an anomaly in what would otherwise be an ordered, stable system.

As Lee Horsley has pointed out in *The Noir Thriller*, however, the genre itself is "neither inherently conservative nor radical: rather, it is a form that can be co-opted for a variety of purposes" because it "contains characteristics that lend themselves to political and oppositional purposes" (158-9). In this sense, while many Irish writers have historically looked down on the form and avoided using it as a viable means to examine the Northern conflict, this attitude underwent a notable transformation during and after the peace process. Specifically, writers who employed the genre during the 1970s and 1980s often adhered to a journalistic or realist mode and presented a bleak outlook that

saw the sectarian conflict as an inevitable cycle of historical violence. However, since

the 1990s, there has been a growing trend towards reimagining the thriller in Northern

Ireland, including a self-conscious subversion of its conventions and the adoption of

specific postmodern techniques. This change in attitude, moreover, can be linked to the

publication of such thrillers as Brian Moore's *Lies of Silence* (1990), which was

shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and became a forerunner of how the new generation

of authors would approach this format.[4] In fact, what is most striking about the literary

output since the peace process of the mid-1990s is the number of "serious" novelists,

ones who had avoided adopting the thriller during the conflict, who now find themselves

turning to the genre in order to examine the issues still plaguing Northern Ireland after

the Good Friday Agreement. Glenn Patterson, for example, remarked on this change,

noting that "there are still books in the thriller idiom being written, but I think that the

nature of them has changed slightly. It's not the present, it's not the ongoing situation–-

obviously times have changed—but it surprises me that in peacetime the thriller genre

should be so… attractive to writers, including myself" (Hicks 107). Similarly, respected

Irish novelists have also turned an eye to popular fiction, such as John Banville, who

writes crime novels under the pseudonym Benjamin Black, while simultaneously

admitting that he views such genre-writing as "slumming it" (Burke 220).

Despite this renewed outlook on the part of novelists, many literary critics continue to

uphold the distinction between "serious" literature about the conflict and the "Troubles

Trash" of popular culture. For instance, Alan Titley delineates between thrillers and the

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[4]   As Ian Campbell Ross points out in his introduction to *Down These Green Streets: Irish Crime Writing
in the 21st Century*, Before the publication of *Lies of Silence*, *"Few of [Moore's] contemporaries dared
address such matters in the form of crime fiction or, perhaps, thought it appropriate to do so"* (28).

"serious" novels about the Troubles, which he claims observe "different rules, different orders of meaning, enact different motions of spirit, and are motivated by different defining conceptions" (33). Likewise, while Kennedy-Andrews devotes an entire chapter to the thriller in *Fiction and the Northern Ireland Troubles since 1969: (de)Constructing the North*, he explores the genre chiefly as a means to address how these works divert from the more "serious" literature he will examine in the rest of his critical study. Similarly, in *Writing the North: The Contemporary Novel in Northern Ireland*, Laura Pelaschiar mentions the Troubles thriller only briefly, ultimately dismissing it as "clichéd," while also admitting that, in certain hands, it can be a beneficial genre in making sense of the moral complexity of the conflict. Both Kennedy-Andrews and Pelaschiar, furthermore, examine specific thrillers in subsequent chapters, but tend to ignore how these novelists are reimagining and reworking the genre, preferring to treat these works as "serious" novels that happen to conform to thriller conventions in certain ways. In a similar manner, Marisol Morales Ladrón, who explores three variations of the thriller in "'Troubling' Thrillers: Politics and Popular Fiction in Northern Ireland Literature," admits that none of the authors chosen for discussion "are professional thriller writers, although… they have all experimented with the form and their names are well known in Northern Irish literary circles" (203). Thus, critical attitudes towards the Troubles thriller have remained somewhat mired in the same critiques dating back to Bowyer-Bell's analysis, while also upholding a division between popular forms of fiction and what are seen as their more "reputable" counterparts.

Yet, internationally, a recognition regarding the value of the thriller genre (and crime fiction in general) in addressing both historical traumas and the issues that continue to

plague post-conflict societies has gained momentum in literary criticism. Moreover, this value has often been linked to a "new generation" of writers who infuse crime fiction with postmodern concerns and techniques, such as irony, pastiche, and a self-reflexive awareness or subversion of the genre's tropes. For example, Eva Erdmann has argued that the focus of the crime novel in the past few decades has shifted to an exploration of setting; as a result, new variations of the genre are more interested in exploring issues of identity and alterity, rather than the crime itself. In this way, Erdmann contends, "crime fiction retains that postmodern indecisiveness in which attempts are made to deal with ambivalent identities" (21).

In more specific terms, several literary critics have explored how crime fiction has reemerged as an active and practical genre through which to address historical and contemporary issues in countries like Spain, Russia, Argentina, and Chile. Anne Walsh, for instance, has directly linked the boom in Spanish detective fiction during the post-Franco era to the fact that "it was ideally suited to express the social, political and literary concerns of postmodern Spanish writers and their readers" and notes that this mode of "using past models ironically may be viewed as part of a more general and extensive postmodern trend" (59, 62). Similarly, the preponderance of female crime fiction in post-Soviet Russia has been explored by Olga Mesropova, who argues that the emergence of an "ironical detective fiction," one that fuses realism with fairy-tale subplots, represents the "re-orientation in Russian popular values," including the move away "from general pessimism to the carnivalization of the post-Soviet socio-economic environment" (114). Lastly, both Philip Swanson and Kate Quinn have explored the boom in Latin American detective fiction, focusing on Argentina and Chile, respectively. Swanson, for example,

focuses on José Saer's crime novel *La Pesquisa* (2006), whose complexities and digressions he argues "may be taken as a dramatization of the collective national will to forget the past and avoid the truth" (292). Similarly, Quinn argues that recent Chilean detective fiction fuses the cynicism of the hard-boiled genre with "socio-political criticism" that addresses certain realities in Latin America, such as corruption, crime, and drug trafficking (295).

The international re-examination of these crime fiction subgenres has also, interestingly enough, extended to the Republic of Ireland, which, according to Andrew Kincaid, has recently seen the emergence of "an interesting new version of noir" that he defines as a "hybrid of hard-boiled detective, forensic thriller and crime mystery" (41). Moreover, Kincaid argues, "these novels cannot be dismissed as trash" because "they grapple with all the issues on the minds of their readers" in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland: urbanization, immigration, the declining influence of the Catholic Church, and increased crime and income inequality (54). Despite this acknowledgement, however, the same critical assessment has not been extended to Northern Ireland, notwithstanding the fact that, as British thriller writer Lee Child once pointed out, Belfast is still "the most noir place on earth" (*Belfast Noir* 18). As the previous examples reveal, there is a precedent for the utilization of crime fiction as a response to historical trauma and as a means to address contemporary issues in post-conflict societies, specifically issues revolving around national identity, cultural values, and ongoing psychological trauma. In this sense, the critical evaluation of the Troubles thriller deserves more sustained attention because, as David Torrans, owner of the crime fiction bookshop No Alibis, points out, Northern Ireland is "a place filled with contradictions – social, political, and

environmental – and this provides the perfect material for the genre to flourish" (*Belfast Noir* 22).

Therefore, this chapter will explore the overlooked Troubles thriller as a valid means of addressing national trauma during and after the peace process by examining several variations of this genre written by three professional thriller writers: Eoin McNamee's *Resurrection Man* (2004), Colin Bateman's *Cycle of Violence* (1995), and Stuart Neville's *Ghosts of Belfast* (2006). Specifically, I will examine how these three novels incorporate postmodern techniques and concepts, such as historiographic metafiction, pastiche, and the carnivalesque, as well as the incorporation and subversion of the hardboiled and noir style, to show how the contemporary Troubles thriller presents viable ways of grappling with the complexities of the conflict and its aftermath. Some critics, like Brian Cosgrove, have insisted that it is virtually impossible for contemporary Irish writers to be postmodern because they are forced to give priority to immediate historical realities and "render justice to the insistent and traumatic events in Northern Ireland" (382).   However, I contend that such arguments, which largely relegate postmodernism to a form of self-indulgent linguistic play, ignore how a postmodern perspective can be useful when dealing with the aftermath of historical atrocities, mainly because it allows for the deconstruction of recurrent categories of national identity and the undermining of totalizing national mythologies, both of which have a hand in propagating sectarian divisions and violence.

<div align="center">I.</div>

Eoin McNamee's pseudo-historical thriller *Resurrection Man* (2004) adapts the real life story of the Shankill Butchers, a loyalist gang that was active in Belfast between 1975

and 1982 and known for kidnapping random Catholic civilians and torturing their victims with knives, meat cleavers, and other cutting implements. Due to both its grounding in nonfictional events and McNamee's persistent focus on and aestheticization of the group's violence, the novel was met with somewhat conflicted reviews. Thus, while several critics acknowledged its technical accomplishments, they simultaneously attacked McNamee's adoption of the thriller and noir genre as a means to mask the gruesome reality of the Shankill Butchers' activities. Specifically, many reviewers have argued that McNamee's highly stylized descriptions of the murders result in a voyeuristic exploitation of the actual victims and, more generally, the violence that erupted during the worst years of the Troubles. For example, Peggy O'Brien contends that "the sheer sensuality of the style can feel like a guilty pleasure for author and reader, yet another sexy take on the Troubles" (150). Similarly, Richard Haslam claims that, through the "distancing aesthetic filter of film noir, detective thriller, horror and gothic generic conventions," McNamee presents these crimes in a detached manner, one that stresses the "cinematic qualities of violence over their reality" (205). Even McNamee's literary contemporaries have singled out the work for criticism; Glenn Patterson, for example, argues that *Resurrection Man* reverts to the stereotype of presenting Belfast as a necropolis: "This is the city as cadaver… a city whose mortification precludes all possibility of change" (43). Yet, what many of these reviews fail to acknowledge or examine in detail is the intention behind McNamee's stylistic choices, many of which are grounded in a postmodern perspective.

Firstly, McNamee's fictional account is largely adapted from Martin Dillon's nonfictional study *The Shankill Butchers: The Real Story of Cold-Blooded Mass Murder*,

thereby putting his novel in direct dialogue with a mass-marketed work that aligns itself with the true crime genre. As such, McNamee is acutely aware of the kind of sensationalism associated with the Shankill Butchers, who were likened to Jack the Ripper and described as the "the ultimate bogeymen for a generation," as well as the media frenzy that surrounded their subsequent trial.[5] In this sense, the novel can be firmly located within the context of Linda Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction, in that it is "intensely self-reflexive" and also "problematize[s] the entire question of historical knowledge" (*Poetics* 276).[6] Indeed, in an interview, McNamee questions the arbitrary division between fact and fiction, or historical knowledge and narrative, by stating that "what passes for recorded history would seem in fact to be a series of imposed and promoted political narratives which operate to deny complexity and universality … This history is awash with what DeLillo called the 'sinister buzz of implication,' and I hope I'm accurate in exploring that" (Magennis 157). Thus, as Hutcheon points out, such postmodern works problematize the binary between history and fiction, often by exposing "that we can only know 'reality' as it is produced and sustained by cultural representations of it" (*Poetics* 290). In this sense, McNamee's aestheticization of violence can be read as a self-reflexive commentary on both the sensationalism surrounding the Shankill Butchers and, more generally, as an exploration of how the Troubles thriller and its conventions play into similar cultural representations of the sectarian conflict.

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[5]   In Dillon's account, one defendant compared killing to the iconic image of the Viet Cong soldier being shot in the street during the Vietnam War and Lenny Murphy, the group's leader, is repeatedly described as seeing himself as a film star.

[6]   McNamee often refers to his novels as "faction," a blending of fact and fiction.

McNamee's choice of subject matter is itself one that subverts typical narrative conventions of this genre. His focus is primarily concerned with the activities of loyalist paramilitaries, a group that, as mentioned earlier, was usually ignored in the traditional Troubles thriller. Moreover, the motivations behind these sectarian murders are complicated by our introduction to Victor Kelly, who is modeled on Lenny Murphy, the real life leader of the Shankill Butchers. Specifically, as Kennedy-Andrews points out, McNamee grounds Victor's motivations in his psychology rather than any overt political ideology, and, therefore, "the violence is not seen as deriving essentially from religious bigotry" (122). While it may be an oversimplification to state that such bigotry plays no role in Victor's crimes (his victims are, after all, chosen for the most part because they are Catholics), the issue of sectarianism is complicated by the fact that it is the bigotry he experiences within his own community that seemingly prompts Victor to assert his unionism. Early in the novel, for example, we are told that the family is forced to move frequently because, due to their problematic last name, "a suspicion would arise in each place that they were Catholics masquerading as Protestants" and Victor is repeatedly taunted and exposed to violence because of this misinterpretation (3). As a result of his contested religious background, Victor learns from an early age that language and signifiers are important in terms of their ability to dictate identity and reality: "It was a question of assembling an identity out of names: the name of schools attended, the name of the street where you lived, your own name. These were the finely tuned instruments of survival" (34). As such, Victor's indoctrination into a political ideology is, at least partly, the result of a need to stabilize and assert his sense of self within the Protestant community.

Therefore, as the novel reveals through its growing fixation on violence, Victor's meticulous choice of victims ultimately serves to mask his own growing destabilization of identity. Thus, he is aligned with other protagonists found in historiographic metafiction, protagonists that Hutcheon remarks "are anything but types: they are the ex-centrics, the marginalized, the peripheral figures of fictional history" (*Poetics* 283). Just as the signifier of Victor's own last name disrupts the binary of Catholic/Protestant, his group functions on the margins of loyalist ideology and, eventually, McNamee's novel attributes his use of violence mainly to his lack of a stable identity. Even Victor's mother remarks on her son's instability when justifying his alleged criminality, stating that his actions are the result of the fact that "he suffered from incomprehension. He was in pain because of life" (3). In this sense, the novel can be read as a form of what Carl Malmgren defines as "decentred crime fiction," one which "undermines the self as a grounded sign by calling into question the identity, stability, or sanity of the central character" (22). Moreover, McNamee's choice to combine a peripheral figure with a general noir sensibility in his novel reveals that Victor is himself a reflection of the society that has created him, a society that is increasingly obsessed with identity politics and eschews anything that hints at ambiguity or alterity. In this way, *Resurrection Man* replicates certain aspects of the post-1980s noir thriller, which, according to Lee Horsley, posits that "various kinds of 'belonging' – assimilation, complicity, dependency – have become nightmares as disturbing as deprivation and exclusion" and focuses on the threat "posed by the erasure of difference consequent on an addiction to the pleasures and games of a consumer society" (189).

If, therefore, Victor's damaged sense of self functions as a mirror for his society's own instability and corruption, McNamee extends this critique beyond Northern Ireland to encompass the postmodern world in general, with the Troubles becoming subsumed as merely one more form of the spectacle. Specifically, Victor's strained relationship with his father, who is defined by his silence and the fact that he "left no discernible trace" on the protagonist's identity, causes Victor to seek out an identity through the commodity culture that surrounds him. Thus, Victor's own development into a serial killer is directly linked to his participation in various forms of consumerism and consumption, both of which are increasingly aligned with Guy Debord's concept of the society of the spectacle. As such, McNamee's text aligns itself with an emerging strand of literary noir that, according to Horsley, views "contemporary society as a culture of consumption, consuming not just commodities but performances and spectacles – and consuming the consumer" (190). This theme is evident throughout *Resurrection Man*, beginning with Victor's early appropriation of the gangster persona after he views the 1931 film *Public Enemy*: "After the Apollo Victor worked hard at getting the gangster walk right. It was a combination of lethal movements and unexpected half-looks. An awareness of G-men" (5). Victor's impersonation, moreover, points to both his construction as a postmodern subject and, more specifically, to McNamee's self-conscious employment of the gangster trope within the context of the sectarian conflict. As J. Edward Mallot has pointed out, "Belfast newspapers began to liken instigators of sectarian violence to actors from iconic gangster films, such as James Cagney" (38). In other words, the media coverage of the Troubles packages and promotes specific images of "the instigators of sectarian violence" that Victor both consumes and internalizes, a trend that McNamee investigates and

ultimately condemns. As a result, Victor becomes, according to Dermot McCarthy, a prime example of Jameson's "postmodern mimic man," one whose "construction of a pastiche self is his way of short-circuiting the vicissitudes of identity in Northern Ireland" (144).

What begins as conscientious role-playing, however, soon consumes Victor's entire perspective, causing an amplified self-awareness regarding his public persona and even infusing the language he uses to narrate his own reality. For instance, shortly after he is arrested for the first time, he is photographed and forced to participate in a line up, an exchange between criminal and law enforcement that he notes is "carefully staged" and replete with "the tones of flawed irony employed in gangster films." As a result, his attitude towards the mugshot is infused with the aura of celebrity: "He knew that these photographs were important, that in the future they could be released to the press. When he took a comb out of his pocket and smoothed his hair back, none of the policemen objected" (52). As Robert Conrath has noted, in many serial killer narratives, the killer's actions are "motivated by some Warholian sense of pending and self-gratifying fame," and, in a similar manner, Victor's political ideology is quickly supplanted by his desire to construct an identity through notoriety (146). In short, he is constantly aware of how his image will circulate in the spectacle of mass media. This trait, in fact, is even commented upon by other characters, such as when Heather, his lover, feels "disappointed for Victor" after a court appearance because there were "no journalists, the roar and press of men with cameras, the snatched interview. She knew that their absence

was a kind of humiliation for him" (109).[7] Such "humiliation" further undermines the sectarian ideology of the Shankill Butchers and grounds Victor's violence, instead, within the society of the spectacle.

In a similar manner, virtually all of Victor's experiences come to be filtered through language that recalls film noir and hardboiled detective narratives. When he is finally sent to prison, for instance, he recalls the phrase "holed-up," which "came back to him from the films" (200). Likewise, when searching through the prison's medical supplies for poison to use against an informer, he fixates on cyanide because "it sounded like something from the pictures. He thought of Bette Davis who was his mother's favourite. Passions seething beneath the surface. A glitter of madness in the eye with only the music giving it away, the fitful, nervy violins. Alone in the big house coming unhinged" (99). As these examples suggest, Victor's consciousness has become permeated by the popular culture he has consumed in an effort to ward off his increasingly unbalanced sense of self. As such, Victor's integration of language, which is taken from a pastiche of hardboiled detective fiction, film noir, and American gangster films, becomes a language that penetrates even his inner monologues and is, thus, a form of interpellation. Specifically, his reliance on such cinematic references to describe his own reality suggests that he frequently misrecognizes himself through an overidentification with the fictional characters found in such popular genres.

Yet, what his mimicry ultimately points to is Victor's lack of interiority. This condition is stressed when Heather notes, "looking into Victor's blue eyes when you were

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7   As Walter Laqueur has noted, "the real danger facing the terrorist is that of being ignored, or receiving insufficient publicity, of losing the image of the desperate freedom fighter" (223).

fucking was like watching a televised account of your own death, a disconsolate epic"
(11). The comparison of Victor's eyes to television screens, which are only capable of
projecting images, highlights his position as a postmodern subject in the spectacle. As a
result, Victor's subjectivity unravels as the novel progresses and he is increasingly forced
to define himself through external mass media narratives, as seen in his collection of
newspaper clippings about the murders he committed: "They referred to a mystery man
which pleased him. He saw himself as a figure in the shadows, someone elusive and
dangerous to know. He thought that he could become a celebrity and give interviews to
the papers on a regular basis" (214). In this way, Victor's lack of interiority, and his
subsequent need for fame as an antidote, comes to symbolize the postmodern society of
the spectacle that McNamee critiques, one that, according to Debord, is marked by a
"degradation of being into *having*" and a "general shift from *having* to *appearing*" (10-
11; author's emphasis). Additionally, as Debord notes, this overidentification with the
spectacle can lead to problems of alienation; specifically, by attempting to understand
one's self through a representation, the subject loses all hope of "understand[ing] his own
life and his own desires" (16). Similarly, Victor comments on the fact that, although he
initially gains power and control through his growing public persona, "this led to
problems of isolation. He believed he knew how Elvis felt" (8).

Within this postmodern context, Victor's choice of victims takes on a new meaning,
one that complicates the reader's understanding of his crimes as merely the result of
sectarian hatred. In particular, *Resurrection Man* adapts one notable convention of the
traditional serial killer narrative, in that the trope of the killer hunting down his victims
represents "hunting not for truth but for an all-powerful me (at the expense of the

tragically fragile other)" (Conrath 151). That Victor initially seeks out Catholic victims, therefore, can be understood as both an over-determination of his Protestant identity and an extension of his participation in the commodity culture. As Allen Feldman points out in *Formations of Violence*, "in Northern Ireland the practice of political violence entails the production, exchange and ideological consumption of bodies" (9). Thus, Victor's "consumption" of his victims, specifically through his employment of knives rather than guns, reflects one more method he adopts to ward off his lack of interiority, a fact that is highlighted by his elevation of the murders into a ritual and a "lesson in power" (8).[8] When Victor confesses his activities to Heather, for example, his killings move beyond the rhetoric of sectarianism and convey a deep desire for familiarity and intimacy with his victims: "Victor used the victims' full names. He told her how he found himself in sympathy with their faults and hinted that during their last journey he nursed them towards a growing awareness of their wasted years and arranged their bodies finally with an eye to the decorous and eternal" (174). With this attempt to establish an intimacy with his victims, or to "convey familiarity," McNamee suggests how this particular form of ritualistic violence is aligned with Victor's attempt to refashion or invent some kind of self in the postmodern world (15). Moreover, Victor's explanation for his crimes once again aligns his narrative with those found in the traditional serial killer genre, where, as Mark Seltzer notes, the murders reflect "an affair of becoming or self-making premised on the self as an empty category and as an effect of imitation and not its cause" (97). In

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[8]   As Martin Dillon remarks in his non-fictional account, "The knife has been used by those on the fringes of paramilitary organizations: people out of control and therefore not subject to the kinds of discipline imposed by the majority of terrorist groupings" (111)

other words, an audience, whether it is composed of the singular victim or the general public, is the only thing that can grant Victor a greater sense of selfhood.

Moreover, the Resurrection Men's activities play out against the backdrop of Belfast, which Haslam argues the novel constructs as a "Baudrillardian inferno," a depiction that can largely be grounded in the media coverage of events surrounding the conflict during the 1970s (206).[9] Yet, McNamee also fuses this image of the postmodern city, permeated with simulacrum and the hyperreal, with the modern metropolis found in most hard-boiled fiction, which is notably "populated by various fakers, frauds, and charlatans as hollow as the city in which they live" (Scaggs 72). This connection between the importance of place and its representations of violence is stressed by the fact that Victor's own obsession with mapping the city's streets and areas coincides with the beginning of the Troubles: "He felt the city become a diagram of violence centred about him. Victor got a grip on the names" (11). In this sense, much like Michel de Certeau's city walkers "whose bodies follow the thick and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read," Belfast itself functions like a text or script on which he and his group inscribe their personalities and their crimes, which are then re-presented to them in a virtual form through the media coverage of the events ("Walking in the City" 93).

Thus, much of McNamee's novel offers a sustained critique on the way that violence is appropriated by media outlets and transformed into images for the international audience's consumption. As Dermot McCarthy points out, such a focus "raises

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[9]   In particular, Eric Reimer in "Ulsterisation and the Troubles Thriller: Eoin McNamee's *Resurrection Man*" has thoroughly explored how media coverage of the Troubles and the Shankill Butchers promoted England's "mid-1970s policy of 'Ulsterisation'," which attempted to portray the conflict as a local sectarian issue, with England acting as a neutral peacekeeper.

profoundly disquieting questions about the nature of our gaze and our ability to absorb such images as part of our daily in-take of visual stimulation/simulation" (142). In fact, throughout the novel, the rhetoric surrounding the representation of the violence is marked by error, detachment, and intentional secrecy. For example, when the Resurrection Men watch footage about their own activities, they remain sensitive to mistakes regarding their victims' age and background or the location of the bodies, contending that such errors are "subversive" because they "denied sectarian and geographic certainties" (17). Likewise, Ryan, a journalist who obsessively follows and reports on the group's crimes, notes that media outlets increasingly mask the gruesomeness of the atrocities in "a familiar and comforting vocabulary," one that moves beyond transmitting mere information and, instead, achieves "the pure level of chant." Increasingly, McNamee also suggests a sense of collusion between media reports and paramilitary activities, where "car bombings were carried out to synchronize with news deadlines" (58). As a result, the news coverage of the atrocities comes to represent the "official literature" of the Troubles, with an "emphasis on the visual" that transforms the violence into a simulacra (92).

It is against this backdrop that Victor and his group of Resurrection Men commit their sectarian crimes and, in this way, the novel explores how violence itself has been transformed into a kind of cinematic experience. The correlation between terrorism and spectacle has been established previously; for instance, Brian Jenkins famously argued that "the primary objective of terrorism is *not* mass murder. Terrorists want a lot of people watching and a lot of people listening, not a lot of people dead" (3). Similarly, in *Breaking Enmities: Religion, Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland 1967-1999*

(1999), Patrick Grant contends that there is a link between violence and performativity. He writes:

> Violence can all too easily seem an intoxicating game, a stirring or carnivalesque performance… The disjuncture between theatrical self-aggrandizement and the sordid facts of the matter is often grotesque, a kind of cruel absurdity emergent from how people devote themselves to starry ideals while wading in blood. (155)

The grotesque absurdity behind terrorism as "carnivalesque performance" is a feature that is stressed repeatedly throughout the text and is yet another way that McNamee locates the Troubles within the postmodern culture of consumption and commodification. For instance, Victor's paramilitary group christens the area where they commonly torture their victims as the "Romper Room," a name "taken from a children's television programme where the presenter looked through a magic mirror and saw children sitting at home" (28). Similarly, when the group, following Victor's orders, opens fire on the Catholic Shamrock bar, their experience of the event is contextualized against their cinematic understanding of such violence. Therefore, they note "the firing did not sound like shots, did not fit into the perceived idea of gunfire," even while acknowledging that "nevertheless people were dying." Likewise, the gunmen "watch in appreciation" when the barman "started to fall, tumbling down the stairs in a graceful, cinematic manner" (140). Tellingly, the group is only able to acknowledge the reality and importance of the event after the ambush appears as the first item on the evening news.

In this sense, Victor and his group's crimes can be read, initially, as a perverse form of détournement, a form of cultural jamming that Debord argues involves using spectacular images and language to disrupt the flow of the spectacle. Specifically, if, as the novel suggests, the media coverage of the conflict has become marked by a tendency towards passivity and detachment, "then the combatants in Northern Ireland have acquired a

pressing new directive – to 'hijack headlines,' to force repeated and favorable coverage"

(Mallot 45). This, in fact, is precisely what Victor attempts to accomplish, both through

his unique employment of cutting implements and his mutilation of his victims' tongues.

Upon discovering the first casualty's body, for example, Ryan and his journalist

colleagues note the difference between these murders and the typical sectarian killings.

McNamee writes:

> There was someone out there operating in a new context. They were being lifted into
> unknown areas, deep pathologies. Was the cortex severed? They both felt a silence
> beginning to spread from this one. They would have to rethink procedures. The root
> of the tongue had been severed. New languages would have to be invented. (16)

Thus, by moving beyond the typical expectations of his "audience," Victor momentarily

disrupts the spectacle by presenting the journalists with an image that defies

representation and confronts them with a form of violence that seemingly cannot be

assimilated into simplistic media narratives about the Troubles. One way in which this

détournement plays out is by having the victims' bodies conform to Kristeva's concept of

the abject, which Barbara Creed argues, in crime fiction, reflects a "displaced anxiety"

and "an increasing sense of individual helplessness" in a postmodern world (143, 129).[10]

Yet, as McNamee reveals, this form of détournement fails to undermine the society of

the spectacle, both because Victor begins to lose control over his own narrative and

because the preponderance of simulacra is too firmly ingrained in Troubles Belfast.

Thus, as the murders continue, they are marked by an "evidence of frenzy, repeated

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[10] Irish culture has a long history of focusing on abject bodies, from the hunger strikers to the ideological
martyrs and masculine ideals of both paramilitary groups. As Allen Feldman notes: "It seems in the end
the body will always trump ideology, so both ideologies in Northern Ireland appropriated the imagery of
the body. Contrast the muscular 'hard men' of loyalist culture with the folkloric emaciated bodies of the
hunger strikers. These discourses deal with different images but never stray too far from the body" (52)

slashing," which suggests "carelessness, panic, reluctance" (145, 176). Notably, this lack of control is directly tied to Victor's loss of his sense of place and his lack of direction when he discovers "that the streets were not the simple things he had taken them for… They had become untrustworthy, concerned with unfamiliar destinations, no longer adaptable to your own purposes" (163). Therefore, as Eric Reimer contends, "like the city 'created' by the ordnance survey in Brian Friel's *Translations*, the Belfast mapped by the Resurrection Men – and, more importantly, by the government operatives who seem to provide the loyalist murder gang with its scripts – becomes a constrictive enclosure" (65). In essence, then, due to its "constrictive" nature, Victor's loses control of his script, and his growing mental confusion is directly aligned with the fact that the Resurrection Men themselves have become part of the spectacle. As Walter Benjamin notes, "the idea of eternal recurrence transforms historical events into mass-produced articles," and, in a similar manner, Victor's group finds themselves confronted by a new approach to media coverage about the Troubles (Gilloch 36). Specifically, as one character notes, there is an air of "cultivated boredom" around such sensationalistic accounts, and a "new vocabulary" has emerged that instead promotes "acceptable levels of violence" (156). As a result, Victor's group is ostracized because they have become "too unpredictable" and, as such, he is relegated to a kind of cartoonish villain: "'See the paper today? They've took to calling him Captain X. It's like a comic. Mystery man Mr. X. Evil Monster. Next thing he'll be stalking the streets. That's what evil monsters are supposed to do. Stalk the streets hunting for victims'" (192).

McNamee also foreshadows and undermines the performativity of violence in two specific instances in his text, both of which expose the tenuous division between

simulacrum and reality. Firstly, as Victor grows more paranoid, his violent tendencies

begin to turn inward, resulting in the murder of several members within his own

Protestant group. One such instance occurs when he accuses Flaps McArthur, a member

of his own organization, of being an informer and he brings him to the Romper Room for

a public interrogation. Here, terrorism is initially transformed into theatricalism, with his

followers clearing the stage and using the prop of a lone chair "with a single light shining

on it." Likewise, Victor makes a dramatic entrance, approaching the "cone of light in

which the chair sat," and declaring that it is now "show time" (164). However, Victor

misreads his audience here, who "looked on, convinced that this would be a spectacle of

redemption and that Flaps would emerge from the ordeal, purged and godly" (165).

Instead, Victor goes against this "script" by executing Flaps with a single gunshot to the

head, leaving his onlookers disoriented about the reality of what they have just witnessed:

"No one moved. This must be a simulation of death, a poor rehearsal" (166). Thus,

while the group is able to see violence committed against Catholics in terms of a

cinematic spectacle, largely because it follows a specific ideological narrative, the

violence that Victor commits against one of their own problematizes the concept that

terrorism can be passed off as a mere "carnivalesque performance."

In a similar manner, Victor's own assassination undercuts the distinction between the

"simulation of death" and its gruesome reality, as well as the seemingly strict binary

between Nationalist and Unionist factions. Following the evidence now known about

Lenny Murphy's death, Victor's execution is the result of collusion between the

Provisional IRA and loyalist paramilitary forces, who felt that his unbridled violence was

becoming a liability to their cause.[11] Yet, even when Victor recognizes the betrayal of

his mentor, Billy McClure, he initially interprets it in terms of the spectacle, feeling "an

expression cross his face like in a film." Similarly, as he acknowledges in his final

moments, "nothing was right" because his assassins do not conform to his cinematic

ideal: "He wanted them to be serious-minded men who shouted out a warning. He

wanted words full of allure and danger to shout back. Never take me alive" (230).

Therefore, in a final attempt to gain control over his death, Victor reenacts the familiar

"moves" from the gangster film: "Struggle to raise the gun. Clutch the breast and lean

forward in anguish." This reenactment, however, is quickly undercut by the final

actuality of the situation, where he "did not see one of the men leave cover and walk over

to him and put his foot in his neck and shoot him through the back of the head with a

snub-nose revolver. There were no words, got him at last. No last rueful gangster smile,

goodbye world" (230). Ultimately, as McNamee shows, Victor loses control of his own

narrative, thus becoming another passive spectator whose "real life is materially invaded by

the contemplation of the spectacle, and ends up absorbing and aligning itself with it" (Debord 8).

Furthermore, as Heather watches the news after Victor's murder, she is aware of how his

death has become merely another part of the spectacle. McNamee writes:

> It was a staged murder, a minor spectacle with themes and digressions. No one had
> claimed the killing. A commentator hinted darkly that it was the work of a special
> unit within the police or army. Victor was described as a leading member of a
> notorious cutthroat gang. She knew that McClure would be feeding them
> information, outlining a plot. (232)

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[11]   According to Mallot, "Both UVF and UDA leadership saw this group, and specifically its leader, as a
public relations crisis" (53).

Thus, Victor's death, in the end, becomes, at best, a kind of rerun or "something old-fashioned" that Heather likens to "archive footage" (232).

Ultimately, while several critics have noted the preponderance of postmodern techniques and concepts in *Resurrection Man*, few have explored at length McNamee's purpose in implementing such stylistic and thematic choices throughout his novel. For example, while several reviewers remarked on McNamee's use of pastiche, they tend to critique his incorporation of film noir, serial killer narrative, the hardboiled detective genre, American gangster films, and Troubles thrillers as a purely aesthetic choice, one that, they claim, detracts from the novel's exploration of real world violence. However, by fusing such pastiche with a general exploration of postmodern existential angst, as well as ideas about consumption and representation, *Resurrection Man* transcends Frederic Jameson's idea of postmodern pastiche as a "blank parody" because the novel is neither neutral nor lacking in a political viewpoint. In fact, if, as Jameson notes, in historiographic metafiction "we are condemned to seek History by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach," then this form of representation is precisely what McNamee is criticizing in his novel (*Postmodernism* 25). In other words, the author's deliberate choice to coopt a historical event and represent it through this particular genre reflects his critique of the thriller itself as a genre that has historically promoted and exploited the sensationalist aspects of the Troubles, thereby creating a simulacra of Troubles history that is readily and easily consumed by the general public.

II.

While Eoin McNamee's reworking of the Troubles thriller genre is heavily grounded in historiographic metafiction and pastiche, the majority of Colin Bateman's oeuvre relies extensively on a specific form of postmodern parody that is described in Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Parody*: *The Teaching of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (1985). Known for having produced the first "comedy thriller" to deal with the Troubles with his 1995 debut novel *Divorcing Jack*, Bateman's subsequent works are clearly marked by a postmodern sensibility in terms of their intertextuality, self-reflexivity, "cannibalization of past narrative and filmic styles," and the erosion of the traditional thriller genre's conventions, including causality and closure (Kennedy-Andrews 186).[12] Yet, as Laura Pelaschiar notes, despite the fact that Bateman's thrillers "seem to be entitled to a revolutionary status similar to that achieved by more acclaimed, because more highbrow, novels written by Glenn Patterson and Robert McLiam Wilson," their association with mass culture has meant that "the Bateman phenomenon has passed almost unnoticed" in terms of scholarly attention (59). While many of Bateman's novels adhere to the trend of the thrillers series, with the same protagonist appearing throughout, his second novel *Cycle of Violence* (1995) represents a stand-alone text that, nevertheless, uses parody to explore issues of sectarianism, historical trauma, and the impact that violence has on an individual community. Thus, Bateman's comedic thrillers posit a specific political agenda and outlook while, at the same time, mocking paramilitaries, sectarian ideology,

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[12]   As Gerry Smyth has noted, "such a combination of formal and conceptual factors signals Bateman's engagement with a strand of 'postmodern thriller' that has become popular in the United States of America since the 1970s, while also marking *Divorcing Jack* as a new departure in Northern Irish fiction" (124).

and the format of the traditional Troubles thriller in general. Moreover, since Bateman's

novels were written and are typically set during the time of the peace process and beyond,

his texts can be situated within a larger exploration of the continuing impact of the

Troubles and their aftermath in Northern Ireland.[13] In other words, as Aaron Kelly

contends, "whilst the thriller has always lent itself to parody from 'without'… it is telling

that Bateman is now enabled to write successfully and securely from 'within' the genre"

(161).

On the surface, Bateman's thrillers seem to conform to the formulaic conventions found

in the overall crime or detective fiction genre, specifically in terms of his use of fast-

moving, linear plots, clear distinctions between heroes and villains, and investigations that

lead the protagonist deeper into a murky underworld that is marked by corruption and

conspiracy. Likewise, novels like *Cycle of Violence* also adhere to many of the traditional

elements of the Troubles thriller, which, as Pelaschiar notes, typically involve "crooked

politicians, prying journalists, wicked paramilitaries, CIA agents in disguise, the Secret

Service, fat private eyes, ruthless killers, kidnappings, blackmailings, fights, manhunts,

shootings, disguises and topsy-turvy love stories" (60). However, Bateman's use of parody

and ironic distance is what ultimately separates his texts from the conventions of both the

thriller genre in general and the Troubles thriller in particular. For instance, the

paramilitaries in his fiction are rarely at the forefront of his plots, nor do they represent the

stereotypical godfather figure, "Mother Ireland-fixated psychokiller," or reluctant IRA

activist found in traditional works (Magee 1). Instead, Bateman's terrorists are depicted

through a parodic lens that often presents them as, at best, comically inept and, at worse,

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[13] Notably, the film version of the novel, *Crossmaheart* (1998), was the first feature film to be filmed entirely in Northern Ireland after the peace process.

dangerously incompetent. Likewise, the Troubles are often relegated to the background or

provide a secondary focus in his novels; for example, in *Cycle of Violence*, the central

crime that the protagonist investigates involves the sexual assault of a thirteen-year-old

girl, an incident that "acts as a foundation to the rotation of suicides, murders, and

paramilitary executions which follow" (Jackson 223). Lastly, in *Cycle of Violence*, the

majority of the action and plot is located in the fictional small rural town of Crossmaheart,

rather than being located in Belfast, a city that has been "dominated by its 'Troubles' and

formed, or more accurately deformed, by them into the kind of location where, as ancient

maps used to be labelled, 'Here be dragons'" (Hughes 141). As a result of these

modifications, alongside Bateman's more general parodic inversions of the crime and

detective fiction format, he both destabilizes the thriller and Troubles thriller and, instead,

"enacts a carnivalistic overthrow of 'respectable' or 'serious' modes of discourse"

(Kennedy-Andrews 189).

By upending such "'serious' modes of discourse," Bateman's *Cycle of Violence*

strongly adheres to Hutcheon's ideas about postmodern parody, which she delineates

from the corresponding terms and genres of allusion, pastiche, and satire. As Hutcheon

notes, postmodern parody is a form of "repetition with critical distance, which marks

difference rather than similarity" (6). In this sense, parody is distinct from pastiche, in

that pastiche stresses similarities between two or more texts and is, thus, imitative, while

parody is a "bitextual synthesis" that is "transformative in its relationship to other texts"

(33, 38). Moreover, according to Hutcheon, the purpose of postmodern parody is not

merely to point out the inadequacy of earlier texts and genres, but rather serves as a

refunctioning of past forms that becomes necessary for continuity to take place. In other

words, as Hutcheon argues, "if a new parodic form does not develop when an old one becomes insufficiently 'motivated' (to use the formalists' term) through overuse, that old form might degenerate" (36). Thus, Hutcheon's interpretation of parody's purpose recalls Bakhtin's ideas about re-accentuation, a process that explains how works of the past are appropriated and modified in a dialogical exchange between previous writers and contemporary ones. As Bakhtin notes, such a dialogical exchange can "under changed conditions… emit bright new rays, burning away the reifying crust that had grown up around it" (*Dialogic* 419). In a similar manner, Bateman has stated that his fusion of comedy and crime fiction can be traced back to the tradition of Sherlock Holmes, Agatha Christie's Miss Marple and Dorothy Sayers' Lord Peter Wimsey, as well as the rapid one-liners found in Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett's hardboiled and noir fiction of the 1920s and 1930s. On the other hand, Bateman also acknowledges that crime fiction has "rapidly descended into formula" and is marked by writing that "has become stale and predictable." As a result, Bateman concludes that "bizarrely, if you want to find something new and challenging" about the genre today, then "comic crime fiction is now the place to go" ("It's No Crime").

In addition to parody's repurposing of previous genres and forms, Hutcheon also links its use of critical distance with its preferred rhetorical mechanism of irony, stating that "irony's patent refusal of semantic univocality matches parody's refusal of structural unitextuality" (54). In other words, the critical distance that characterizes parody's relationship with other texts, a distance that Hutcheon labels as "trans-contextualization," is generally signaled by the use of irony. As such, irony enacts on the semantic level what parody does on the textual level because both are a "marking of difference… by

means of superimposition" (54). Moreover, Hutcheon extends the definition of irony beyond its usual meaning of marking a contrast between what is explicitly stated and what is implicitly meant by focusing, instead, on the fact that "irony judges" (53). However, irony's judgment is not necessarily demeaning or destructive; in fact, according to Hutcheon, it can be "critically constructive" in the sense that the pleasure of irony can be located in "the degree of engagement of the reader in the 'intertextual 'bouncing'… between complicity and distance" (32).

This tension between "complicity and distance," furthermore, elucidates the contrast between parody's "tendency toward conservativism" and the general view that hails it as "the paradigm of aesthetic revolution and historical change" (67-8). Hutcheon deems this contradiction the "paradox of parody," stating that, while parody typically represents a transgression, it is one that is always authorized, in that, through imitation, "even with critical difference, parody reinforces" (26). Thus, parody, according to Hutcheon, bears some resemblance to Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque, which transgresses norms in a seemingly subversive way, while only being able to do so "within the controlled confines authorized by the text parodied – that is, quite simply, within the confines dictated by 'recognizability'" (75). Hence, parody reinforces even as it mocks or subverts, and by adapting the very conventions it purportedly challenges, it allows for the continuity of those forms. Ultimately, then, Hutcheon concludes that the purpose of parody can be conservative by reinforcing the same conventions it hopes to deride, but she also acknowledges that, "parody can, like the carnival, also challenge norms in order to renovate, to renew" (76). Hutcheon's "paradox of parody," in fact, might help explain some of the criticisms that have been leveled against Bateman's *Cycle of Violence*. For

instance, Ellen Raissa Jackson argues that, while the novel "dramatically revises the woman-as-nation trope" so commonly found in much Irish literature, it also ultimately presents Marie, the protagonist's love interest, as "yet another general victim," and that, as a result, Bateman's thriller falls back into recognizable patterns by "continu[ing] to marginalize individual women's agency and textual consequence" (225).

However, Bateman's use of parody in his comedic works, while arguably reinscribing certain female tropes found in both Troubles thrillers and crime fiction in general, also makes use of the connection between parody, metafiction, and detective or crime fiction in order to expose and complicate the conventions of the traditional Troubles thriller. For instance, the romantic relationship between Miller, the protagonist, and Marie, while recalling the popular love-across-the-barricades trope found in much Northern Irish literature, is secondary to his political exploration of the futility and absurdity of violence and sectarian divisions, as well as his condemnation of communities who accept such violence and sectarianism as inevitable or justified. In this sense, Bateman's form of parody relies heavily on the metafictional aspects of both parody and crime fiction. As Hutcheon points out, postmodern metafiction is often "characterized by a very Bakhtinian ironic use of parodic forms," in the sense that the metafictional qualities of a text can be highlighted through the use of parody, since "in the background will stand another text against which the new creation is implicitly to be both measured and understood" (76, 31).

Similarly, metafiction has often been linked to crime fiction because, as Scaggs notes, "crime narratives that are structured around the investigation of a crime are, by default, metanarratives. They are narratives about narratives, or stories about reconstructing and

interpreting the story of a crime" (142). Likewise, as Malmgren has argued, certain

strands of postmodern detective fiction fall in line with metafiction as well, because their

decentered worldview stages "a crisis in signification," thus disclosing "the arbitrariness

of various signifying systems," while "inevitably draw[ing] attention to itself as

signifying practice" (113). In similar manner, Bateman's crime novel repeatedly draws

attention to its metafictional qualities by referencing earlier works of familiar crime

fiction and even extending these references out into his own future oeuvre. For example,

when Miller is kidnapped by Curly Bap, a part-time hairdresser and full-time commander

of the PIRA in Crossmaheart, the protagonist is tied to a chair and repeatedly asked by

Bap, "Is it safe?," an obvious reference to the iconic dental torture scene in William

Goldman's *Marathon Man*. Similarly, when Marie and Miller discuss books, Marie

references *The Day of the Jack Russell*, a title that will be used by Bateman for a 2009

novel that becomes part of his *Mystery Man* series. Thus, through such references,

Bateman both places *Cycle of Violence* within the tradition of the thriller genre, while, at

the same time, his self-conscious adaption of these allusions, along with the parodic form

of the novel itself, "destabilizes the authority of the international 'Troubles' thriller's

dominant representations" (Kelly 80).

One way in which Bateman's novel positions itself within the traditional crime fiction

genre is through the use of his protagonist, Miller, who initially works as a Protestant

journalist in Belfast covering the various atrocities of the Troubles, and who provides the

narrative with a variation of what Kennedy-Andrews defines as the typical Bateman

protagonist: the "ultimate 'Honest Ulsterman,' the embodiment of a self-conscious,

ironic, knowing, yet largely optimist humanism" (188).[14] Thus, Miller begins the novel

by covering activities in the city center, "mostly courts and killings," and, due to the

attempts to prevent car bombs, he becomes a familiar figure in Belfast through his racing

"about town on a battered mountain bike," loaded with journalistic equipment, that

becomes commonly known as the literal "cycle of violence" to which the title refers (10).

Similarly, following his relocation to Crossmaheart, Jackson compares Miller to Clint

Eastwood's man-with-no-name figure found in common American westerns, claiming

that he "has no connections with the town, few possessions, and treads the same thin line

between good and evil as he uncovers and avenges a dark secret" (225). Moreover,

Miller, despite being a journalist, also adheres to the typical trope of the outsider hero

found in much crime fiction, in that, throughout the novel, he "shares the general moral

perspective of the community he serves, but is forced both to spend most of his time

outside it, in an unpleasant world to which he is professionally adapted, and to behave in

a way that is only just tolerable to the community" (Palmer 25).

The catalyst for Miller's removal from Belfast and reassignment to Crossmaheart

occurs during the opening pages of the novel, when Miller's father dies of cancer, thus

setting up the first in a series of deaths and funerals that will take place throughout the

narrative. As with much of the action in *Cycle of Violence*, his father's death provides

the first in a series of coincidental and causal links that precipitates all of the other events

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[14]   Miller's job in Belfast involves reporting on the repeated cycles of violence in Belfast: "It had been another rough week in the city. A bomb had exploded in a crowded department store in Royal Avenue, killing thirteen people. Six men had been shot dead in a bookmaker's office in revenge for the bomb. And in revenge for the killings in the bookmaker's office two off-duty policemen enjoying a quiet drink had been shot in a country pub. Everyone expected the next piece of action would involve a young IRA terrorist being shot dead on the way to a possible hit, but no gun to be found near his body. It worked in cycles like that" (9).

in the novel and will lead to Miller's ultimate fate. Specifically, in reaction to this death,

the narrator notes that, "Miller hadn't been bothered by ghosts yet, although he had been

rendered completely unconscious by a different kind of spirit" (3). After showing up

drunk at his office, Miller is ostensibly punished by his chief editor by being relocated to

Crossmaheart, where his predecessor, Jamie Milburn, has mysteriously gone missing.

Thus, his father's death acts as the main inciting event for the action of the novel, a fact

that Miller acknowledges when he wonders "what would have happened if he had taken

more time to look after his father, had somehow managed to postpone his death for a

matter of weeks. He might never have moved to Crossmaheart at all and thus avoided all

the heartache" (3). Moreover, the guilt and grief that Miller experiences at the onset of

the narrative serves as a foreshadowing of his own death in the final pages, a fact that is

repeatedly hinted at through the appearance of his father in dreams and as a spectral

figure who seems to be warning Miller to "leave it alone. Leave well alone" (202).[15] In

this sense, Bateman, from the outset of his novel, fuses both the causal chain of events

found in the traditional detective story with elements of the Gothic, itself often seen as a

predecessor to the crime fiction genre (as will be explored in greater detail with *Ghosts of

Belfast*).

    Miller's reassignment to Crossmaheart, a fictional rural town that appears frequently

in Bateman's works, marks Miller's transformation into an outsider figure and initiates

the criminal investigation that will take up the rest of the narrative. More importantly,

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[15]   Similarly, Miller encounters his father in a dream he has immediately after Marie tells him about her sexual abuse: "He dreamt about a wedding, his own. He couldn't see the bride's face, but his shoes were undone. Every time he bent to tie them somebody kicked him from behind. When he looked round his dad was smiling at him" (73).

however, the shift in locale highlights one of the novel's key subversions of the Troubles

Thriller genre, in that the action occurs entirely outside of Belfast, the most common

setting for such works. As several critics have argued, there is a notable tension in

Troubles thrillers (and in Northern Irish fiction in general) between the city and the

countryside, a juxtaposition that Hughes argues contrasts the city's complexity "as

antithetical to the lost rural world and its pastoral simplicities, so that complexity

becomes a sign of urban corruption in contrast to rural innocence" (144-5). Specifically,

Bateman's Crossmaheart would seem to be a parodic version of the real Crossmaglen, a

town located in County Armagh that, despite a population of less than 1,600 people,

experienced several bombings and sectarian murders during the conflict. Thus, by

providing a "parody of the traditional picture postcard Irish village," Bateman is able to

complicate the binary between city and country in order to reveal how rural and pastoral

settings are not immune from the same sectarianism and cycles of violence so often

attributed to Northern Ireland's capital (Kennedy-Andrews 186). In fact, Bateman

highlights the connections and commonalities between Belfast and Crossmaheart, such as

when Miller notes that the latter has, since the Troubles, become overridden with the

"dregs of the city, guinea pigs in a scheme to alleviate the urban decay and religious

mayhem of Belfast by shifting it to an idyllic existence in the country" (25). Rather than

prove an ameliorative to city life, therefore, Crossmaheart soon becomes marked by the

same "gangs and the symbols of war" typically associated with Belfast (25). In this

sense, Crossmaheart merely acts as an extension of the violence found in Belfast, a fact

that is highlighted by Miller's own observations:

> Crossmaheart has as much terrorism as anywhere in Northern Ireland, and for the size
> of it could be described as the murder capital of Europe. But it isn't big enough for

its own Crown Court, so the major trials take place up in Belfast. Scheduled offences – anything involving a gun or smacking of terrorism – also get shipped to the city. (88-89)

In other words, rather than contrasting the rural setting that Miller finds himself in with the urban one he left behind, Bateman instead reveals how Crossmaheart is merely a microcosm for the broader region's sectarian divisions.

Thus, Miller's reassignment places him in a pastoral setting replete with checkpoints, random disappearances, "horror stories" and the physical remnants of sectarian violence (34).[16] Moreover, Crossmaheart is presented as a place where sectarian hatreds are perhaps even more deeply ingrained than in their urban counterpart and, most importantly, where the entire community seems complicit in acts of terrorism and violence. For example, as Marie tells Miller, "'even the Women's Institute kidnaps people down here. They torture them for days, then throw them in the lake wearing concrete boots and a crocheted jacket'" (103). As a result of such complicity, sectarian divisions and violence literally mark the landscape of Crossmaheart, a fact that is repeatedly symbolized in the novel by the presence of Riley's and the Ulster Arms, two opposing sectarian pubs that occupy the same street. As Pelaschiar notes, "the ontological need for a binary opposite to oppose, in order to define one's meaning and identity, is the common structural ground on which the encounter between the literary discourse of the thriller and the political discourse of nationalistic and sectarian politics is able to take place" (55). It is this ontological need to define oneself against an Other that

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[16] As one deaf character notes, the streets contain not only "natural-born cripples," but also "gunmen who had been shot, gunmen who had shot themselves, bombers who had blown their hands off, thieves who had been shot in the legs by terrorists because they (the thieves) were a menace to society, and you could see them hopping down the streets, wearing their disability with pride like it was some red badge of courage" (21-22).

Bateman explores through Miller's interactions in both settings. Specifically, Bateman dissects the foundations of religious differences and undermines them by suggesting that adherence to the physical markers of identity promotes an "us versus them" mentality that veils similarities between the two communities, particularly in terms of common class divisions. For instance, upon entering the Protestant Ulster Arms, Miller comments that he "could hardly tell the difference between it and [the Catholic] Riley's," and notes that even the customers were the "dead spit of those in Riley's" (108, 110). Instead, sectarian divisions are marked by an overreliance on the paraphernalia of difference, such as the "Gaelic insignia" that decorates the walls at Riley's, the "juke box full of Protestant out-of-work ethic interpretations of country classics" found at the Ulster Arms, or the religious and political tattoos displayed on the customers' bodies. As Miller observes, however, such markers of difference do not entirely mask the fact that both locations contain "the same whiff of desperation brought on by poverty laced with alcoholism" (108). In this way, Bateman parodies what he perceives as the often uncritical nostalgia of identity politics, which blinds the community to the common plight of poverty that could otherwise unite both sides.

Yet, while Bateman is critical of such adherence to sectarian divisions, and tends to mock both sides for their absentminded complicity to markers of difference, he also complicates this perspective by examining the allure of communal inclusion, an illusion that even Miller is, at times, helpless to resist. For instance, while Miller may initially mock the strict sectarian pretensions of the Protestant patrons at the Ulster Arms, and while he admits that "the [Protestant] heritage of his youth he had not delved into for years," he simultaneously finds himself drawn to the "rabble-rousing tunes he had

disdained for so long" and even begins "singing disjointedly" along with the rest of the patrons to a disparaging song about IRA hunger striker Bobby Sands. Thus, Miller is, at least momentarily, taken into the flock and symbolically deemed "one of us" (111). The moment, however, proves short-lived after Miller, who is too drunk to stand for the British national anthem, is unceremoniously thrown from the bar because the locals suddenly realize "'he's not from round here,'" and he is beaten in full sight of a police cruiser, which "grew, faded" and then "disappeared" (115). Ultimately, then, Miller's brief moment of communal inclusion ends by reestablishing his position as an outsider in the community, despite his Protestant background, and, therefore, his expulsion brings into question the clear-cut binary between Protestant and Catholic that seemingly governs the strict rules for inclusion or exclusion.

Yet, Bateman also presents several moments of carnivalesque subversion during which these sectarian divisions are disrupted and the hierarchies that create such binary oppositions are momentarily dismantled. In each case, the moment occurs because of either an external threat that requires a temporary shifting of the "ontological need for a binary opposite to oppose," or, ironically, during a moment of terrorism that promotes unity over exclusion. One such example is referenced after Marie causes an accidental fire at the Riley's pub and reveals to Miller that calling the fire brigade is not an option since, due to local budget cuts, they have to be "brought over from Ballyblack," a neighboring rival town whose previous appearance resulted in the fire brigade being pelted with rock by Republicans, Loyalists, and the police force alike (99). Thus, such a moment transcends the "religious thing" that Miller assumes is the governing force of any violent outbreak in the community and, instead, represents a momentary unity that

temporarily replaces sectarian divisions due to an allegiance to place rather than religious affiliation. As one of the owners of Riley's notes, "'It's a loyalty thing. We hate Crossmaheart as much as anyone, but we have a right to. Those wankers from Ballyblack look down their noses at us, so we don't mind breaking them'" (99).

A more extreme moment of carnivalesque subversion occurs after the failed Loyalist attack on IRA leader Curly Bap, which inadvertently results in his death when Miller, who is attempting to escape during the chaos of the bombing, steps on Bap's body and, in the process, "rather helped along the impaling process which had begun with his landing on the shattered door" (145). At the same time, the car bomb originally intended for Bap and his IRA associates prematurely goes off, killing Davie Morrow and Tom O'Hanlon, "two potatoes" who believe that the assassination attempt is a "redoubling of the military campaign against those who would seek to destroy Ulster's Protestant heritage," although it is, in fact, carried out for entirely financial reasons (140-1). In the aftermath of the bombing, a carnivalistic atmosphere in the city erupts; for example, as Miller notes, the streets are almost immediately filled with "people anxious to make a killing from a killing" by looting local shops and partaking in "bomb damage sales," regardless of political or religious affiliation. Likewise, Riley's pub opens its doors to "the customers of their erstwhile rivals" after the Ulster Arms is shut down by the Health Department, suggesting that capitalistic gain wins out over adherence to strict political and religious divisions. As Miller remarks, this scene marks a moment that resembles "playing football across the trenches of No-Man's Land," with the only outliers being the hard-core Loyalists who refuse to drink at Riley's on principle, while, at the same time, they celebrate Curly Bap's death (149).

Given the novel's focus on ingrained sectarianism, punctuated with these brief moments of carnivalesque inversion, one might expect that the impetus for Miller's primary investigation (the disappearance of his predecessor and Miller's discovery of his dismembered body on a country road) would lead the protagonist to an immersion in the terrorist underworld of Crossmaheart. However, Bateman subverts the reader's expectations here by, instead, maintaining a sequence of events in which "terrorism is related to child abuse" (Kennedy-Andrews 185). Specifically, a particular moment of past trauma serves as the catalyst for Miller's inquiry after Marie reveals to him that she was sexually assaulted by three men when she was thirteen years old, an incident that Jamie Milburn was also investigating at the time of his death. Following Marie's own disappearance, Miller fixates on exploring this past trauma, an occurrence that is seemingly disconnected from any form of sectarian violence, in an attempt to both mete out justice and restore some kind of order to an unharmonious world. Thus, Miller decides that "instead of looking for impossible answers in the future, he could look for attainable answers from the past" as a "reaction to the helplessness he felt over Marie, and before her Jamie and even, perhaps, his father" (126). In this sense, Miller's immersion in a past event could be read as a metaphorical commentary on the complexities and potential dangers of fixating on historical trauma, particularly at the expense of dealing with the realities of the present. For example, after Marie's disappearance, Miller notes:

> He was a journalist, a trained investigator, but instead of investigating her whereabouts, he was looking into the abuse she had suffered many years before. He knew why, really: because, horrible as it was, he could cope with her past. It was printed in black and white, an historical document. But he couldn't cope with her present: the manic vibrancy of her personality, the anger that was so compelling, the undoubted madness that was fascinating and frightening at the same time. (158)

In other words, by believing he can right this individual past wrong, Miller ignores the broader implications of Marie's trauma, which is itself tied to the culture of violence present in Crossmaheart, a culture that promotes anger and "undoubted madness" and continues to affect countless individual lives.

Miller's investigation is complicated, however, by his attempt to locate and confront Marie's attackers, due to the fact that his inquiry leads him deeper into a conspiratorial world where the distinctions between truth and falsehood, appearance and reality, and even hero and villain, begin to disintegrate. In this sense, Miller finds himself encountering the "wilderness" that Jerry Palmer cites as an extension of the conspiratorial climate found in the traditional thriller, a wilderness that plunges the hero into "an opaque, radically uncertain world" and is marked by "dissemblance: the conspirators hide behind disguises; things are not what they seem" (85). Thus, Miller's encounters with all three men (who each received light sentences following the assault) not only fail to restore order to a disjointed world, but also result in Miller's complicity in their "accidental" deaths. For instance, when Miller interviews Reverend Rainey, one of the attackers and a current Presbyterian minister, Rainey situates Marie's sexual assault within the context of a broader ongoing sectarian hatred: "I took my punishment, I acknowledged the wrong… I was only a wee lad… we were all drunk… we were just having a bit of fun with a Fenian" (130).[17] Similarly, Curly Bap, another of Marie's attackers, frames Miller's accusations against this culture of violence, claiming, "'Your lot started it… Your fuckin' Shankill Butchers, cutting up innocent Catholics for fun'"

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[17] Following his encounter with Miller, who threatens to expose his secret, Reverend Rainey takes his own life.

(139). Likewise, Miller's confrontation with the third attacker, Tom Callaghan, highlights the radical uncertainty of the "wilderness" that Miller is exploring. Assuming that Callaghan will be some variation on the hypocritical drunk Protestant, complete with "the faded Kick the Pope tattoo on his left arm," Miller instead discovers a blind man who expresses remorse over his past actions and is dying of cancer. After Miller refuses to offer Callaghan forgiveness, he whistles for a cab and Callaghan's dog reacts and pulls him into traffic, where "both were flattened by a lorry" (166).

As Tony Hilfer notes in *The Crime Novel: A Deviant Genre* (1990), some of the basic themes of crime fiction are "the indeterminacy of guilt, the instability of identity, and, above all, the heavily compromised, even reversible binary opposition of deviance and the norm" (124). It is this reversible binary that problematizes Miller's actions during his investigation. While he originally contends that these deaths occurred "accidentally, of course," Miller's own complicity in them suggests that, ultimately, he has merely becomes another participant in the cycle of violence that is plaguing Crossmaheart and Northern Ireland more generally during the tail end of the Troubles, an implication that is further suggested by the novel's correlation between child abuse and terrorism. In other words, as Jackson notes, "sexual violence, as a test case, justifies revenge and points to an underlying complicity between protective violence and that which is purely vindictive" (225). This "underlying complicity" is acknowledged by Miller when he eventually realizes that "he had set out to kill them, he knew that now… There had been a rupture in that dark recess of the mind where human nature is kept in check, where the barbarity inherent in every man is shackled to a feminine advocate for the defense" (173).

Moreover, Miller's particular brand of violence reflects a standard feature of the thriller, in that often "the hero's unorthodox methods succeed where Bureaucratic law-enforcement procedures fail" (Palmer 13). As a result, despite the fact that while local Constable William Craig (who compares himself to Deep Throat in *All the President's Men*) is able to link Miller to these death, Craig ultimately advocates for a similar brand of vigilante justice, claiming that "'You're the law as much as anyone. You're certainly the only man handing out punishments that fit the crime'" (189). Yet Miller's role as, according to Callaghan, "a personal assassin, not political or religious" implicates him in the same culture of violence that he strives to separate himself from as an objective observer and journalist and, moreover, does little to reestablish order and harmony by bringing Marie's trauma to light. In this way, therefore, Bateman parodies the conservatism of most detective fiction by questioning the brutality of Miller's actions, despite his seeming adherence to justice and his allegiance with the victim in the text.

Further complications arise, in that Marie's status as victim proves to be more opaque than her initial story suggests, since, after Miller tracks her down to a Dublin hotel where she is suffering a manic breakdown, it is revealed that the sexual attack was actually a form of displaced trauma. As Frank O'Hagan, Miller's editor and an unidentified fourth juvenile who was present during Marie's attack, reveals, it was actually Marie's sister who was assaulted, resulting in her suicide several years earlier. Marie, instead, bears the guilt of this trauma because the men mistook her sister for Marie herself, and, in the aftermath of her sister's suicide, her father beats Marie after finding out about her pregnancy, resulting in the loss of her baby. Thus, Bateman refrains from crafting Marie as a traditional femme fatale, the love interest who knowingly betrays the protagonist,

because her deception is not willful, but rather the result of a deeply buried family trauma. Moreover, the lesson Marie seems to take from this incident, that '"What goes around comes around, eh?," resonates metaphorically with the mindset that promotes the various cycles of violence Miller experiences in the community at large (224). Thus, while Craig ultimately contends that Miller's actions were justified, claiming that the attackers "may not have fucked [Marie] up physically, but they fucked her up mentally" and that they, therefore, "deserved their punishment," Bateman's text is much more ambiguous regarding Miller's justification for his violent behavior, a fact that he now understands will be, at best, one of those "things you have to learn to live with" (218-19).

Yet, as Hutcheon points out, postmodern parody often "subverts formalist notions of closure by its self-referential reveling in parodic arbitrariness" (109), a trait that becomes evident in Bateman's novel when, after Miller and Marie's reunion towards the end of the narrative, she chooses to kill herself following one night of "absolute perfection" with the protagonist (226). In this way, Bateman erodes the traditional narrative arc of his own story, one that initially suggests that "the sorrowing Marie is rescued from the ravages of both Protestant and Catholic men by an avenging male who makes her whole again through his virility" (Jackson 225). Moreover, Miller, through his involvement in Marie's trauma, not only fails to dismantle the social order in Crossmaheart, but is also killed, during the final pages of the novel, in a seemingly random moment of violence when, distraught over Marie's suicide, he is gunned down by the local owners of the Good Neighbour grocery store after attempting to return some moldy bread. Ultimately, Marie's suicide and Miller's senseless death promote not only a lack of closure and a conscious overturning of narrative expectations, but also a world without agency, a fact

that Miller learns in his final moments when he envisions the ghost of his father telling

him that dying has "never been a matter of choice" (242). In this sense, Bateman not

only upends the familiar tropes of the thriller genre, but also comedy in general, which

"requires that characters be re-accommodated into an ideal order by the time the story

ends" (Pelaschiar 69). As such, *Cycle of Violence* can ultimately be read as a comedic

reworking of what Jerry Palmer terms the "negative thriller," whose distinctive traits are

the "sense that the hero's local success is insufficient to radically purify the social order"

and the reduction of the individual "to solitary inadequacy or to a bureaucratic function"

(220). Therefore, just as Miller is unable to save Marie from the ghosts of her past, he

also fails to escape the consequences of his own violent actions: "Out of the dark he saw

them, hovering, wraith-like. They smiled at him leerily. He knew their dead faces.

Michael Rainey, Tom Callaghan, Tyrone Blair" (242). Ultimately, Miller is unable to

escape from the cycle of violence he has implicated himself in, a fact that is stressed by

the novel's final image of a group of children stealing his bike (the literal Cycle of

Violence) and pedaling off into the "the stinging winter rain" (243).

Yet, while the novel, through its parodic resistance of causality and closure, may

appear to offer a rather bleak perspective on the culture of violence in Northern Ireland,

Bateman's use of parody is also tied to a political vision that advocates the deconstruction

of atavism and sectarianism that he directly links to the cycles of violence found

throughout the Troubles. Thus, as Kennedy-Andrews points out, despite working within

the familiar thriller genre, Bateman invests his works "with a cultural mythology very

different from that found in the classical British model of crime fiction (Christie, Doyle)

or the democratized American version (Hammett, Chandler)" (186). In fact, by openly

critiquing the "rhetorical images, structural formulas and cultural clichés which [have] been the trademark of much previous Northern Irish fiction," Bateman's brand of comedic thrillers argue, instead, for a serious exploration of the roots of violence and offer a critique of each community's complicity in the perpetuation of the cycles of violence, an exploration that he suggests is still relevant in post-peace process Northern Ireland (Pelaschiar 65). Therefore, while some critics, like Jackson, contend that *Cycle of Violence* is a conservative parody, in that it reinforces certain tropes about gender and nationalism, I would argue that Bateman's adaption of the postmodern parodic lens is more aligned with one of parody's primary functions, according to Hutcheon, in that it is "one of the ways in which modern artists have managed to come to terms with the weight of the past" (29). In this sense, Bateman moves beyond the linguistic playfulness that Brian Cosgrove finds antithetical to works that deal with the Troubles and their aftermath and, instead, offers "an implicit punkish (and puckish) anarchism or libertarianism, a revolutionary potential which questions existing society and prevailing power relations" (Kennedy-Andrews 189).[18]

III.

Although less explicitly grounded in postmodern techniques and themes than McNamee's and Bateman's works, Stuart Neville's neo-noir thriller *The Ghosts of*

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[18]   According to Cosgrove, "it has been well-nigh impossible for the contemporary Irish writer *not* to give priority to immediate historical realities, *not* to render justice to the insistent and traumatic events in Northern Ireland. The argument, in other words, is that the contemporary Irish writer has not the leisure or breathing-space to be (self-indulgently?) postmodernist. If s/he tries to retreat into the prison-house of language, s/he will be relentlessly pursued and harried by the accusing voices of the unjustly victimized and the savagely slain" (382-3).

Belfast (2006) constitutes one of the first critically acclaimed post-Troubles thrillers to emerge in Northern Ireland. Yet, despite its status as perhaps the "first great post-Troubles novel," the somewhat unique and problematic publication history of Neville's text is also worth noting since, after the manuscript for the novel was originally rejected by several publishers, Neville sought publication online (O'Doherty 26). Thus, *The Ghosts of Belfast* began as a series of short stories distributed in an online forum, which led to its serialization in web magazines and, eventually, the attention of a prominent agent (Shortall 4). Moreover, while Neville's novel was published under its original title in America, it was rebranded as *The Twelve* in the United Kingdom, presumably because of "perceived apathy or even antipathy to anything related to Northern Ireland" (Burke 5). Such complications with both the publication and the title choice of Neville's text highlight the ongoing difficulty that such works face in terms of procuring both local and international appeal. Similarly, Colin Bateman has commented on this issue of addressing a divisive international audience, stating that while Northern Ireland may be a location of commercial interest in America, it marks the "kiss of death" in England, where the literary market is prone to "Troubles fatigue" ("The Troubles I've Seen" 180).[19] More specifically, the problem of "Troubles fatigue" hints at the broader issue of what is the appropriate role of the Troubles thriller in post-Troubles Northern Ireland.

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[19] Bateman states: "I just know that research has been done that shows that whatever media you care to name, sales dip significantly when we are featured. I know that national newspaper sales always fell when we were mentioned, and I know of a BBC series set here whose viewing figures dropped away to virtually nothing before the opening credits were even over. When I came to write Murphy's Law for Tiger Aspect/BBC it was made very clear that while they didn't mind Jimmy Nesbitt's character being from Northern Ireland, and while they wanted my Northern Irish voice, they most certainly didn't want anything set over here" ("Troubles I've Seen" 180-1).

In the aftermath of the Good Friday Agreement, the question surrounding the role of crime fiction in post-Troubles Northern Ireland has been marked by a notable division in critical opinion. Specifically, while some literary scholars have argued that crime fiction cannot really flourish during times of conflict, and therefore will only successfully emerge once "normality" has been restored, others claim that such genre works occupy a limited place after the resolution of the Troubles because they no longer have a viable place in the literary market after interest in the conflict has waned. Laura Pelaschiar, for example, states that Neville's novel "comes across as a sort of ghostly apparition" because of the commonly stated belief that "the advent of the Post-Troubles era… should have buried the Northern Ireland Troubles thriller" (195). On the other hand, Ian Rankin argues that "when a society is in chaos… crime fiction cannot flourish, but it comes into its own once democracy is restored or the ballot box begins to replace the bullet and the bomb" (10). As Neville's and other crime writers' works have shown, the thriller genre has, in fact, flourished after the peace process, specifically as a means of exploring the contemporary issues still plaguing the region. Thus, as Declan Burke notes, the increased popularity of the genre in the past decade can be tied to both current events and the changing literary landscape: "[T]he post-Troubles fallout, the economic boom, an increasing urban anonymity and the sales success of chick lit have all contributed to a growing number of writers using crime narratives to tell their stories about modern Ireland" (4).

Therefore, there are several valid reasons for why the thriller still remains a viable genre after the Troubles have ended. Firstly, the peace process allowed for the reemergence of more traditional varieties of crime fiction, a trend which was hindered by

the violence of the conflict because, as Declan Hughes points out, "how could the deaths

of one or two people be compelling when the IRA were slaughtering ten or twelve at a

time? Removing political violence from the national scene enabled common or garden

crime to be seen for what it was – and enabled those of us who wanted to write crime

fiction that was political with a small 'p' to do so" ("Irish Hard-Boiled Crime: A 51st

State of Mind" 167). More importantly, the Post-Troubles thriller has increasingly been

adapted as a literary response to the ongoing ramifications of the sectarian conflict. In

this sense, the end of terrorist violence has, according to John Connolly, "freed Irish

writers, both North and South, to write mainstream crime fiction" by emphasizing "the

aftermath of decades of low-level religious and political warfare." For example, one such

focus that is perfectly attuned to the thriller genre has been on the emergence of new

types of criminality following the peace process, and, with it, an ongoing social

commentary on the fact that the "removal of the flags of convenience beneath which the

terrorists conducted their affairs has not significantly impaired their transition to purely

criminal pursuits" ("No Blacks, No Dogs, No Crime Writers" 55-6). Thus, money and

power have increasingly been shown to replace prior motivations regarding religious,

political, or national distinctions and, with this emphasis, the problematic shift of

prominent figures from paramilitaries to parliamentarians and the relocation of crime into

other avenues (such as drug trafficking) has been explored. Additionally, Post-Troubles

thrillers have also tackled the continuing sectarian divisions that have largely failed to be

eliminated following the peace process, the generational divide between those who lived

through the conflict and those coming of age after the implementation of the Agreement,

and the divisive issue of burying the past or seeking out justice for past wrongdoings (in

the form of truth commissions, for example). In this sense, what is most unique about

Neville's debut novel is the author's use of the thriller genre to probe the morality of the

peace process and the Agreement itself.

In addition to its unique political stance, which is "suffused with the understanding

that the Northern Ireland peace process was corrupt and immoral from top to bottom,"

The Ghosts of Belfast is also a notable contribution to the Troubles thriller genre because

of its fusion of supernatural and Gothic elements with a neo-noir sensibility (O'Doherty

26). As John Scaggs notes "the line of the modern crime thriller can be traced from the

Gothic novel" and, given Neville's Protestant background, his use of this genre can be

specifically tied back to the "Protestant Magic" or "Protestant Gothic" tradition in

Ireland, which finds its antecedents in such nineteenth century works as *Uncle Silas*

(1865), *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), and *Dracula* (1897) (106). According to

Terry Eagleton, this particular Gothic tradition was "a specifically Protestant

phenomenon" because the Gothic "carries with it a freight of guilt and self-torment, and

these are arguably more Protestant than Catholic obsessions" (188). Moreover, the

crossover between contemporary Northern Irish fiction and the Gothic has become

increasingly commonplace, and, in this sense, Neville's novel is in line with other recent

texts that adopt certain Gothic conventions, such as Seamus Deane's *Reading in the*

Dark, and even previous thrillers, like M.S. Power's *Children of the North* trilogy, both

of which employ the supernatural to comment on contemporary issues. Thus, Neville's

focus on the unearthing of past secrets, the return of repressed memories, his use of the

doppelgänger, and the general sense that, despite the peace, Northern Ireland and many of

its citizens remain haunted by the ghosts of the past all inform his political viewpoint

regarding the problems and failures of the peace process itself.

In addition to its incorporation of the Gothic, *The Ghosts of Belfast* also resides

comfortably in the noir genre, specifically in terms of its presentation of the protagonist;

its depiction of Belfast; its themes of existential despair, guilt, entrapment, and

criminality beneath the guise of respectable civilization; and its adaptation of noir's

critique of narrative models. Thus, the novel's protagonist, Gerry Fegan, an ex-IRA

hitman and recently released paramilitary prisoner, in many ways functions as the typical

noir protagonist. For example, Fegan is haunted (literally) by the terrible deeds of his

past; remains plagued by guilt for the deaths he has caused; is, at least initially, isolated

from any form of family or community; and represents a figure who "consciously

exceed[s] the law" (Priestman 34).[20] Moreover, as Lee Horsley points out, in most noir

thrillers "we are brought close to the mind of a protagonist whose position vis-à-vis other

characters is not fixed. Treacherous confusions of his role and the movement of the

protagonist from one role to another constitute key structural elements in noir narrative.

The victim might, for example, become the aggressor; the hunter might turn into the

hunted or vice versa; the investigator might double as either the victim or the perpetrator"

(Horsley 10). In a similar manner, Fegan simultaneously occupies the role of both ex-

killer and current avenger or enforcer of justice. Moreover, the Belfast the Fegan inhabits

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[20]   As Lee Horsley notes, in typical noir thrillers, the characters "suffer either from failures of agency
(powerlessness, immobilizing uncertainty) or the loss of community (isolation, betrayal). Obsessed,
alienated, vulnerable, pursued or paranoid, they struggle with fatality, suffering existential despair as they
act out narratives that raise the question of whether they are making their own choices or following a
course dictated by fate" (11).

displays a similar confusion of roles between the "most noir-imbued city in Western Europe" and the new Belfast of cosmopolitanism and diversity (*Belfast Noir* 78). Neville himself has commented on this affinity between noir conventions and the presentation of Belfast in crime fiction. He states:

> This is a city that gave the world its worst ever maritime disaster, and turned it into a tourist attraction; similarly, we are perversely proud of our thousands of murders, our wounds constantly on display. You want noir? How about a painting the size of a house, a portrait of a man known to have murdered at least a dozen human beings in cold blood? Or a similar house-sized gable painting of a zombie marching across a post-apocalyptic wasteland with an AK-47 over the legend *UVF: Prepared for Peace – Ready for War*. (*Belfast Noir* 18)

Thus, Neville's presentation of the city alternates between a portrayal of a place mired in ongoing corruption, criminality, and divisions, and a space that is no longer a necropolis, but rather a changing landscape following an increase in economic prosperity, a place where "the property boom had driven the young middle classes into parts of the city they had never contemplated before" (45).

Neville uses the guise of this "new Belfast," however, to highlight the ongoing corruption and criminality that fuel the political process following the IRA ceasefires in 1994, a process that eventually paved the way for the Agreement to be accepted and implemented. For example, Fegan notes that although "the politicians had taken over the movement, even though they were shifting from the rackets, the extortion, the thieving, people still needed to be kept in line," specifically by way of eliminating competition for safety payouts from bars and taxi drivers, regulating drug dealers, and promoting electoral fraud, when "reluctant voters needed gathering up and escorting to the polling stations where they would be reminded whose name to mark" (56). Thus, the depiction of ongoing criminality under the guise of seemingly respectable motives (i.e. the desire for peace) fits in with the thematic interests of the noir genre, according to Horsley:

"They are not just the 'dark secret' of respectable society but an inescapable part of it, only thinly disguised by civilized pretense. The dispersal of guilt, the instability of roles, and the difficulties of grasping the events taking place all mean that there can be no 'simple solution'" (12). Ultimately, if "an exploration of guilt" is "at the core of noir," as Horsley states, Neville's text examines the ramifications of that guilt on both a personal level, with Fegan, and, more importantly, on a communal one, with the moral shortcomings of the political process that led to the Agreement.

By questioning the morality of the peace process and the Agreement, *The Ghosts of Belfast* also aligns itself with noir's general critique of narrative models. Specifically, as Horsley points out, noir represents a "'voice of violation'" that exposes "the inadequacy of conventional cultural, political and also narrative models" and "expresses fears and anxieties but also has the potential for critique, for undermining complacency and illusions." Moreover, this noir sensibility is most prominent during times of "discontent and anxiety, of disillusionment with institutional structures and loss of confidence in the possibility of effective agency" (13). Thus, Neville's text taps into the ongoing disillusionment with the peace process and the Good Friday Agreement, which, from its inception, has encountered several obstacles. Firstly, as Stephen Farry argues, "there is no teleological inevitability to the Agreement contributing to peace and stability in Northern Ireland, let alone the creation of a shared and nonsectarian society. By itself, the Agreement only amounts to conflict management" (25). The Agreement's notably vague language about how to actively achieve peace following the Troubles is further problematized by the differing interpretations that various sectarian groups have imposed upon its outcome. For instance, to Unionists the Agreement was promoted as a

solidification of the union between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, while

Republicans/Nationalists have come to view it as merely a rung in the ladder towards

total unification with the Republic of Ireland. As a result of such contrasting views,

Northern Ireland has seen a trend towards ongoing violence in terms of Republican

splinter groups who feel the Agreement was a "sell out" of the core historic mission of

their movement.[21]

Moreover, the years immediately following the peace process saw an upsurge in

sectarian violence, in terms of the burning of Catholic churches, religiously affiliated

schools, and Protestant Orange halls.[22] Such increases in sectarian violence were largely

attributed to the Republican reluctance towards the decommissioning of weapons, which

many Unionists saw as a continuity of their "ballot box and armalite" strategy, suggesting

that "the IRA would maintain its arms in order to continue the military struggle if the

political strategy failed" (Morrissey and Smyth 21). Simultaneously, following the

Agreement, recent years have seen an abandonment of moderate political positions in

favor of extremism on both sides.[23] As a result of these developments, the Post-Troubles

era continues to be marked by deeply entrenched sectarian divisions, despite the outward

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[21]   For example, according to Morrissey and Smyth, Republican splinter groups "continued to recruit the disaffected from the IRA and mounted a fresh series of incidents including an attempt to bomb Hammersmith Bridge in London… For Republican splinter organizations, the 'holy grail' of Irish unity had not been achieved, so the war had to go on" (23).

[22]   "During 1999 and 2000, attempts to burn Catholic churches, schools and Orange halls, the intimidation of individuals from their homes and the continuing disputes over territory – along interfaces or contested marching routes – continued unabated. All of this contributed to a continuing sense of fear and suspicion in those areas that suffered most from political violence and a general uneasiness in the wider society" (Morrissey and Smyth 21).

[23]   Donald Horowitz: "The architects of the Agreement abandoned the concept of a government across the moderate middle and instead opted for an all-inclusive government that coopted rather than marginalized the extremes" (16).

signs of an end to terrorist activity. Lastly, the division in public opinion over the notably

contentious issue of dealing with the past has been aggravated by the vaguely worded

Agreement, which offers no clear solutions in terms of truth commissions, amnesty, or

the desire for justice on the parts of the dead, wounded, or their families. As a result of

these various issues, it is no surprise that public support towards the Agreement has

waned in recent times.[24]

Thus, Neville's novel is one of the first Post-Troubles works to explicitly deal with the

problematic nature of the peace process, a fact that is highlighted by his use of a

protagonist who is part of the controversial early prisoner releases that took place

following the implementation of the Agreement. In this sense, Fegan occupies a complex

role in the novel, given that he was, at one time, an IRA hitman, a fact that still gives him

a respectable status among former paramilitaries in West Belfast. Moreover, as the novel

progresses, Fegan, who is continuously haunted by the ghosts of his victims, once again

assumes the role of killer, this time by seeking revenge for his victims and, thus,

appeasing the specters who haunt his waking life. Therefore, by occupying the role of

both killer and avenger, Fegan resembles the protagonist killer often found in the noir

genre, a man who, according to Horsley, "acts to change things through revenge,

'cleansing' society or righting a wrong…. If he is more radically alienated from

'normality,' the killer may act to undermine the whole social order. The avengers… are

more isolated and may themselves be trying to escape from the demands for conformity

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[24]   As Farry notes, "In terms of public opinion, the repeated crises over the Agreement, in which attempts
to find a breakthrough often become regarded as a series of sectarian trade-offs that are perceived to favour
one side over the other, and the increasing challenges to the rule of law have led to an erosion of cross-
community support" (26).

to a particular code or organizational loyalty" (97). In a similar manner, Fegan

consistently must work outside the law and the "social order" and his murderous actions

eventually threaten the stability of the peace process itself, which relied on the political

involvement and decommissioning of republican paramilitary groups in order to move

forward.

Additionally, Fegan's status as simultaneous killer and avenger problematizes the

reader's moral sympathy towards his character because, as O'Doherty notes, "the fact

that Fegan is no worse than the people he stalks… makes the reader's empathy with him

tenable" (26). Complicating Fegan's characterization even further is the fact that Neville

employs a doppelgänger in the form of David Campbell, a Scotsman who was initially

part of a dissident republican group and is later revealed to be a member of the secretive

British Fourteen Intelligence force, a group that "didn't officially exist" and "did the dirty

work, the stuff no one owned up to, the kinds of things ordinary people go to prison for"

(92). Thus, like Fegan, Campbell, who is eventually tasked with investigating the

killings that Fegan commits, works outside the official social structure of law and order.

Likewise, just as Fegan's murders are attributed to ongoing paramilitary activity during

the peace process, Campbell's presence in Belfast suggests the ongoing influence of

clandestine British security forces and interests in the region. Moreover, despite Fegan's

assertion that "he had always thought of killing as work" and that he was distinct from

"those assassins who made it art," Neville's depiction of Campbell as both a ruthless

killer and as Fegan's double complicates our interpretation of the novel's protagonist.

For example, countering Fegan's self-characterization, Campbell instead contends that

Fegan "looked like a killer, the purest kind, the kind who killed more out of want than

need" (144). By thus complicating the status of Fegan as the traditional "hero" in his crime narrative, Neville is able to reflect the public's mixed opinion about the early prisoner releases, a fact that was recognized by the Northern Irish government, who timed these releases "alongside announcements of measures designed to help victims" (Morrissey and Smyth 9).

What, ultimately, differentiates Fegan from his double is his literal haunting by the ghosts of his past, "twelve of them if he counted the baby in its mother's arms" (3). While some critics have contended that these "followers," as Fegan deems them, are merely psychological manifestations of his guilt, Neville suggests otherwise by tracing these ghostly apparitions back to Fegan's troubled childhood. For example, the novel notes that Fegan sees the ghost of his deceased alcoholic father (and possibly others) during his formative years, which upsets his mother, who warns him, "You don't see anyone. You don't talk to anyone. You turn away from them. Do you want people to think you're mad?" and advises him to "always be quiet" so that they will "leave you alone" (39). In this sense, Fegan's ghosts are more aligned with the "ghostly matters" that Avery Gordon differentiates from superstition or folk belief in *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (2008). According to Gordon, such ghosts bring a "charged strangeness" to a situation and draw attention not only to themselves but also to what they represent, which is "usually a loss, sometimes of a life, sometimes of a path not taken," and must be reckoned with "*out of a concern for justice*" (63; author's emphasis). Specifically, in the context of postcolonial or post-conflict societies, such apparitions, according to Tina Kirss, might refer to "the failure or short-circuiting of a future that has failed to materialize" (26).

Thus, while the eradication of these "followers" serves as the catalyst for the revenge killings that Fegan undertakes, the ghosts who manifest in Neville's text also serve a broader purpose in terms of raising questions about the status of victimhood and justice in contemporary Northern Ireland. For instance, while Fegan himself might be deemed a victim, one who was initially drawn to the Republican paramilitaries due to his remembrance of "the anger, the hate, the poverty, the unemployment" of the Catholic community during the height of the Troubles, he is contrasted against the ghosts of his past, which comprise three British soldiers, two UDR men, a RUC officer, and four civilians who were simply "in the wrong place at the wrong time" and "whose memories screamed the loudest" (83, 4). The fact that the civilian's memories are the ones that "screamed the loudest" suggests that Neville is consciously aware of the problematic nature of defining victimhood following the peace process, which, as Morrissey and Smyth point out, has been complicated by the establishment of a victims' hierarchy. Specifically, for those, like Fegan, who have taken an active part in the sectarian violence of the past, "claiming the status of victim is [often seen as] an attempt at escaping guilt, shame or responsibility," while universal definitions of victimhood "tend to promote a political culture of powerlessness and undifferentiated chaos" (5). In this sense, Neville's text offers a commentary on the complex nature of defining victimhood following the Troubles and, simultaneously, the problematic nature of justice and revenge that characterized media representations of victimhood during the Troubles, where those who forgive the perpetrators of violence against loved ones are held out as "moral beacons"

for the rest of society.[25] Ultimately, then, Fegan's role in the text aligns with what

Horsley notes about the avenger mindset, in that it "acts as a comment on the tendency of

others to sell out to a plausible but corrupt system and to put the demands of tame

conformity above truth and justice" (105).

It is notable, therefore, that the specters that haunt Fegan make their initial appearance

during the early parts of the peace process, when "mountains moved, deals were struck,

another election came and went, while the shadows gathered close to Fegan," until they

develop into a constant presence, whose "shadows turned to faces and bodies and arms

and legs" following the Good Friday Agreement (6). Specifically, the manifestation of

these revenants seems to highlight what many critics of the peace process deem the

"moral vacuum at the heart of the implementation of the Agreement," which they argue

failed to address issues such as continued paramilitary activity or the prosecution of past

sectarian crimes in the interests of political expediency (Farry 42). Even the cover image

of the Agreement itself, which features both a setting sun and a family looking out at

what was eventually discovered to be the western seaboard in Cape Town in South Africa

hints at this discrepancy between appearance and reality. Aaron Kelly points out:

> It is highly symptomatic of the spuriousness of postmodernism's supposed
> empowerments that the very image designed to entice the population of Northern
> Ireland into believing that the Peace Process will devolve power to them and their
> decision-making parades an experience which is materially impossible for them."
> ("Geopolitical Eclipse" 547)

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[25]   "Media representations of those bereaved and injured in Northern Ireland's Troubles have sometimes probed in a rather crude and insensitive manner. In interviews with the newly bereaved, broadcasters have asked immediate family members if they forgave the perpetrator, or if they wanted revenge – often within hours or days of the death. The bereaved person's response is held up as a moral benchmark by which others could gauge their degree of entitlement to desire revenge or retaliation. If those closest to the loss, those most entitled to blame and revenge, respond with magnanimity, then who could respond otherwise? In this way victims can be put in a position of a kind of moral leadership" (Morrissey and Smyth 11).

Thus, more than simply serving as a manifestation of personal guilt, Fegan's ghosts

would seem to signal, more generally, Derrida's reworking of Martin Heidegger's

concept of *adikia*, which suggests a disjuncture of history, or "time out of joint," that is

ethical as well as temporal, and requires an exploration of "our phantasmagoric present

and its injustices, to 'set things right,' as Hamlet would have it" (Kelly "Geopolitical

Eclipse" 550).

In particular, Neville's novel examines several of the ongoing issues that continued to

plague Northern Ireland in the wake of the peace process, including the political

legitimization of former paramilitaries, the outbreak of corruption, and the reality of

continued paramilitary activity. Firstly, while Fegan was a foot soldier in the IRA's

terrorist campaign, and remains a killer throughout the text, *The Ghosts of Belfast* is more

focused on the fact that someone else, "a cynical manipulator, as likely as not now a

senior political figure in the Northern Ireland Executive" is in a position of power

(O'Doherty 26). For example, Fegan encounters Michael McKenna, a childhood friend

and now wealthy politician in Stormont, who has "had [his teeth] fixed so he could look

presentable for the cameras" and hides his legitimacy behind a veneer to respectability.

This is an illusion that Fegan exposes when he confronts McKenna about a case of a

disappeared boy whose death McKenna had authorized: "This was the face he knew, not

the one on television, but the face that burned with white-hot pleasure as McKenna set

about the boy with a claw hammer, the face that was dotted with red when he handed

Fegan the .22 pistol to finish it" (6). McKenna, however, is only a symptom of a broader

plague, since, as Fegan notes, he is part of an overall trend, whereby "the longing for

freedom, whatever that was, had given way to the lust for money and power. The

paramilitaries, Republican and Loyalist alike, maintained the façade of their political ideals, but Fegan knew the truth" (84).

Furthermore, the legitimization of former paramilitary leaders like McKenna exposes a division within Republican factions between the desire for political legitimacy and the continued belief in dissent, an ideological split that Fegan notes is increasingly noticeable during the peace process, "as more and more foot soldiers drifted to the dissidents" because "they feared becoming nobodies again now the movement had no further use for them" (22). Thus, as the novel suggests, despite the outward signs of political progress and negotiation, and the overall attitude that in a post-9/11 society "the world –and especially America – didn't view terrorists with the same romantic tint these days," continued paramilitary activity remains a problematic byproduct of the peace process itself (257). For example, punishment beatings were still employed as a means to "settle scores or 'cleanse' territory whilst the political vacuum lasted" and were "not challenged through any formal political sanction" (Morrissey and Smyth 22; Farry 31). Likewise, while engaging in talks about decommissioning, several high profile operations were attributed to the PIRA following the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, including a break-in at the Police Service of Northern Ireland's Special Branch headquarters in East Belfast in 2002, where intelligence files pertaining to IRA informants were stolen. Additionally, in the same year, British military intelligence discovered that "Provisionals had purchased at least 20 sophisticated AN-94 armor-piercing assault rifles" from Russian sources, thus demonstrating "the intentional and cynical operational emptiness of decommissioning gestures" (Stevenson 162). Most troubling, however, was the Office of Counterterrorism's discovery in 2002 of the

continued involvement of the PIRA with international terrorist organizations, specifically

in terms of their training of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and

the fact that "Palestinian pipe bombs found in the West Bank appear to be of IRA design,

and Palestinian snipers are suspected of having been trained by the IRA" (Stevenson

162). Moreover, as Dean Godson suggests, such questionable tactics are not limited to

the dissident faction of the Republicans, but also extended to legitimate political parties

like Sinn Fein, who employed "the methods of intelligence gathering they honed during

the long years of terrorism" in order to spy "on legislators from the South's constitutional

parties, for the purpose of compromising them in seats that Sinn Fein wants to win at the

next Irish election" ("Northern Ireland Fails the 'Town Square Test'").

    As these examples reveal, and as Neville's novel suggests, a disparity existed between

the public perception and rhetoric surrounding the peace process, which highlighted

cooperation and unity across the sectarian divide, while the more complicated political

reality was marked by a slow-moving shift away from violence and towards the

implementation of non-violent, "profit-oriented corruption," that, as Shelley Deane points

out, "is more likely to be tolerated in post-conflict transitions than its violent counterpart"

(434). As *Ghosts of Belfast* reveals, however, such disparate forms of corruption are not

mutually exclusive since, as the text states, while the old ways are dying out, "their

ghosts might come to haunt the political process" (23). In this sense, Fegan's haunting

on a micro level enacts a broader haunting on the macro level of the peace process,

particularly in terms of the threat his revenge killings present to the political legitimacy

that the paramilitary elites are attempting to uphold. As Paul McGinty, one such

paramilitary turned corrupt parliamentarian, tells Fegan: "'But I did good, Gerry. Think

about it. I helped build the peace. I kept the boys on the streets in line. Me, Gerry. It would've fallen apart if it wasn't for me. But you've risked it all. Do you hear me? All those lives for nothing, all that labor, the heartbreak, the years – you might have wasted them all. And what for? For some figments of your imagination?'"(311). What makes Fegan's killings particularly radical, however, in addition to their potential to unravel the entire peace process, is that they exist outside the norm of what is deemed "acceptable" behavior by paramilitary organizations like the IRA. As Morrissey and Smyth note, "paramilitaries in Northern Ireland tend to monopolize the conduct of violence" in order to "both control the direction of violence and minimize acts that would threaten their long-term legitimacy." As a result, killing became "highly routinized with commonly recognized protocols governing its operations," including using recognizable codewords to claim responsibility for certain operations, distinguishing between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" targets, and, implicitly, promoting the overall "principle that it is the *behavior* and not the *identity* of the person that qualifies him or her as a target" (47, 62; author's emphasis). By contrast, Fegan's revenge killings cannot, as a whole, be claimed by any particular organization, blur the distinction between legitimacy and illegitimacy because they cross sectarian divisions, and their motivating source is entirely contingent on the identity of the targets, who have been singled out by the specters themselves.

Ultimately, then, Fegan's crimes expose various forms of border-crossing that are prevalent throughout the novel, both between the living and the dead and between political legitimacy and corruption. It is thus fitting that the narrative culminates in a bloodbath located at the borderland itself, specifically at a farm owned by Bull O'Kane, the republican leader who originally recruited Fegan and who, following the peace

agreement, embraces criminality over the political process. The border has long had a

symbolic importance in Irish literature, representing a "crack in the pavement through

which people could disappear to evade justice," and border-crossing in particular

represents an act that is often seen as reinforcing "feelings of social division and the tribe

mentality of both religion and politics in Ireland" (McGilloway 306). The farm,

therefore, marks not only the setting of the final confrontation between the major players

in the novel, but also establishes a space that, more broadly, represents how the old ways

and the new maintain a tenuous equilibrium. Specifically, Neville seems to model Bull

O'Kane on the real figure of Tom 'Slab' Murphy, the alleged Brigade Commander of the

IRA in South Armagh who was employed in smuggling and various illegal activities

along the border. However, despite Murphy's ongoing criminal activities and MI5's

categorization of him as "the single biggest domestic threat to the UK" in the 1990s, his

behavior was tolerated by the Republican movement at large due to his allocation of

proceeds to Sinn Fein (Deane 435).[26] In a similar manner, the novel contends that

"McGinty and O'Kane were two sides of the same coin" because the party leadership

relies on men like O'Kane for "their power in the street" and, at the same time, tolerates

O'Kane's criminal enterprises, thus maintaining "a precarious balance between the old

ways and the new" (166).

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[26]   Deane elaborates: "Rather than exacerbate any schism within the Republican movement by
recognizing the 'spoil politics' ethos of the South Armagh brigade, this section of the IRA was used instead
to bankroll the rest of the movement. By reining in Mr. Murphy financially and overlooking the
discrepancies in his political aspirations, the Sinn Fein leadership used corruption as a process of
integrative exchange where 'Slab' Murphy was incorporated into a lasting network of exchange and shared
interest; the extra-disciplinary behavior of his brigade tolerated in exchange for compliance on political
initiatives. In this instance black market racketeering corruption was regulated in order to curb further
squandering of Sinn Fein's legitimacy. Corruption functioned as an accommodation among the political
and the more militant 'predation-oriented' factions of Irish Republicanism" (435-6).

In the end, some catharsis is achieved when Fegan kills Campbell, who encounters the ghosts of his own victims in his final moments (thus reinforcing his role as Fegan's doppelgänger) and McGinty, to whom Fegan relays the ghosts' central message: "Everybody pays" (283). However, Fegan also allows O'Kane to go free, after enacting a promise that he will not harm Marie, Fegan's love interest, or her daughter, and the futility of Fegan's own actions are acknowledged when he realizes that the events of both the preceding weeks and the confrontation at the farm will most likely be whitewashed. Neville writes:

> 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. (325)

In this sense, while the reader's last glimpse of Fegan shows his release from the twelve "followers" of the past and his self-exile from Ireland, following his realization that "men like him no longer belonged here," the novel as a whole can ultimately, like Bateman's *Cycle of Violence*, be aligned with the genre of the negative thriller. As Jerry Palmer notes, while such works might end with the hero's nominal success, there is an overall sense that "the evil the hero has dealt with will reappear without difficulty in another form" (43). Thus, Neville's text seems to end on a more cynical than hopeful note, specifically suggesting that "men like Gerry Fegan are morally above those who did the deal" (O'Doherty 26).

<center>IV.</center>

As the previously examined texts demonstrate, the Northern Irish thriller has moved well beyond the "Troubles Trash" label that characterized the genre during the 1970s and

1980s. Instead, writers such as McNamee, Bateman, and Neville have repurposed the thriller in order to address the contemporary issues that continue to impact the region in the wake of the Troubles and the peace process. Specifically, the genre has been employed to deconstruct how media representations became the primary means through which the sectarian conflict and its aftermath were defined and explore the costs of violence following the Troubles. Thus, if, as the Good Friday Agreement states, "the achievement of a peaceful and just society would be the true memorial to the victims of violence," the new generation of crime fiction writers contends that such a lofty sentiment requires a thorough examination of not only the successes of the peace process, but, more importantly, the ways in which this achievement has failed or fallen short of its goals (6). As Aaron Kelly points out, "until the time is no longer out of joint, until a more ethical and equitable reclamation of our own moment in history is attained, the ghosts of Belfast's other histories, other possibilities and other voices will continue, rightly and insistently, to haunt the dominant discourse of progress and development" ("Geopolitical Eclipse 553). Ultimately, despite its controversial origins, the Troubles thriller has emerged in recent times as one particular genre that has opened itself up to these alternate histories, discourses, and possibilities.

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<u>Biography</u>

Aleksandra Hajduczek was born April 10, 1980 in Bytom, Poland. She received the

Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from the University of California, Berkeley in

2001 and the Master of Arts in English Literature from San Jose State University in 2005.