

SUBALTERN *AESTHETICS*:  
TRACING COUNTER-HISTORIES IN CONTEMPORARY  
SCOTTISH, IRISH AND NORTHERN IRISH LITERATURE

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**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

The University of Edinburgh

2008

## ABSTRACT

This PhD thesis proposes an Irish-Scottish comparative framework for examining a range of shared ethical, socio-political and theoretical concerns, pertaining to aspects of class and gender, in contemporary Irish, Northern Irish and Scottish literature. My approach galvanises Lévinasian ethics with the socio-cultural category of the 'subaltern' in relation to postcolonial, Marxist and feminist theories in order to trace what I term a 'subaltern aesthetics' between selected works of Scottish, Northern Irish and Irish writing that show a specific sensibility to the social inequalities and inequities that are part of the current restructuring of the global capitalist system. My work explores how these texts engage with both the processes of political and economic transformation in the Atlantic archipelago, and critical-theoretical approaches which, I argue, show the tendency to subsume the specificity and intensity of subaltern concerns.

The first chapter delineates key debates in Irish and Scottish studies, offering a critique of conventional applications of postcolonial and postmodern theory. I demonstrate that dominant versions of postcolonialism are analytically entrapped in the nation as a paradigm. Additionally, I show that for all its apparent celebration of difference, postmodernism reduces otherness to the terms of the self. Chapter 2 outlines the model of a subaltern counter-history as a theoretical framework for reading ethical issues of historicity on the basis of texts by James Kelman, Patrick McCabe and Robert McLiam Wilson. This engagement with history is continued in chapter 3, which investigates the desire to archive Northern Ireland's recent past in the context of its peace process in Glenn Patterson's and Eoin McNamee's recent novels. The emphasis of the three subsequent chapters turns the attention of my counter-historical method to issues of gender. The fourth chapter evaluates the material consequences that the gendering of the imagined nation has on female bodies in particular. Whereas the focus lies here specifically on the Irish context, the following chapter 5 engages in a comparative reading of traumatic herstories in three Irish and Scottish novels by Roddy Doyle, Janice Galloway and Jennifer Johnston. The purpose of both of these chapters is to examine women's experience of disempowerment and their struggle to reclaim agency. My last chapter then investigates the relationship between men, gender and nation in the allegorical imagiNation of Alasdair Gray and McCabe with specific regard to the turn to the feminine that has taken place in contemporary criticism.

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## PREFACE

This thesis uses the Chicago Style Guide (author-date system) with slight variations to ensure the fluidity and readability of the text. These include that when the author of the referenced source is clear, only the date and/or page number will be cited in parenthesis in the text. Footnote references comprise in addition a short title. Furthermore, references to the primary texts selected for detailed discussion are abbreviated; a list is supplied at the beginning of this thesis. Full bibliographic information of all works cited is supplied in the list of references at the end of this thesis; further works consulted are recorded in Appendix I.

All quotations are commonly cited in their original formatting, which includes the adoption of original emphasis (commonly italics). That means that only when the emphasis is added by the author of this thesis it is indicated. This also pertains to quotations from novels, and I would like to particularly point here to the specific typography in the works of both Alasdair Gray and Janice Galloway.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I gratefully acknowledge the support of the University of Edinburgh, whose provision of a research scholarship allowed me to undertake this project.

In particular, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Aaron Kelly, for his invaluable kindness, intellectual generosity and encouragement, and from whose thoughtful and thought-provoking suggestions I have benefited greatly. The commitment and spirit of his work has been a formative and challenging inspiration. My genuine thanks are also due to my assistant supervisor, Robert Irvine, and to Randall Stevenson for their support and perceptive comments upon my work at various stages. I am obliged to all at the University of Edinburgh who have helped me to see this project to fruition, foremost the members of the Department of English Literature. I also want to indicate my appreciation for the assistance and patience of the staff of the University Library, the Computing Services and the National Library of Scotland.

Special thanks go to Rajeev S. Patke (National University of Singapore) for offering helpful feedback on this project in its initial stages; and to Patricia Coughlan (University College Cork), Robert Eaglestone (Royal Holloway, University of London), Eamonn Hughes (Queens University, Belfast), Carole Jones (Trinity College Dublin) and Aaron Kelly (University of Edinburgh) for their generosity and kindness of making (at the time) unpublished material accessible to me.

This project has specifically profited from the annual ‘Crosscurrents’ postgraduate conferences in Irish and Scottish Studies, sponsored by the Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies in conjunction with the Arts and Humanities Research Council, and I want to state here my gratefulness to all the organisers and participants for the intellectual crosscurrents they have enabled.

I would also like to acknowledge the support of the British Association for Irish Studies, whose awarding of the 2007 Essay Prize not only permitted me to publish a chapter of this thesis, but also immensely assisted my research through the form of Cambridge University Press books.

The list of colleagues and friends who inspired and encouraged me over the last years can only ever be incomplete. I would therefore like to express my deep gratitude to all those in Edinburgh, Berlin, and many other places, with whom I had stimulating discussions, and whose love and friendship has been an unfailing source of support.

Finally, I wish to dedicate this thesis to my family, Christa, Ludwig and Annabelle Lehner, without whose incommensurable love, unceasing encouragement, and sacrifices it could never have been accomplished. However unworthy, I hope to have captured, at least, a certain spirit of my father’s tenet in this work:

*DUM SPIRO SPERO ~ As long as I breathe, I hope.*

## DECLARATION

I herewith declare that this thesis,

‘Subaltern *Aesthetics*: Tracing Counter-Histories in Contemporary Scottish, Irish and Northern Irish Literature’

has been composed by myself and is completely my own work. I have not used any other material and aids than the ones mentioned. The work has not been submitted to any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

Stefanie Florence Lehner

Edinburgh, 1 September 2008

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

### Primary Literature by Selected Authors

- BoP Patrick McCabe, *Breakfast on Pluto* (London: Picador, 1999 [1998]).
- DBR Edna O'Brien, *Down By the River* (London: Phoenix, 2000 [1996]).
- DS Patrick McCabe, *The Dead School* (London: Picador, 1995).
- FD Glenn Patterson, *Fat Lad* (London: Minerva, 1993 [1992]).
- IW Jennifer Johnston, *The Invisible Worm* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992 [1991]).
- J Alasdair Gray, *1982 Janine* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2003 [1984]).
- NH James Kelman, 'Naval History' in *The Burn* (London: Minerva, 1991), 93-105.
- TD Robert McLiam Wilson, 'The Dreamed', in *Granta* 81 (2003): 303-322.
- TKB Janice Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (London: Vintage, 1999 [1989]).
- TT Mary Costello, *Titanic Town* (London: Methuen, 1992).
- TW Glenn Patterson, *That Which Was* (Hamish Hamilton, 2004).
- U McNamee, Eoin, *The Ultras* (Faber and Faber, 2004).
- WW Doyle, Roddy, *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (London: Minerva, 1996).
- YH James Kelman, *You Have to be Careful in the Land of the Free* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2004).

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

- Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*

## INTRODUCTION

# TOWARDS AN ARCHIPELAGIC SUBALTERN AESTHETHICS

### Literature & the 'Irresistible Need to Speak'

*'Criticism as a distinct function of art ... can indeed seem suspect and pointless. But it has its source in the mind of the listener, spectator, or reader; criticism exists as a public's mode of comportment. Not content with being absorbed in aesthetic enjoyment, the public feels an irresistible need to speak. The fact that there might be something for the public to say, when the artist refuses to say about artwork anything in addition to the artwork itself, justifies the critic.'*

Emmanuel Levinas, 'Reality and Its Shadow'

If Emmanuel Levinas remained notably critical if not outright hostile to the ethical potential of the field of aesthetics, which he considers in his 1948 essay 'Reality and Its Shadow' as irresponsibly disengaged from moral and political concerns,<sup>1</sup> his above statement nonetheless evokes the compelling force that works of art exert on the public: they generate 'an *irresistible* need to speak', as he puts it (my emphasis). There is, then, a sheer excess inherent in art that actually *cannot* be contained in detached, silent contemplation. This powerful and intrinsically political effect of artworks to trigger a response confronts the critic with an irreducible responsibility: to try to capture this excess; to articulate that what makes art so compelling; to make audible and bring to light that what is perhaps not obvious or perceptible on the surface layer of a visual image or a literary text. This thesis confronts such a responsibility by engaging with those issues and voices that are commonly relegated to the bottom layers of society – but not necessarily of the aesthetic realm. It is my contention that it is not that literature itself is marked by evasion and irresponsibility

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<sup>1</sup> For a salient engagement with Levinas in relation to and through the literary, see Jill Robbins, *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature* (1999). Robbins argues that while Levinas remained, like Plato, hostile to the potential of art, his own writings – both in terms of their literary language and his use of literary sources – however refute the easy demarcation between the realms of ethics and literature.

towards social, political and historical questions as Levinas maintains, but that it offers a space wherein such concerns can be addressed, explored, and tested out in a manner that is often denied or disavowed full critical attention outside their own sphere.

The context of this thesis is the social inequities, inequalities and disruptions that are part of the current restructuring of the global capitalist system. My work engages with contemporary Scottish, Northern Irish and Irish fiction through a comparative approach as part of a wider insistence that the issues addressed by these writings are, if specific to a national situation, not solely reducible thereto. This thesis maintains that there are a number of important historical, socio-political and cultural affiliations between these three state formations that enable exploring a shared matrix of ethical, political and theoretical concerns in an indicative selection of novels written since the 1980s. On the basis of close readings, my work traces what I will outline in this introduction as an archipelagic ‘subaltern aesthetics’ between writings that show a specific perceptivity to forms of marginalisation, oppression and disempowerment related to issues of class and gender. It is through a consideration of these concerns that this thesis hopes to perform a ‘crossing’ between these three regions, such as Tom Paulin evokes in the fragment that forms the following epigraph.

## **I. IRELAND (NORTHERN IRELAND) SCOTLAND: Towards an Archipelagic Approach**

*‘That stretch of water, it’s always/ There for you to cross over/ To the other shore ...’*  
(Tom Paulin, ‘States’)

In its look ‘to the other shore’ this project is inspired by the current rise of Irish-Scottish Studies. The earliest crosscurrents can be dated back to the first millennium when Irish tribes, called *Scoti*, crossed over to the other shore and established the Gaelic kingdom *Dál Riata*, and thus afforded Scotland its name. However, it was as recent as 2002 that Willy Maley proclaimed the ‘official’ arrival of this new interdisciplinary (2002: 13), and the work of different groups of historians has provided important groundwork for establishing dialogue between the two islands. On the one

hand, it was J.G.A. Pocock's call for a 'new British History' in 1974 that sought not only to move away from an Anglocentric and nation-centred approach, but also to consider the 'Atlantic archipelago' as a whole.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, it was the inaugural meeting of Irish and Scottish historians under the auspices of Louis Cullen (Trinity College, Dublin) and T.C. Smout (then, University of Edinburgh) in 1976 in Dublin that pioneered an Irish-Scottish comparative approach.<sup>3</sup> In 1995, the founding of the Irish-Scottish Academic Initiative (ISAI) furthered and consolidated this archipelagic exchange institutionally by establishing a partnership between the Universities of Aberdeen and Strathclyde in Scotland, and Trinity College Dublin in Ireland, which were joined in 1999 by the Queen's University Belfast, and by the University of Edinburgh in 2002. Expanding the initial focus on the historical and politico-economic interrelations between these three regions, the Initiative fostered further research into their cultural, linguistic and literary intersections, whose outcomes were presented in a series of biannual international conferences with published proceedings.<sup>4</sup> This dynamic culminated in the establishing of the Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies (RIISS) at the University of Aberdeen in 1999. The capacity of this 'new subject' to attract major funding is, as Maley points out, indeed noteworthy: while Trinity received £400,000 by the Irish Higher Education Authority (HEA) to set up a Centre for Irish-Scottish Studies in 1999, Aberdeen University 'netted' (in Maley's words) for the first phase of its pilot-project an award of £870,000 over five years (Maley 2002: 13), which was followed in 2005 by the largest ever single grant given in the humanities of £1.34 million.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'Atlantic archipelago' has been put forward by Pocock as an alternative name for 'the British Isles', which entails a British history that subsumes and simultaneously negates the specificity of Ireland. See Pocock, 'British History: A Plea for a New Subject' (1975).

<sup>3</sup> The proceedings of this initial meeting were published under the editorship of Cullen and Smout as *Comparative Aspects of Economic and Social History 1600-1900* (1977).

<sup>4</sup> The first conference was held in 1997 at the University of Strathclyde; selected essays were edited by T.M. Devine and J.F. McMillan and published as *Celebrating Columba: Irish Scottish Connections, 597-1997* (1999). The second conference took place at Trinity College in 2000; proceedings were published by David Dickson *et al.* as *Ireland and Scotland: Nation, Region, Identity* (2001). Papers of the third biannual conference, which happened at Queen's University in 2002, were edited by Edna Longely *et al.* and printed as *Ireland (Ulster) Scotland: Concepts, Contexts, Comparisons* (2003). Contributions to the 2004 conference, held in Edinburgh under the title *National Identity and Cultural Exchange*, were partly published in the *Journal of Irish and Scottish Studies*, vol. 1.1., while the papers from the last event held at Aberdeen in 2007 still remain unpublished.

<sup>5</sup> See RIISS website: <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/riiss/history.shtml>. (accessed 1 April 2008).

This financial injection indicates the political significance of this development, which is, as the RISS website acknowledges, driven by the contemporary political and economic restructuring of the three state-formations on these isles. Where the Republic of Ireland radically altered its social and economic infrastructure under the impact of the so-called ‘Celtic Tiger’, devolution transformed the political landscape in Scotland, as does the current Peace Process in Northern Ireland. It is in this respect, then, that the RISS website emphasises the ‘profound similarities between the possible futures of these two nations’.<sup>6</sup> Significantly, this sentiment is not only invoked in academic discourse but has also been envisaged by political leaders, most notably by the current First Minister of the Scottish ‘government’ (as he famously renamed the Scottish executive) and head of the Scottish National Party (SNP), Alex Salmond. On his recent visit to Dublin in February 2008, he outlined his vision of ‘Scotland’s Future’ as an emulation of Ireland’s economic success; to create, in his words, ‘a Celtic Lion economy to match the Celtic Tiger on this side of the Irish Sea’. In his public lecture held at Trinity College, Salmond evokes ‘an Arch of Prosperity’ surrounding Scotland that consists of ‘small independent nations’ such as Ireland, whose ‘impressive and inspiring’ example he then uses to advocate the benefits of independence. ‘First, and most important,’ he proclaims, ‘there there are no limits to the success of an independent nation united by a common purpose’ (2008: n.p.).

But while Salmond’s envious glance towards the neighbouring isle conveniently elides the historical and politico-economical specificity of its Northern part, his invocation of a ‘common purpose’, apparently spoken in the name of all people respectively, similarly works to conceal the socio-economic divides and diverse sectional interests that rupture the assumed homogeneity of the national whole. This strategic obfuscation is reflected in his propagation of independence, which indicates not the emancipatory movement towards political self-determination but, instead, the increasing economic interdependence of small political micro-units with the free-market forces of global capitalism. In ‘Geopolitical Eclipse’, Aaron Kelly argues that it is also in this context that the current Northern Irish Peace Process needs to be understood. Hence, rather than necessarily leading to fuller democracy, the roughly

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

contemporaneous processes of political and economic change must, as Kelly insists, be seen as part of the global restructuring of the world's economic system (commonly called the 'new world order') that is attended by all the inevitable symptoms this entails (2005b: 545). What the visionary glances towards Ireland's and Scotland's shining future thus tend to forget is the enduring impact of class divisions, gender inequalities, patriarchy, sexism, racial discrimination, and poverty. It is with such issues that my thesis is concerned, issues which have been recurrently overlooked not only in political discourse but also in the field of Irish and Scottish cultural criticism.

For long, Ireland and Scotland have been only perceived through their relationship with England, which has prevented possibilities to establish a meaningful dialogue between them. However, it is also their historical-political relation to the former imperial centre that indicates their similar marginal location and experience. Indeed, there is a tendency in both Irish and Scottish studies to foreground 'their status as minority cultures', as Marilyn Reizbaum does in her pioneering Scottish-Irish comparative approach (1992: 169). As will be detailed in chapter one, such readings have been often influenced by a certain postcolonial model that justifies the preoccupation with national paradigms. In these, Ireland and Scotland are conceived as homogeneous entities that have been subjugated and marginalised by the historically overshadowing presence of England. As a result, the *telos* of the reconvened nation-state is posited as a panacea that can resolve all issues of identity and belonging. This is, for instance, evoked in Cairns Craig's recently developed idea of the nation as a 'suspended civil war' (2004: 248). This conception of the nation proposes a quasi-Hegelian *Aufhebung* (sublation) whereby the antagonisms and struggles of different groups are preserved – that is, 'suspended' – and at the same time cancelled – namely, regulated and subsumed by the hegemonic politics of the national.

Such a teleological model is attested by the ways in which Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland have been currently reconfigured as post-national spaces of postmodern plurality and multicultural diversity. This is most influentially promoted by Irish philosopher Richard Kearney, whose account of a *Postnationalist Ireland* (1997) has been celebrated as a means to transcend the immuring discourse of

essentialist ideas about nationality, specifically in the context of the North. Such postmodern revisions have lately also proven highly influential on the Scottish side of the Irish Sea. Whereas Craig's revaluation of Scotland's 'integral' hybridity renders it as the ultimate antidote to a monologic nationalism (2004: 240), Eleanor Bell's recent study, *Questioning Scotland*, directly draws on Kearney to advocate what she describes 'as an ethical concern with difference' that would disrupt 'the tendency [in Scottish studies] to resort to essentialist forms of national identity' (2004: 3-4). Notably, neither Kearney's model, nor Craig's or Bell's account, dispense with the nation as the most privileged socio-political category through which to analyse and understand each of these respective cultures and the challenges that they face.

However, rather than indicating a truly ethical effort to relate to or address what is radically other, this thesis argues that such postnational and/or postmodern celebrations of difference efface the continuing inequalities and disenfranchisements by translating them into a grammar of pluralism and inclusiveness. It is then against both national as well as post-national/postmodern approaches that my work sets out to explore the specific forms of disempowerment and oppression that continue to exist within, between and beyond national entities. I propose that these issues allow establishing *affiliations* between selected works of Irish, Northern Irish and Scottish writers. The concerns of class and gender both rupture and transgress a *filiative* containment within both national as well as post-national spaces.<sup>7</sup> My method for developing such a cross-archipelagic approach consists in a subaltern *aesthetics*. As this compound suggests, the three key aspects are the concept of the subaltern, ethics and aesthetics, which I will discuss in this order through the lenses of their major inspirations for my project.

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<sup>7</sup> See Edward Said's distinction between *filiation* and *affiliation* in *The World, the Text and the Critic* (1983: 16-20), as taken up by Kelly in *The Thriller and Northern Ireland* (2005a: 15). Kelly argues that the way in which national (and, by extension, postnational) ideologies are constructed around filiative, supposedly natural forms of relationships (whose paradigm is the family), is designated to obscure the complex web of affiliations that exist along the lines of class, gender, etc.

## II. TOWARDS A SUBALTERN APPROACH: A Concept and its DisContents

This thesis proposes a Marxist postcolonial framework for an Irish-Scottish comparative approach.<sup>8</sup> But whereas postcolonialism is, broadly speaking, analytic of unequal power relations between national wholes, it is a Subaltern Studies method that offers a more productive means to investigate how power operates in specific situations both within and between political formations. The Subaltern Studies collective was founded in India in 1982 under the intellectual and editorial auspices of Ranajit Guha. Its name derives from the terminology of the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, for designating social groups that are oppressed and subordinated by the (colonial and postcolonial) state-formation. While the term ‘subaltern’ referred originally to peasants and the lower working classes, it latterly expanded to include women and other marginalised identity groups. It is noteworthy that in the context of Irish studies, such an approach has been forwarded both by Colin Graham (1994b; 2001) and David Lloyd (1993; 1999). Yet whereas Graham uses the Subaltern Studies critique of nationalism to question the predominance of the nation in both Irish and postcolonial studies, Lloyd recasts this aspect to argue for the possibility of what he calls ‘nationalisms against the state’, to which I shall return in chapter one (1999: 19-36). Following Graham, then, rather than Lloyd, the inspiration that my project takes from Subaltern Studies is threefold: firstly, I appropriate the concept of ‘the subaltern’ for the specific purposes of this thesis. As with Gramsci and the Subaltern historians, I understand ‘subaltern’ as a relational term in a dialectic with ‘dominant’. Its usage thus predominantly consists in a metaphorical sense to designate unequal and iniquitous power relations between individuals and/or groups, underpinned by the institutional structures of the state. Accordingly, the term applies in my work to forms of disempowerment, oppression, exclusion and so on; issues that I will henceforth congregate with the adjective ‘subaltern’.

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<sup>8</sup> Throughout this thesis, the term ‘postcolonial’ implies a critical apprehension of practices of domination and oppression, rather than a period or moment ‘after colonialism’. It is on this basis that I differentiate ‘postcolonial’ from ‘post-colonial’. The contentiousness of a postcolonial reading of both Ireland and Scotland will be discussed in chapter one.

An intrinsically related aspect is the Subaltern Studies criticism of colonial and national historiography for constructing a teleological narrative of progress that has annexed the history of subaltern groups. Consequently, the tenet of the group of historians has been to ‘rewrite’ Indian history from the specific standpoint of ‘the people’. This endeavour to propose what Edward Said describes as ‘an alternative history to the official one’ (1988: vi) offers the second impetus for my work. Rather than endorsing the successful achievements of the three state-formations under focus here, the second chapter of my thesis outlines the model of a subaltern counter-history in the spirit of Walter Benjamin’s demand that history must be brushed against the grain. This will provide my primary methodological framework for registering the recalcitrance of the works selected for discussion to dominant historical paradigms, and their engagement with what is so often silenced and forgotten by them. If subaltern issues of poverty, class and gender inequities, violence and violations, and so on remain invariably ‘other’ – that is non-identical – to Western progress and development, they are at the same time its unavoidable symptoms that haunt the present historical moment. As such, they expose what I will elaborate as a historical-ethical disjuncture or interregnum, which the contemporary processes of so-called ‘democratic’ transformation in the Atlantic archipelago are designated to suture; namely, the impossibility of universal equality under capitalism.

This adumbrates the third aspect that this thesis seeks to resuscitate from the Subaltern Studies method, namely its force as an ethical form of criticism. On the one hand, care needs to be taken to resist reducing otherness to the terms of the self. Since my work argues for the importance to acknowledge and address the *radical* alterity of the subaltern and its concerns, it simultaneously insists on the non-identity and incommensurability of their demands with a capitalist utopia. As indicated before, equality is not simply translatable into difference and diversity but remains the incommensurate excess that ruptures any effort to rewrite inequality in a class society as heterogeneity or pluralism. On the other hand, there is a danger to construct the subaltern as an ethically pure category of *absolute* alterity. While my work affirms the need to investigate what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls ‘the *mechanics* of the constitution of the other’, those processes and strategies that ‘other’

the subaltern other (1994: 90),<sup>9</sup> it furthermore insists on the need to retain the capacity to morally adjudge these power relationships in terms of their fundamental inequality.

However, there has been a tendency in recent postcolonial criticism to read the subaltern as a singular category, seemingly ‘beyond’ a discernible position in history or society, which confirms the general trend of this disparate field that Peter Hallward identifies in his groundbreaking study, *Absolutely Postcolonial* (2001). As the concept of the subaltern has become – through its postcolonial usage – rather more diffuse than distinct, it seems necessary at this point to retrace its emergence and development in the work of its key thinkers: Antonio Gramsci, the Subaltern Studies collective and Gayatri Spivak. The aim here is to set up some of the basic parameters of the subaltern approach of this thesis, whilst also registering the grounds of dissent, in order to move towards a productive reconfiguration of the term, which is both specific to the framework of this project and retains its rigour as an ethical position. That is, in the spirit of the following Benjaminian epigraph, I wish to ‘rescue’ the concept from a singular orientation that is about to overpower it so that the term is again able to capture its radical dialectical impetus as a specific socio-cultural category.<sup>10</sup>

### **MAPPING THE ‘SUBALTERN’: From the Specific to the Singular**

*‘What matters for the dialectician is to have the wind of world history in his sails.  
Thinking means for him: setting the sails. What is important is how they are set.  
Words are his sails. The way they are set makes them into concepts.’  
(Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* [N 9,6])*

The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists three different meanings for the noun ‘subaltern’. It conventionally refers to ‘a person of inferior rank or status; a subordinate’, but also denotes a lower-ranking officer in the army, as well as a ‘particular’ proposition in philosophical logic ‘in relation to a universal of the same

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<sup>9</sup> See also Spivak’s concept of ‘Othering’, elaborated in ‘The Rani of Simur’ (1985a).

<sup>10</sup> Benjamin notes: ‘On the concept of “rescue”: the wind of the absolute in the sails of the concept. (The principle of the wind is cyclical.) The trim of the sails is the relative.’ (1999b: 473 [N9,3]).

quality’.<sup>11</sup> All three definitions but, in particular, the connotation of hierarchical power relations signified by the former two, illustrate Gramsci’s understanding of the term. Gramsci develops the concept in his *Prison Notebooks* with reference to the rural Italian peasantry, whose situation he first discussed in ‘Some Aspects of the Southern Question’ (1926). In this essay and in Notebook 25, which is exclusively devoted to the study of the subaltern and entitled ‘On the Margins of History (The History of Subaltern Groups)’,<sup>12</sup> Gramsci is concerned with the conditions of subalternity. In his analysis of the class structures of southern Italy, the relations between subaltern groups and dominant classes, and the role and function of intellectuals, ‘the subaltern’ emerges, as Marcus Green notes, ‘as a historically determined category that exists within particular historical, economic, political, social, and cultural contexts’ (2002: 8). David Arnold furthermore contends that Gramsci’s usage of the term is expressive of his dialectical thought, which aims ‘to bring out the conflicts and contradictions ... to be found within actual historical situations’ (2000: 33).

But if this promises a clearly delineated concept, it nonetheless proves otherwise. As the editors of the most commonly cited translation of his work, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, observe, Gramsci uses ‘subaltern’ interchangeably with ‘subordinate’ or even ‘instrumental’; ‘it is difficult to discern any systematic difference in Gramsci’s usage’, Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith conclude (1971: xiv). It is in this respect that Green asserts that Gramsci employs the word in a ‘figural or metaphorical sense ... when referring to subordinate social groups or classes’ (2002: 2). This has recurrently led commentators to argue that ‘subaltern’ is a euphemism or code name for the Marxist term ‘proletariat’ – as Timothy Brennan does, for example, in his *Wars of Position* (2006: 249) – in order to avoid censorship during his incarceration under Benito Mussolini’s fascist regime. On the other hand, for post-Marxist thinkers, such as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe as well as

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<sup>11</sup> Citations from the *Oxford English Dictionary* refer to the online-version, <<http://www.oed.com>>, under the general editorship of John Simpson (2008) (accessed between October 2004 and July 2008). Henceforth, I will abridge references with *OED* in parenthesis in the text.

<sup>12</sup> As Marcus Green point out, to date, only four of the eight sections of Notebook 25 have been translated into English. Note 2 and 5 are published in Hoare and Nowell Smith’s edited *Selections from the Prison Notebooks [SPN]* (1971: 52-55); Note 1 has been published in *Selections from the Cultural Writings* (1991: 50-5); and Note 7 in *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (1995: 238-41). See Green, ‘Gramsci Cannot Speak’ (2002: 2 FN2).

Spivak, whose endeavour is to dismiss the Marxist category of a revolutionary class subject altogether, Gramsci's reflections on the failed class alliance between the workers in Italy's industrial north and its southern peasantry apparently 'changed' his understanding of the term: in a 1992 interview, Spivak asserts that 'Gramsci began to be able to see ... [that] just class-formation questions were not going to solve anything' (de Kock 1992: 45).<sup>13</sup> But while it is certainly accurate that Gramsci's notion of the subaltern neither denotes a class 'in and for itself' nor is expressive of a revolutionary class consciousness *per se*, Green stresses that this conception obscures the fact that Gramsci used the term from the very beginning (that is, from his first notebook in 1929-30) for various historical contexts and circumstances (2002: 19). It is, however, this specifically post-Marxist understanding of Gramsci that has led to some severe misconceptions of 'the subaltern', which necessitates a return to his writings.

### **Antonio Gramsci's 'History of the Subaltern Classes'**

For Gramsci, the condition of subalternity is directly linked to his concepts of hegemony and the state, which consists (in his notion of the 'integral state') of both political society and civil society, comprising an 'organic' unity.<sup>14</sup> Gramsci explains the relation between the two spheres in his notes on the 'History of the Subaltern Classes':

The historical unity of the ruling classes is realised in the State, and their history is essentially the history of States and groups of States. But it would be wrong to think that this unity is simply juridical and political ... the fundamental historical unity, concretely, results from the organic relations between State or political society and civil society. (1971: 52)

This passage adumbrates the ways in which political power is maintained by the ruling classes not just by coercive force ('juridical and political') but also by establishing consent (what Gramsci also calls 'common sense') through promoting their specific ideology, beliefs and value-systems. Hegemony thus designates the

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<sup>13</sup> See also Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985: 12).

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed study of Gramsci's notion of the state, see Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State* (1980).

complex matrix of ideology and power within civil society by which subaltern groups are kept in their subordinate positioning; as Gramsci notes, they ‘are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up’ (55). Hence, in contrast to those who possess hegemonic power, Gramsci asserts that ‘the subaltern classes, by definition, are not unified and cannot unite until they become a “State”’ (52). Yet, rather than remaining outside or beyond the influence of the state, their history is ‘intertwined with that of civil society’, as they are also, Gramsci stresses, in ‘active or passive affiliation to the dominant political formation’ (52).

Accordingly, in the six phases that Gramsci lays out as his methodological criteria for the study of subaltern social formations, he demands attention not only to ‘their attempts to influence the programmes of these formations in order to press claims of their own’ but also to their production of ‘new formations which assert the autonomy of subaltern groups’ (52). That is, although ‘the history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic’, for Gramsci, ‘there undoubtedly exists a tendency to (at least provisional stages of) unification in the historical activity of these groups, but this tendency is continually interrupted by the activity of the ruling groups’ (54-5). Green argues that Gramsci’s six-point plan, therefore, not merely proposes a methodological approach, but also represents ‘the sequential process in which a subaltern group develops and grows into a dominant social group or, in other instances, is stopped in its ascent to power by dominant social groups or political forces’ (2002: 10). Hence, rather than describing a fixed position in relation to the state and the ruling classes, or a homogeneous development in a set of fixed stages, subalternity exists, as Green asserts, in different ‘degrees or levels of development’ (Ibid.).

Furthermore, while rejecting the teleological orientation and economic determinism of what is commonly called ‘vulgar’ Marxism,<sup>15</sup> Gramsci nonetheless retains a strong interest in a revolutionary strategy for subaltern liberation through the transformation of oppressive state structures. In Gramsci’s view, this necessitates that subaltern groups become a counter-hegemonic force and engage in a ‘war of

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Gramsci’s critique of ‘the iron conviction that there exist objective laws of historical development similar in kind to natural laws, together with a belief in a predetermined teleology like that of a religion’ (*SPN* 1971: 168), as also his discussion of the question ‘whether the fundamental historical crises are directly determined by economic crises’ (184-5).

position' with the ruling elite.<sup>16</sup> In this struggle for hegemony the organic intelligentsia plays an important role in challenging the dominant doctrine, and also by advocating an alternative set of socio-cultural values that is capable of 'bringing about not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity, posing all the questions around which the struggle rages, not on a corporate but on a "universal" plane' (181-2). This constitutes what Gramsci describes as an 'expansive' hegemony, which is set in opposition to a hegemonic 'transformism' wherein subaltern interests are absorbed and rewritten by the dominant classes (58-60). The ultimate endeavour of the subaltern struggle is 'to become a "State"' (52); that means to transform the social relations that produced and perpetuated their subalternity and create what Gramsci calls an 'ethical State – i.e. one which tends to put an end to the internal division of the ruled, etc., and to create a technically and morally unitary social organism' (259).

### **Subaltern Studies and the 'Recovery' of Subaltern Consciousness**

Where Gramsci's conception of subaltern groups foregrounds their revolutionary potential, it is this emphasis on autonomous agency that the work of the Subaltern Studies collective recuperates. For this endeavour, the group seems to have taken Gramsci's insistence on the responsibility of the Subaltern historian to attend to 'every trace of independent initiative on part of subaltern groups' as their guiding tenet (1971: 55). In the initial published volume of *Subaltern Studies*, its (former) general editor, Ranajit Guha, extends the definition of the eponymous name of their group to 'the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender, and office or in any other way' (1982a: vii). In alignment with Gramsci, Subaltern Studies uses the term as a category for historical analysis that will, as they hope, 'even remotely match [Gramsci's] six-point project' (Ibid.). More specifically, the appropriation of the concept aims, as Guha notes, 'to rectify the elitist bias characteristic of much research and academic work' in the field of South Asian studies (Ibid). This indicates the counter-historiographical motivation of their project, directed against the

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<sup>16</sup> See Gramsci, *SPN* (1971: 229-35; 238-9).

dominance asserted both by ‘colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism’, which originated, Guha famously declares, ‘as the ideological product of British rule in India’ (1982b: 1). As Gyan Prakash observes in his article on ‘Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism’, the formation of Subaltern Studies occurred in response to the growing discontent with the Indian nation-state in the 1970s (1994: 1476). In particular the coercive measures imposed under the emergency of the Indira Gandhi government attest to the fact that the postcolonial nation is not necessarily liberating or emancipatory but often merely perpetuates the structures of oppression which it purportedly displaced, and thus maintains the subordination of subaltern groups. Hence, Guha’s critique of postcolonial India derives from its failure to ‘*to speak for*’ its people, in particular the subaltern classes whose agency and history has been ‘left out by this un-historical historiography’, as he puts it (1982b: 4).

In order to reclaim what Guha calls ‘the *politics of the people*’ (Ibid.), Subaltern Studies took inspiration from the ‘history from below’ approaches pioneered by English historians such as E.P. Thompson and E.J. Hobsbawn.<sup>17</sup> Like these Marxist scholars, the Subaltern historians were concerned with recovering the historical agency of subaltern groups under the colonial regime; ‘the contribution made by the people *on their own*,’ Guha stresses, ‘that is, *independently of the elite*’ (1982b: 3). But in contrast to Gramsci who emphasises the ‘affiliation’ of subalterns to dominant formations (which they are always ‘subject to’), subaltern politics constitute for Guha, ‘an *autonomous* domain, for it neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence depend on the latter’ (1982b: 4). Accordingly, Guha distinguishes two different modes of political organisation. ‘Mobilization in the domain of elite politics was achieved vertically,’ he asserts, whereas the mobilisation of ‘subaltern politics’ took place through horizontal affiliations, relying ‘more on the traditional organization of kinship and territoriality or on class associations’ (Ibid.). This differentiation between subaltern and elite ‘politics’ furthermore diverges from the Marxist historians who regard subaltern rebellion as ‘primitive’ or ‘pre-political’, as, for example, evinced in Hobsbawn’s study of social banditry in his tellingly entitled *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement* (1959: 2). Instead of seeing peasant revolts as ‘an anachronism in a modernizing colonial world’, Dipesh

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<sup>17</sup> See E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1968) and E.J. Hobsbawn, ‘On History from Below’ in *On History* (1997: 201-216).

Chakrabarty explains that Guha saliently insists that ‘the peasant was a real contemporary of colonialism and a fundamental part of the modernity that colonial rule gave rise to in India’ (2000: 473).

In reclaiming ‘the political’, Guha furthermore refutes the historiographic ‘myth’, as he calls it, that peasant rebellions were ‘purely spontaneous and unpremeditated affairs’ (1988: 45). Insurgency, Guha contends, ‘was a motivated and conscious undertaking on part of the rural masses’ (46). Searching the colonial archives for traces of subaltern agency, Guha argues in ‘The Prose of Counter-Insurgency’ that historical writings often constitute ‘an act of appropriation which excludes the rebel as the conscious subject of his own history and incorporates the latter as only a contingent element in another history with another subject’ (77). Hence, where colonialist as well as nationalist historiography assimilated peasant revolts under the triumphal narrative of the Raj or the *telos* of the independent nation, Marxist historiography similarly tended to ‘arrange [insurgencies] along the alternative axis of a protracted campaign for freedom and socialism’ (Ibid.). It is this ‘act of appropriation’ of subalternity that has subsequently come to the forefront of subalternist concerns. For example, Partha Chatterjee’s *The Nation and its Fragments* (1993) engages specifically with the issue of how Indian nationalism has dominated and subsequently subsumed the area of subaltern politics, particularly the ‘women’s question’, in the drive to establish a modern nation-state. I will come back to these issues in the second part of this thesis, which explicitly deals with the complex relationship between gender and nation, what a recent anthology calls *Dangerous Liaisons* (1997). Furthermore, it is this theme of appropriation of the feminine with which my last chapter is concerned.

However, the desire of Subaltern Studies to restore the subaltern ‘as the conscious subject of *his* own history’ (my emphasis) has precipitated objections from several critics, who pointed out that this ‘recovery’ of a conscious subject-agent – tacitly assumed to be male – falls back on liberal-humanist notions that have effected subaltern subjection in the first place.<sup>18</sup> It is on these grounds that Spivak’s theoretical intervention in Subaltern Studies is based.

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<sup>18</sup> See Rosalind O’Hanlon’s 1988 review of *Subaltern Studies*, ‘Recovering the Subject’ (2000).

## Spivak's Subalternist Intervention: Strategic Subaltern vs. Ethical Aporia

In her 1985 contribution 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Hystiography', Spivak criticises the masculine bias of Subaltern Studies for 'emptying [woman] of her meaning'; while acknowledging the group's 'scrupulous' attention to women, she points to their utter 'indifference' to women's 'instrumental' function in insurgent mobilisation (1988: 31, 26-7). As indicated by Chatterjee's work, Spivak's critique has generated a crucial expansion of the work of the collective, with increasing focus on how issues of gender and sexuality are entangled with the discourses of colonialism, nationalism and postcolonialism.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Spivak's evaluation of the theoretical scope of the group discerns a discrepancy between the historians' (post)structuralist methodology and a seemingly 'positivistic' desire to discover a 'peasant consciousness' (10). Hence, in order for the group to avoid the pitfalls of a supposedly disavowed humanism, Spivak hopes 'to align them with deconstruction' (8). For while the 'consciousness' that is to be uncovered from the archival silences can only ever be 'negative', Spivak concludes that 'the subaltern's view, will, presence, can be no more than a theoretical fiction to entitle the project of reading' (12).

But if this is intended as a warning to those seeking to recover an 'authentic' subaltern, it also poses a profound ethical dilemma for the integral historian who, as Spivak writes, 'is either caught in a deliberate choice of subalternity, granting to the oppressed either that very expressive subjectivity which s/he criticizes or, instead, a total unrepresentability' (17). In 'A Moral Dilemma', Spivak revisits this 'founding gap' of the 'ethical situation', in which the imagining of the 'radical alterity' of the subaltern 'can only be figured in the ethical experience of the impossible' (2001: 216). However, this 'aporia of the ethical', which is 'haunted by the ghost of the undecidable in every decision,' Spivak insists, 'is the condition of possibility of deciding. In the Aporia, to decide is the burden of responsibility' (221-22). This emphasises the radical ethical decision made by the subaltern historians – a deliberate and decisive positioning that inspires my own approach – which Spivak

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<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, Guha, 'Chandra's Death' in *A Subaltern Studies Reader* (1997: 34-62); and the contributions to Volume XI of *Subaltern Studies: Community, Gender and Violence* (2000), edited by Chatterjee and Pradeep Jeganathan.

has supported at the time as ‘a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously viable political interest’ (1988: 13). But where her ‘apologetic formula’, as she later calls it (2000: 333), justifies the political strategy of Subaltern Studies, Spivak has subsequently pointed to the dangers of using it as a general method to bridge the gap between theory and practice, between the historical-political and the ethical, and between the critic and ‘the people’ – especially when appropriated by Western intellectuals.

In her famous 1988 essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, Spivak accordingly takes issue with the ‘activist’ branch of poststructuralism, embodied by Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, whose radical undoing of the ‘sovereign subject’ is, in turn, undone by their accounts of political practice. ‘In the name of desire,’ Spivak notes, ‘they reintroduce the undivided subject into the discourse of power’ (1994: 68). Such ‘valorisation of the oppressed as subject’ upholds the subaltern as an authentic and empirical category, justifying the desire of Western intellectuals to speak about the ‘concrete experience’ of disempowerment and oppression, which however, according to Spivak, merely helps to ‘consolidate the international division of labour’ (69). As Colin Graham points out, there is also a danger here to celebrate an ‘ethics of oppression’ in which the subaltern becomes ‘a theoretical site of disempowered purity’ (2001: 106). But, as Spivak contends, what all this talk about oppression crucially overlooks is the ideological and ‘historical role of the intellectual’ *himself* (66). That is, rather than invoking ‘the *authenticity* of the Other’, these critics need to consider their own implication in ‘the *mechanics* of the constitution of the Other’ (90). For in ‘representing [the subaltern], the intellectuals represent themselves as transparent’, which renders the subaltern other ‘mute’ (70).

Spivak points here to the power gap inherent in the politics of representation that is obscured by conflating the two distinct, if related, senses of representation, which she invokes via the famous phrase in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* (1852) in which Karl Marx states with reference to the small peasant proprietors [*Parzellenbauern*] under Napoleon III: ‘They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented’ (1972: 239).<sup>20</sup> When Marx talks of the political representation of the *Parzellenbauern* the German verb is *vertreten*, in the sense of ‘speaking for’, in contrast to the

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<sup>20</sup> For an astute critique of Spivak’s (mis)reading of Marx, see Neil Larsen, ‘Marxism, Postcolonialism, and *The Eighteenth Brumaire*’ (2002).

epistemological *Darstellung* as ‘re-presentation’ in the arts or in philosophy. Hence, the foundational gap that separates the subaltern from their representation in Western elite discourses is dissimulated by a supposedly power-free re-presentation (*Darstellung*) that assumes that ‘the oppressed can know and speak for themselves’ (74). But it is in fact by ascribing a voice and consciousness to the subaltern, who are powerless to represent themselves, that they are spoken for by the intellectuals. Whereas Gramsci bridged this gap through his notion of the ‘organic intellectuals’ whose affiliations with their local community impel their ‘active participation in [the] practical life’ of ‘the people’ (1971: 10), for Spivak, the inevitable result is that ‘the subaltern cannot speak’ (104). This refers in particular to the female subaltern whose voice and agency cannot be recognised – that is, ‘heard’ – as she remains, according to Spivak, seemingly irretrievably *outside* socio-political and economic infrastructures.<sup>21</sup> Through Edward Said, Spivak nonetheless insists on ‘the critic’s institutional responsibility’ to continue the task of re-presentation with self-awareness of her/his own role (75).<sup>22</sup> For, she maintains, ‘representation has not withered away’ (104). However, this task is for her not merely ‘circumscribed’ (Ibid.), but it is especially her own conception of ‘the subaltern’ that renders it quasi impossible.

### **Spivak’s Singular Subalternity: Cut Off and Out of Touch**

Spivak’s notion of ‘the subaltern’ has undergone several shifts in emphasis and approach but, nonetheless, reaches a discernible settlement in what she refers to as the ‘ethical singularity [of] the subaltern’ (1996: 269) or, simply, a ‘singular subalternity’ (2005: 475). If the subaltern once represented for Spivak the ‘paradigmatic victims of [the international] division’ of labour, namely ‘the women of the urban sub-proletariat and of unorganized peasant labor’ (1985a: 271), she has subsequently emphasised the term’s incommensurability with, or resistance to any

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<sup>21</sup> In a later interview, Spivak has explained that the dire conclusion of her essay refers to its implication in a speech act, which consists of both ‘speaking and hearing’. That means, according to Spivak, ‘that even when the subaltern makes an effort to speak, she is not able to be heard’ (‘Subaltern Talk’ in Landry and MacLean 1996: 292).

<sup>22</sup> See Said’s discussion of the responsibility of the critic in *The World, the Text, the Critic* (1991).

forms of exemplarity. In this, Spivak diverges from the philosophical logic intrinsic to the term (in its *OED* definition as a ‘particular’ example supporting a ‘universal’ proposition) that has underwritten its usage both by Gramsci and the Subaltern Studies historians. Instead, following Gilles Deleuze, Spivak argues that ‘the singular is not the particular because it is an unrepeatable difference that is, on the other hand, repeated – not as an example of a universal but as an instance of a collection of repetitions’ (2005: 475). It is this sense of singularity that underpins Spivak’s description of subalternity: ‘If the thinking of subalternity is taken in the general sense, its lack of access to mobility may be a version of singularity. Subalternity cannot be hegemonized according to the hegemonic logic. That is what makes it subaltern’ (Ibid.). Where Gramsci insists not only on the specific relationship or ‘affiliation’ of subaltern groups with hegemonic structures but also on the possibility to transform their position (exactly by creating a new hegemonic logic), Spivak contends that the subaltern is ‘cut off’ or ‘removed from all lines of social mobility’ (2000a: xxi; 2005: 475). For Spivak, subalternity occupies ‘a space out of any serious touch with the logic of capitalism or socialism ... Please do not confuse it,’ she beseeches, ‘with unorganised labor, women as such, the proletarian, the colonized, the object of ethnography, migrant labor, political refugees, etc. Nothing useful comes out of this confusion’ (1995: 115). Dispelling the subaltern ‘Other’ to a sub-nominal place, located beyond any cognisable historical, socio-political and economic structures, Spivak’s definition has lost any sense of the causes, the relation of forces that create and constitute the condition of subalternity itself.

Hence, even though Spivak stresses that ‘the subaltern “is” not the absolute other. (Nothing) (is) the absolute other’ (2000a: xx; original bracketing), her inaccessibility to any conventional notions of experience, situation, mobilisation and solidarity constitutes Spivak’s subaltern as what Peter Hallward astutely describes as an impossible ‘*untouchable*’ site of theoretical purity (2001: 30). That is, pure because uncontaminated by any systems of knowledge, representation or politics; but also, as Colin Graham intimates, pure because so utterly disempowered that nothing could possibly transform her status (2001: 110).<sup>23</sup> According to Spivak, ‘subalternity is a position without identity ... where social lines of mobility, being elsewhere, do not

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<sup>23</sup> Admittedly, Graham does not relate this to Spivak’s conception of the subaltern, but instead uses her own arguments to criticise this purity.

permit the formation of a recognisable basis of action' (2005: 476). From this standpoint, subalternity becomes an end in itself, a petrified singular state that signals the so-called 'end of history' (more on this in the next chapter). Indeed, there seems no viable political alternative or hope for Spivak, who perceives capitalism and socialism 'as each other's *différance*', that is, as she explains via Jacques Derrida, 'as the different and deferred *within* the systematic ordering of *the same*' (1995: 110-11; my emphasis).<sup>24</sup> Any ethical or political engagement appears, then, merely and always 'aporetic' (1999: 399) by reaffirming 'an impossible social justice glimpsed through the remote and secret encounters with singular figures' (1996: 274).

Ultimately, Spivak's conception proves both politically and ethically disabling.<sup>25</sup> Despite her critique of the failure of intellectuals to conceptualise their own speaking position in supposedly allowing the subaltern to speak for themselves, there is a danger here that Spivak's insistence on a singular subalternity disguises her own role as intellectual, which becomes comparably singular and decontextualised. Furthermore, if the subaltern is defined as 'the lowest of the low', that is, denied a position of agency or enunciation in society, history and politics, then there is ultimately something troubling about any attempt to render the subaltern singular since this, in turn, deprives her/him of any space of agency, articulation and means of representation. In contrast to Spivak's notion, then, this thesis insists that in order for the concept of the subaltern to be ethically and politically meaningful it must be understood as a *specific* socio-cultural category that pertains, as in its original Gramscian usage, to the concrete experience of subordination that is constituted by and implicated with the social and institutional structures of state formations. In *Absolutely Postcolonial*, Hallward notes that the specific mode of approach involves 'the active negotiation of relations and the deliberate taking of sides, choices and risks, in a domain and under constraints that are external to these takings' (2001: xii). This formulation intimates the ethical thrust that I wish to recover from Spivak's project. Although she affirms the burdensome decision that is to be made by the

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<sup>24</sup> Cited from Derrida, 'Différance', in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Allan Bass (Chicago UP, 1982), p. 17.

<sup>25</sup> For a critique of Spivak's notion of the subaltern from a Marxist-postcolonial perspective, see Benita Parry, 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse' (1987: 34-5); Neil Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World* (1999: 112-15); Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory* (1997: 74-113).

responsible ‘postcolonial critic’ and in spite of the pragmatic emphasis of her latest work, Spivak’s approach forecloses a situated positioning that can be diagnostic of the specific place that the subaltern other occupies or is relegated to in a given society.

The problematics of Spivak’s deconstructive ethics can be discerned in Emmanuel Levinas understanding of ethics, which she adopts from Derrida.<sup>26</sup> It was largely through the influence of the latter that Levinas’ work reached prominence in cultural and literary studies, in conjunction with the so-called ethical (re)turn in Western philosophy since the 1980s.<sup>27</sup> As an inspiration for my approach to ethics, I shall therefore briefly delineate the basic ideas of Levinas’ work, which I will then reformulate as a subaltern ethics.

### III. TOWARDS A SUBALTERN ETHICS: Levinas & the Infinite Responsibility for the Other

*‘We are all responsible for all for all men before all, and I am more than all the others’*  
(Fyodor Dostoyevsky, cited by Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*)

This claim, which is voiced by Alyosha Karamazov in Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) and frequently invoked by Levinas, captures perhaps best the imperative of Levinasian ethics: the irreducible responsibility we all have for the other person (or what he calls ‘the Other’).<sup>28</sup> Levinas’ notion of ethics derives from his critique of Western models of philosophy, in particular ontology, which focuses,

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<sup>26</sup> Levinas’s influence on Derrida’s thought comes especially to the fore in his later works, such as *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* (1997/1999), *Archive Fever* (1994/1995) and *Spectres of Marx* (1993/1994); the latter two will be discussed in chapter three and four, respectively. For Derrida’s initial engagement with Levinas, see his 1964 essay ‘Violence and Metaphysics’ in *Writing and Difference* (1978).

<sup>27</sup> This perceived ‘turn to ethics’, which resonates through numerous publications, is indeed a *return* to one of the founding branches of philosophy, dating back to early Greeks. See, for instance, the following collections of essays: *The Renewal of Ethics in Contemporary Thought* (2001), edited by Howard Marchitello; *Mapping the Ethical Turn* (2000), edited by Todd Davis and Kenneth Womack; and *The Turn to Ethics* (2000), edited by Marjory Garber *et al.*. Many critics consider the Paul de Man affair in the late 80s – concerning his support of Nazism in his early career – as a crucial factor for bringing ethics back on a deconstructive agenda (see Geoffrey Harpham, ‘Ethics’ 1995: 389-90).

<sup>28</sup> Levinas’ notion of ‘the Other’ is usually capitalised in the translations of his work; however it is not always the case. When referring to the singular Levinasian ‘Other’ I shall henceforth apply this spelling, but generally use lower cases.

as in the thought of Martin Heidegger, on the meaning and understanding of Being (as in our being-in-the-world, or *Dasein*) rather than on the existence of other beings.<sup>29</sup> For Levinas, this ontological interest in the self or ego – what he jocosely calls ‘egology’ (1985: 44; 117) – violently suppresses otherness by assimilating alterity into sameness (which Levinas associates with totality). Levinas’ work is thus concerned with the ‘Other’ to Being or, as the title of his later book puts it, with *Otherwise Than Being* (1974), that is, with how to preserve the radical alterity of the Other. For, as Levinas proposes in *Totality and Infinity* (1961), it is only through the confrontation with alterity that ‘ethics’ emerges:

A calling into question of the Same – which cannot occur within the egoistic spontaneity of the Same – is brought about by the Other [*l’Autre*]. We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thought and my possessions, is precisely accomplished ... as ethics. (1979: 43)

Significantly, Levinas associates the mysterious incommensurability of the Other with the feminine, which becomes a privileged term in his work that is able ‘to disrupt the primacy of totality, sameness, system and concept’. However, as Tina Chanter explains, ‘the sense in which the feminine cannot be said to be a being’ becomes ultimately problematic for feminism or any other political project of collective emancipation (2001: 3, 15).

But if the Other remains forever beyond cognition and comprehension, since its alterity must by all means be preserved, for Levinas, it is through the encounter with what he calls the ‘face’ (*visage*) that an ethical relationship between self and other – that is, ‘a relation without relation’ (1979: 80) – becomes possible. Levinas states that ‘in the interpersonal relationship it is not a matter of thinking the ego and the other together, but to be facing. The true union or true togetherness is not the togetherness of synthesis, but a togetherness of face to face’ (1985: 77). This face-to-face encounter puts into question my claims for freedom, power and knowledge by confronting me with my infinite responsibility that is prior to everything else; that is, prior to ontology. It is in this regard that Levinas names ethics as ‘first philosophy’.

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<sup>29</sup> See Heidegger’s 1927 opus, *Being and Time*. Levinas’ dispute with Heidegger largely stems from the latter’s support of National Socialism when accepting the position of Rector at the University of Freiburg in 1933.

Furthermore, it is also this call of the Other, the silent demand to be there *for* the Other, that constitutes my subjectivity through what Levinas describes as a ‘substitution’ of the self for the Other, a ‘being-for-the-Other’ (*être pour l’autre*). As Alphonso Lingis writes in the ‘Translator’s Introduction’ to *Otherwise Than Being*, it is by ‘putting oneself in the place of another ... [that] I become substantial and a subject, subjected to the world by others. And because in putting myself in the place of another I am imperiously summoned, singled out, through it I accede to singularity’ (1981: xxiii). This means, Lingis explains, ‘that the whole weight of the universe is on my shoulders, and that I cannot shift this burden upon anyone else ... The approach of the other holding me responsible for everything ... is what singularises me utterly’ (xxx). As several commentators observe, this insistence on the uniqueness of my responsibility is itself unique to Levinasian ethics.<sup>30</sup>

As a result, ethical relations are for Levinas both unconditional and asymmetrical. ‘Intersubjective relation is a non-symmetrical relation,’ Levinas emphasises in one of his conversations with Philippe Nemo in *Ethics and Infinity*:

In this sense, I am responsible for the Other without waiting for reciprocity ... I am responsible for a total responsibility, which answers for all the others and for all in the others, even for all their responsibility. The I always has one responsibility *more* than all the others. [...] I am I in the sole measure that I am responsible, a non-interchangeable I. I can substitute myself for everyone, but no one can substitute himself for me. (1985: 98-9; 101)

This seeming paradox between the utter singularity of one’s responsibility, which is not generalisable to a universal moral code, and its ‘universal substitution’ (Lingis: xxxi) intimates a movement from the ethical to the political sphere. In order for the ethical intimacy of the face-to-face relation to open up to wider issues of social justice, Levinas introduces the notion of ‘the third party’ (*le tiers*), who ensures, as Simon Critchley notes in *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, ‘that the ethical relation always takes place within a political context, within the public realm’ (1999: 225). For Levinas, it is the encounter with the face of the Other that also confronts one with all the innumerable others that make up society. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas expresses this as follows: ‘The third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other –

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<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, Zygmunt Bauman’s discussion of Levinas in *Postmodern Ethics* (1993: 51-3, 85-87, 220 N30).

language is justice ... the epiphany of the face qua face opens humanity' (1979: 213). It is here that my responsibility to the Other becomes the basis for my relation to humanity as a whole, and therefore for justice. While this remains an asymmetrical and, thus, inherently unequal relation, it is through the implication of 'the third party' in the Other that Levinas indicates the fundamental equality of ethical relations within a community. Levinas writes: 'The poor one, the stranger, present himself as an equal. His equality within this essential poverty consists in referring to the *third party*, thus present at the encounter, whom in the midst of his destitution the Other already serves' (Ibid.). However, as will be elaborated in the last chapter, it is questionable to what extent this ethical equality is available for women. For the idea of community that is introduced through *le tiers* is and remains in Levinas' work ultimately male: it is a 'human fraternity', a community of 'brothers' that 'involves the commonness of a father' (1979: 214).

Levinas's philosophy makes clear the shift that the understanding of 'ethics' has undergone after him: instead of an evaluative ethics that passes judgements or demands a deliberate moral positioning, what has been advocated as a 'postmodern ethics' is primarily understood in terms of concern for 'the Other'.<sup>31</sup> Against this false choice of either/or, my work seeks to recover and align both of these aspects in what I call 'subaltern ethics'. Hence, in contrast to Levinas (and by extension Spivak) for whom this responsibility derives from the utter incommensurability, that is, the absolute singularity of the Other, I want to suggest that a subaltern ethics must be based on a responsiveness to the *ethos* of the other, namely the specific position and place that a subaltern other occupies in a given society.<sup>32</sup> This approach to ethics through *ethos* retains the capacity of mapping individual experiences of disempowerment and oppression onto the network of power structures that constitute a social whole.<sup>33</sup> A subaltern ethics thereby demands of the critic a careful scrutiny

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<sup>31</sup> See especially the work of Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (1993) and *Life in Fragments* (1995).

<sup>32</sup> I base this definition on the spatial metaphoric inherent in the Greek word *ethos*, which denotes, as Nedra Reynolds notes, in addition to its meaning as character – commonly within or in relation to a community or *polis* – 'an accustomed place'. In 'Ethos as Location', Reynolds accordingly argues for understanding *ethos* as 'one's place or perceived place in the world' (1993: 327-8, 325).

<sup>33</sup> This notion of 'mapping' is conceived in affiliation with Frederic Jameson's concept of 'cognitive mapping', which he extrapolates from Kevin Lynch's description of the mapability of cityspaces to 'the realm of social structure' through Louis Althusser's formulation of ideology as 'the Imaginary representation of the subject's relationship to his or her Real conditions of existence' (1988: 353). For

and negotiation of power relations, a deliberate taking of sides, decisions and risks that emerge out of what Levinas emphasises as the irreducible responsibility we all have towards the other. For if the ethical relationship remains forever beyond conventional models of cognition and comprehension, and the other thus forever utterly ‘Other’, a meaningful political approach is circumvented from the start. Given the literary nature of this thesis, I will now elaborate specifically how such a subaltern ethics is conceivable in and facilitated by literature.

#### IV. TOWARDS A SUBALTERN AESTHETICS: Adorno’s & Rancière’s Political Aesthetics

I began this introduction by suggesting that literature can offer a space for ethical and political contemplation of subaltern concerns. Indeed, despite Levinas’ antipathy, ethics and aesthetics have been traditionally considered as closely related. ‘Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same [*sind Eins*]’, Ludwig Wittgenstein, for instance, famously noted on 24 July 1916 (1969: 77e).<sup>34</sup> Fredric Jameson, on the other hand, has deprecated the conflation between these two realms: that ‘ethical criticism’ has become an ‘interpretative master code’ which ‘sedimented reading habits’, as he argues in *The Political Unconscious* (1981/2002: 44, x). If many critics have nonetheless claimed that ethics disappeared from literary studies, it has lately made a noticeable comeback.<sup>35</sup> One of the perhaps best known advocates is Martha Nussbaum, who argues in *Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* that the central moral concerns – ‘How should one to live?’ or, more directly, ‘the best way to live’ – can *only* be adequately expressed through novels, through the formal features of a literary text (1990: 168-70, 3-4).<sup>36</sup> Whereas Nussbaum’s neo-Aristotelian ethics tend to consider literature as directly reflective of and thus instructive for empirical reality, the opposite is evoked by some proponents of the

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an incisive critique of some of the masculinist assumptions underpinning Jameson’s concept from a feminist perspective, see Kathleen Kirby, ‘Re: Mapping Subjectivity’ (1996).

<sup>34</sup> For a discussion of Wittgenstein’s remark, see Robert Eaglestone, ‘One and the Same?’ (2004).

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, David Parker, *Ethics, Theory, and the Novel* (1994: 32).

<sup>36</sup> For a detailed discussion of Nussbaum’s claims, see Cora Diamond, ‘Martha Nussbaum and the need for novels’ (1998).

literary philosophical movement that labels itself the ‘*New Aestheticism*’, which endeavours to recover the irreducible singularity of artworks against the influence of political approaches to theory and to identity politics, in particular. ‘The singularity of the work’s “art-ness” escapes,’ John J. Joughin and Simon Malpas complain in the introduction to their influential collection of essays under this label, ‘and all that remains is the critical discourse itself, reassured of its methodological approach and able to reassert its foundational principles’ (2003: 3). It is in opposition to such an ideological reduction of art’s otherness to the terms of the self that the aesthetic realm is defended as an autonomous space for postmodern ethics.

This is, for example, evident in Thomas Docherty’s recent advocacy of what he terms an *Aesthetic Democracy*, which sets out to refute that ‘a political state of affairs determines the shape and nature of our arts’ (2006: ix). Without further ado about who that ‘our’ might include (and especially exclude), Docherty claims, as his title suggests, that the Western political principle of democracy, which is proposed as the universal ethics of good life, is and can, in fact, *only* be made possible through the aesthetic realm: that ‘democracy is entirely *conditioned* by aesthetics as such’, the ‘only genuine democracy that is [nowadays] possible’ (ix, 159).<sup>37</sup> Hence, as art ceases to be contaminated by contemporary social politics and history, it instead becomes a utopian space to realize this ultimate *telos* of humanity: of ‘becoming human’, as Docherty puts it, which however means for him of becoming ‘other’ than the self (xiii, 3). Docherty relates this potential of literature to Derrida’s notion of ‘absolute hospitality’ (adopted from Levinas), which insists on an opening to alterity: to ‘*give place*,’ as Derrida demands, ‘to the absolute other’ (39).<sup>38</sup> Part of Docherty’s aim is to reclaim such a hospitality for ‘those other writers ... to whom we have become, institutionally, less friendly’; and he lists an apparently “random” choice’ of what he himself acknowledges to be ‘DWEMs’ (40).<sup>39</sup> What is most telling is that such a generosity to a *place* is, however, not extended to Scottish author James Kelman, whose ‘identifications with or identifiability as “working-class

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<sup>37</sup> In his forthcoming article, Kelly astutely exposes the telling contradictions upon which Docherty’s aesthetic democracy is based: namely that art becomes here a *privileged* – as indeed exceptional – site in which ‘genuine democracy’ happens. This in itself is an oxymoric negation of the most fundamental principle of democracy. See Kelly, ‘James Kelman’s *A Disaffection*, the Enlightenment, Romanticism and Melancholy Knowledge’ (2009).

<sup>38</sup> Quoted from Anne Fourmantele and Derrida, *De l’hospitalité* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1997), p. 29.

<sup>39</sup> ‘DWEM’: Acronym for ‘Dead White European Males’.

Glaswegian” are – alongside other minoritarian or oppressed identity categories, such as ‘black woman’, for example – dismissed as they interfere with the apparently *hospitable* ‘singularity’ that Docherty envisages; ‘anything else is both egocentric and inimical to culture, growth, *Bildung*’ for him (2006: 40). Similar to Spivak’s notion of the subaltern (and to some extent to the Levinasian ethical encounter), in Docherty’s aesthetic purism, art becomes an autonomous event, apparently beyond politics, society or ideology, which allows him, in turn, to conceal his own specific place as both reader and intellectual.

This elitist conception of aesthetics evokes, in my view, the anaesthetising consequences that the reversal of meaning of the term generated, which Susan Buck-Morss discusses in her article ‘Aesthetics and Anaesthetics’ in relation to Benjamin’s 1936 ‘Artwork’ essay.<sup>40</sup> From its original etymological meaning as a ‘sensory experience of perception’, the word came to be applied first and foremost to art and cultural forms, whereby – through what Buck-Morss considers the leitmotif of autogenesis – the ‘aesthetic’ was then ‘cleansed of any contamination by the senses’ (1992: 9). Such a dialectical reversal, Buck-Morss argues, ‘whereby aesthetics changes from a cognitive mode of being “in touch” with reality to a way of blocking out reality, destroys the human organism’s power to respond politically’ (18). This makes it necessary to reclaim aesthetics as a realm that can be politically responsive to the specific place of the subaltern other and her/his concerns – what I have formulated as a subaltern ethics. For this endeavour, I propose that Theodor W. Adorno’s and Jacques Rancière’s understanding of aesthetics can be productively aligned with my approach, and thus provide a salient complementation for a subaltern *aesthetics*. In their insistence on the politics of aesthetic forms, the work of both of these thinkers further enables the dissociation of my subaltern *aesthetics* from the *anaesthetic* effects that demarcate postmodern approaches.

In distinction to the recent perusal of a singular purism beyond social contamination, Adorno’s dialectic apprehension of aesthetics insists on the immanent specificity of artworks:

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<sup>40</sup> See Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ in *Illuminations* (1999a: 211- 244).

[Art] is defined by its relation to what it is not. The specifically artistic in art must be derived concretely from its other; that alone would fulfil the demands of a materialistic-dialectic aesthetics. Art acquires its specificity by separating itself from what it developed out of; its law of movement is its law of form. It exists only in relation to its other; it is the process [with it] [*der Prozeß damit*]. (1997: 3)<sup>41</sup>

While Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* (1970) advocates the formal autonomy of artworks – their non-identity with empirical reality – he simultaneously maintains that they are the products of a specific social context to which they yet retain a negative or critical distance. This is astutely encapsulated in the following phrase: 'Art is the social antithesis of society, not directly deducible from it' (1997: 9). That is, on the one hand, art resides not beyond the social; it offers no means to escape the unfreedoms and divisions of social reality, as Docherty for instance would have it. By contrast, Adorno argues that these make out 'the wound that art itself bears': 'The unresolved antagonisms of reality return in artworks as immanent problems of form' (1997: 2, 7). As I will show in the following, this is indeed evident in the fictions chosen for discussion in this thesis: these works refuse to cauterise the 'wounds' of history, but mediate its conflicts and contradictions on the level of both form and content. On the other hand, it is this critical or antithetical relation of artworks to the empirical world that opens up an alternative realm, wherein it is possible to critically address, explore and challenge that which is silenced, renounced or impossible in the dominant conditions of the present:

Artworks are afterimages of empirical life insofar as they help the latter to what is denied them outside their own sphere and thereby free it from that to which they are condemned by reified external experience ... Artworks are alive in that they speak in a fashion that is denied to natural objects and the subjects who make them. They speak by virtue of the communication of everything particular in them. Thus they come into contrast with the arbitrariness of what simply exists. Yet it is precisely as artefacts, as products of social labour, that they also communicate with the empirical experience that they reject and from which they draw their content [*Inhalt*]. (1997: 5)

Adorno's reflections emphasise the complex dialectic of art with the social, which suggests, however, not a Hegelian resolution or reconciliation but insists on 'art [as] the negative knowledge of the actual world' (1977: 160).

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<sup>41</sup> See Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* (1973: 12).

The radical political aspect that is inherent in Adorno's notion of aesthetics as a space for critique, debate and articulation in a manner that is denied in the social realm can be fruitfully elaborated through Rancière's dictum that aesthetics *are* politics and *vice versa*. He explains: 'Politics is aesthetic in that it makes visible what had been excluded from a perceptual field, and in that it makes audible what used to be inaudible' (2004a: 226). In turn, literature is political in the ways in which it restores and/or challenges the boundaries of what can be said, thought, heard or done in a given social order, what Rancière calls 'the distribution of the sensible' (*le partage du sensible*).<sup>42</sup> Rancière explains that the 'distribution of the sensible establishes at one and the same time something common that is shared and exclusive parts' (2004b: 15). That is, comparable to Gramsci's concept of hegemony and common sense, it defines a system of inclusions and exclusions, concerning not only of what is sayable and perceptible, but also of who gets a voice and the right to be heard in a given political regime or state formation – what Rancière often refers to with the Greek *polis*. Rancière puns this political ordering and distribution of roles, places, discourses, modes of perception and so on within a *polis* with the police. What makes Rancière's ideas salient for my project is that he opposes this form of politics as police with the politics of disagreement (*mésentente*). For Rancière, politics proper begins when those who have no 'official' existence, part or place in mainstream politics and its institutions emerge into visibility and make their voices heard to challenge their exclusion. 'Politics exists when the natural order of domination is interrupted by the institution of a part of those who have no part,' he explains. 'Politics exists because those who have no right to be counted as speaking beings make themselves of some account' (1999: 11, 27). Similar to Guha's redefinition of politics in relation to the subaltern, Rancière insists that politics reside in 'the people' (*dēmos*): it is the coming into existence of those who have been denied a voice and an active role, demanding their right to be seen and heard as equal, active participants in the debate.

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<sup>42</sup> In her 'Translator's Introduction' to Rancière's *The Politics of the Aesthetics*, Gabriel Rockhill explains this as 'the system of divisions and boundaries that define, amongst other things, what is visible and audible within a particular aesthetico-political regime' (2004: 1). This edition also includes a glossary of technical terms to Rancière's work which are used but not directly referenced in the following. For a discussion of Rancière's political aesthetic in relation to Scottish writer James Kelman, see also Kelly's forthcoming book, *James Kelman: Politics and Aesthetics* (2008).

Adorno and Rancière's approach to aesthetics thus enables the pursuit of a subaltern *aesthetics* along the following lines: while literature makes visible and audible the particular forms and means of exclusion, marginalisation and othering that exist in a given social realm, it offers itself at the same time as a possible site for a radical politics of resistance; namely of challenging or redefining what is permissible to be said; of who gets a voice, and a space or place to think, speak and act in the current political order. All the novels selected for discussion register the struggle, the conflict and also the contradictions that often mark or attend such a giving or coming to voice; the limits of what is possible or perceptible within the parameters of a specific political order. The aim is to evaluate to what extent and in what ways the fictions chosen here open and enable, or disavow and suspend such a proper political space for other voices and other issues that are, as Slavoj Žižek argues in 'The Lessons of Rancière', effectively 'foreclosed' by 'today's "postmodern" post-politics' (2004: 72). This analysis is then designed to undercut both the idea of a power-free representation (as 'speaking for') and a realistic representation (*Darstellung*). I maintain that the literary engagement of authors with issues of subalternity, the specific form in which they face the apparent aporia of addressing the other, of making or letting the other speak and thus heard, is both an ethical and aesthetical choice, and therefore intrinsically political. That is, my work insists on a politics of representation that executes its critique not only through the content (writing about subaltern issues) but especially also through the formal features of a text. Such an approach resists the inclination to read subaltern representations as authentic reflections of social reality. This implies that I refuse to read, for example, the work of male writer – such as Roddy Doyle, discussed in Chapter 4 – in terms of his ability to 'realistically' or 'authentically' depict a female consciousness or subjectivity. By contrast, as suggested above, the endeavour is to investigate how far 'woman' is here afforded to assert her voice and agency.

With this in mind, the following chapter explores the space granted to subaltern issues within Irish and Scottish studies. It analyses the implications and consequences of both field's adherence to national paradigms through the lens of Slavoj Žižek's psychoanalytical understanding of the nation as means towards ontological enjoyment. I show that while Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland have

previously been read in terms of their anomalous historical-cultural development, there is a similar tendency in contemporary cultural criticism to reinscribe the singularity of their socio-cultural position. This chapter pays specific attention to both postcolonial as well as postmodern and post-national approaches in these two disciplines which, I argue, have proven to subsume and efface the specificity of subaltern concerns under their respective teleologies. Accordingly, Chapter 2 outlines the model of a counter-history as an alternative methodology for tracing a subaltern *aesthetical* understanding of history on the basis of James Kelman's short-story 'Naval History' and Robert McLiam Wilson's 'The Dreamed'. The remainder of this chapter discusses Patrick McCabe's *The Dead School*, followed by Kelman's *You Have to be Careful in the Land of the Free* in relation to the recent political and socio-economic transformations in the Irish Republic and Scotland, respectively. Both novels register a deep resistance to prevailing conceptions about what is considered to be a crucial period of historical change: whereas *The Dead School* revisits the epochal transition between what is commonly called a 'traditional' and a 'modern' Ireland, Kelman's novel explores the transformed global landscape in the aftermath of September 11, while this global context also relates to the context of Scottish devolution. The subaltern concerns of both McCabe and Kelman are traced in both their different contexts and their affinities. The subsequent chapter, 'The Peace Process as *Arkhe-Taintment?*', continues this engagement with issues of historicity and history in relation to Northern Ireland's Peace Process. It argues that Glenn Patterson's *That Which Was* and Eoin McNamee's *The Ultras* can be read as participating in the 'archive fever' currently displayed in the North. On the basis of Derrida's eponymous text, I suggest that this official 'archive fever' marks a repressive desire to contain and disavow the recent past, the ethical implications of which are confronted by both novels.

The succeeding three chapters turn the attention of my counter-historical method to issues of gender. Chapter 4 investigates what this thesis maintains is an intrinsically *dangerous* relationship between gender and nation. I take issue with the apparently 'creative' conflation between these concerns by evaluating the material consequences that the gendering of the imagined nation, or what I will call

imagiNation,<sup>43</sup> has for female citizens in particular. After investigating the implications of a gendered colonial-national model on constructions of Scottish and Irish masculinity, this chapter accordingly explores women's role in what Nira Yuval-Davis calls in *Gender and Nation* (1997) the symbolic and biological reproduction of the nation through the lenses of Glenn Patterson's *Fat Lad*, Edna O'Brien's *Down By the River* and Mary Costello's *Titanic Town*. My focus is more specifically on the Irish context here, which I then argue can provide an instructive lens for magnifying the need to readdress the prevailing relations between gender and nation in Scottish studies. Chapter 5, 'Un-Remembering History', proposes Ailbhe Smyth's notion of 'unremembering' as strategy for a comparative reading of traumatic herstories<sup>44</sup> in Roddy Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*, Janice Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* and Jennifer Johnston's *The Invisible Worm*. Rather than naming the failure to remember, such an un-remembering insists on the need to reverse the negation of women's concerns, their voice and agency, and reclaim their recalcitrant persistence. My last chapter, 'The Feminine Redemption of Masculinity?', explores the conspicuous turn to the feminine in contemporary critical discourses on the basis of Alasdair Gray's *1982 Janine* and McCabe's *Breakfast on Pluto*. Both novels invoke the feminisation of their male protagonists who, by virtue of their naming, are interpellated to epitomise their respective nations. These two very different texts thus explicitly evoke an allegorical reading of their national entities. Drawing on Benjamin's theory of allegory, this chapter evaluates the specifically gendered implications of the allegorical imagiNation of these two novels with regard to the recent endeavour to appropriate 'the feminine' as an alternative space to masculine modes of subjectivity.

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<sup>43</sup> The term 'imagiNation' plays on Benedict Anderson's understanding of the nation as an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983). Furthermore, it suggests that it is this imagined nation, generated by a specific national imagination, which motivates and underpins the political movement of nationalism.

<sup>44</sup> The coinage 'herstory' expresses the gender specificity of historical experience and has thus distinctly subaltern as well as feminist credentials. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term denotes the kind of history which emphasises 'the role of women or [is] told from a woman's point of view'.

## CHAPTER ONE

### DELI-N(E)ATIONS:

#### IRISH AND SCOTTISH STUDIES & THE ENJOYMENT OF THE 'NATION THING'<sup>1</sup>

##### (Re)Inventions and Redemptions – Postcolonial & Postmodern

*'National identification is by definition sustained by a relationship toward the Nation qua Thing. This Nation-Thing is determined by a series of contradictory properties'*.  
Slavoj Žižek, 'Enjoy Your Nation as Yourself!'

It is by now almost commonplace to remark upon the predominance of 'the nation' in the field of both Irish and Scottish studies. The according theme of national identity saturates, as David Lloyd remarks in his *Anomalous States*, 'the discursive field, drowning out other social and cultural possibilities' (1993: 3), in particular, as this thesis seeks to attest, subaltern issues of disempowerment and oppression. However, it has furthermore prevented a meaningful comparison between Ireland and Scotland, with the Northern Irish state putatively mediating as what Edna Longley famously calls 'a cultural corridor' between them (1994: 195). As Glenda Norquay and Gerry Smyth complain in the introduction to their edited cross-archipelagic study, *Across the Margins*, 'many academics are reluctant to leave behind the comforting paradigms of national cultures and literatures' (2002: 7). In his rather idiosyncratic, psychoanalytically inspired deliberations upon the nation, Slavoj Žižek provides a possible reason why this may indeed be so. In contrast to the more abstract and metaphysical imaginations of the nation in the work of Benedict

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of my discussion of postcolonial approaches in both Irish and Scottish studies has been published as 'Reassessing Postcolonial Criticism for (Northern) Ireland and Scotland: Rewriting National Paradigms', in *Beyond the Anchoring Grounds*, eds. S. Alcobia-Murphy *et al.* (Belfast: Cló Ollscoil na Banríona, 2005), pp. 154-162. Parts of the section on Scottish postcoloniality have been published as 'Subaltern Scotland: Devolution and Postcoloniality', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, ed. Berthold Schoene (Edinburgh: EUP, 2007), pp. 292- 300.

Anderson or Homi K. Bhabha, for example, Žižek argues that this cultural activity is actually constituted by something more substantial:

A nation *exists* only as long as its specific *enjoyment* continues to be materialised in a set of social practices and transmitted through national myths that structure these practices. To emphasise in a ‘deconstructionist’ mode that Nation is not a biological or transhistorical fact but a contingent discursive construction, an overdetermined result of textual practices, is thus misleading: such an emphasis overlooks the remainder of some *real*, nondiscursive kernel of enjoyment which must be present for the Nation qua discursive entity-effect to achieve its ontological consistency. (1993: 202)

If it is enjoyment, then, that brings the nation according to Žižek into existence, it is most notably displayed in the discursive practices of Irish as well as Scottish studies. Furthermore, when enjoyment is, as Žižek contends, both generated and organised ‘through national myths’, they become a means to authenticate specific claims to what can, through Colin Graham, be described as the ‘undeniable essence [of the nation] as a pure expression of the “real”’ (2001: 133). The entailing dispute about ‘the possession of the national Thing’, which Žižek discerns as the basis of ethnic tensions (1993: 203), is particularly well illustrated in the Irish context, emphasising that authenticity is, as Graham writes, ‘a cultural, textual phenomenon, defining, recreating and projecting’ (2001: 137). It is the endeavour of this chapter to investigate what Žižek discerns as the ‘contradictory properties’ by which claims to the enjoyment of the ‘Nation Thing’ are characterised in both disciplines (2001: 201). More specifically, I endeavour to outline the key debates in both fields, but, in doing so, I will trace and advocate approaches in an Irish-Scottish comparative framework that are responsive to subaltern concerns.

## **I. BEGINNINGS: The Spectre of England and its Anomalous States**

Comparative analyses of Ireland and Scotland commonly set off by evoking the ‘wealth of historical connections and shared experience linking the two countries’, as Liam McIlvanney and Ray Ryan do in their introduction to *Ireland and Scotland: Culture and Society, 1700-2000* (2005: 15). These historical ‘parallels and affinities’

inevitably involve what McIlvanney and Ryan describe as ‘a frequently tense relationship with a much larger neighbour – England’ (Ibid). While it is rather controversial to designate Scotland’s historical experience as colonial, it is now widely accepted to do so in the Irish context, as I will elaborate below.<sup>2</sup> This nonetheless indicates their similar position as ‘minority cultures’, ‘margins’ or ‘peripheries’, as evinced by several critical studies, which promises a seemingly straightforward and inherently enabling model for a comparative approach.<sup>3</sup> However, the spectre of England that hovers over their respective marginality has equally stalled glances towards the other shore. As Willy Maley contends, ‘it is precisely because of their different but related involvements with England that each [nation] has resisted comparison with the other. Anglo-Irish and Anglo-Scottish hyphens conceal an Irish-Scottish interface, with literature as a crossover’ (2000: 205). As with Maley, several proponents of a Scottish-Irish comparison, which often suspiciously subsumes the position of Northern Ireland, assert that this derives from defining each country only as the binary other to England. This is, for example, apparent when Declan Kiberd ponders in *Inventing Ireland* who invented the isle: asserting in orientalist mode the constitutive ‘help’ of ‘the English’, he infers that ‘Ireland was soon patented as not-England, a place whose peoples were ... the very antithesis of their new rulers from overseas’ (1996: 1, 9). As a result, and to the great regret of Cairns Craig, he neglects to acknowledge the impact of Scotland’s cultural exports, such as James Macpherson’s ‘translations’ of the Ossianic poems, for instance, on Ireland’s cultural imagiNation (2005: 48).

But, on the other hand, it is this Anglo-centrifugal thrust that has bequeathed a perhaps even more profound legacy than just Celtic connections between these three regions. Frequently, the mapping against (and within) a British-metropolitan

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<sup>2</sup> In the Scottish context, these debates revolve around Scotland’s parliamentary union with England (under a Scottish King) in 1707, whereby it maintained not only autonomy over key institutions such as church, law and education, but also started to play a significant role in the British imperial project itself. For a comparative analysis of the differences between Ireland’s and Scotland’s relation to the Union, see Jim Smyth, ‘Arguments for and against Union’ (2005). For a refutation of designating Scotland’s historical relation with England as colonial, see Liam Connell, ‘Scottish Nationalism and the Colonial Vision’ (2004). On whether and how Ireland can be considered as a colony, see Joe Cleary, ‘Misplaced Ideas?’ (2002/2007).

<sup>3</sup> These terms have been put forward by Reizbaum’s cross-archipelagic approach in ‘Canonical Double Cross’ (1992: 169); Norquay and Smyth’s edited collection of essays, *Across the Margins* (2002); Robert Crawford’s chapter ‘Peripheries’ in *Devolving Scottish Literature* (2000), and Craig’s ‘Peripheries’ in *Out of History* (1996).

template has led to a conspicuously similar accentuation of their supposedly anomalous historical and cultural development. That is, if it is the normative paradigm of English (qua British) history that has marginalised them, it has also collapsed both countries in the seemingly ‘historyless’ limbo outlined by Craig with regard to David Hume’s *History of Great Britain* (1754): ‘History in Scotland, Ireland and Wales remains a series of accidents, a series of incidents held together by no fundamental necessity ... England has a history; Ireland [and Scotland] will only acquire a history once [they come] into the orderly and progressive world that is imposed on [them] by England’ (1996: 101). (As I will demonstrate below, this has indeed now occurred.) The idea of an Ireland not only outside the norms of history but also beyond its forces is famously invoked by Thomas MacDonagh’s 1916 characterisation of *Literature in Ireland* as seemingly unaffected by ‘the law of gravitation, the Cartesian philosophy, the French Revolution, Darwin’s theory of evolution’ (1916: 5).<sup>4</sup> Yet, where this is meant to emphasise Ireland’s somewhat subaltern difference to dominant Europe, it also echoes Spivak’s conception of a singular subalternity, which may already indicate some of the problems that such approaches pose. Nonetheless, it is, as Seamus Deane asserts, ‘already a convention to say that Ireland has no continuity of cultural experience comparable to that of the nation states of France and England’ (1985:18).

The same sentiment has haunted interpretations of Scottish culture throughout the twentieth century. For example, when T.S. Eliot asks in his 1919 review of G. Gregory Smith’s *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (1919), ‘Was There A Scottish Literature?’, he concludes that it offers no permanence of a literary tradition that is separable from the English, and thus answers with a resounding no. Smith, on the other hand, claims to have found such a distinctive character in ‘the Scottish antithesis of the real and the fantastic’ – what he terms the ‘Caledonian Antisyzygy’ (1919: 20). Significantly, Smith associates these ‘polar twins’ of the Scottish literary imagination with a ‘medieval’ outlook (35). This, however, sets Scotland, as Gerard Carruthers argues, ‘essentially apart from the cultural history and development of the rest of western Europe’ (1999: 56). But also contemporary critics continue to ponder over Scotland’s putatively anachronistic and incongruous place within the Western

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<sup>4</sup> See Graham’s reading of MacDonagh in his chapter on ‘Irish Criticism in the Twentieth Century’ in *Deconstructing Ireland* (2001: 32).

world, which they conceive as inextricably linked to its lack of statehood. Thus, if David McCrone's *Understanding Scotland* (1992) has recently erased the statelessness of the nation under investigation from the subtitle of its second edition, McCrone nonetheless remains fascinated by the 'sociological oddity [that] a nation without an independent state' has to offer. 'In terms of the development of the capitalist world,' he claims, 'Scotland is doubly unique' (2001: 54).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, when Tom Nairn considers Scotland's 'political castration' (as he tellingly calls it) through the Act of Union in *The Break-Up of Britain*, he concludes that such 'an anomalous historical situation could not engender a "normal" culture' (1981: 155). 'The oddity of the Union,' Nairn argues, 'has always posed grave cultural and psychological problems' which created 'a characteristic series of subnational deformations or "neuroses"' (129). For Nairn, these deformations come to the fore through the 'belatedness' of Scotland's nationalism, which he considers as 'the chronological companion of anti-imperialist revolt and Third World nationalism, rather than those of European movements, which it superficially resembles' (95).

In analogue to Scotland's statelessness, Northern Ireland's status as a nation-less state and the Irish Republic as a state that is incongruous with its imagined nation have been equally described as 'anomalous', as evinced, for instance, in the title of Lloyd's 1993 book. In her essay 'From Cathleen to Anorexia: The Breakdown of Irelands', Edna Longley furthermore declares that 'both parts of Ireland are failed *conceptual* entities. That is, the ideas which created them and the ideologies which sustained them have withered at the root' (1994: 173). Evocative of Nairn's diagnosis, Longley associates this condition with 'a destructive neurosis', exemplarily displayed in the euphemistically termed 'Troubles' (Ibid.), which Seamus Heaney famously considers to display the North's 'anachronistic passions' (1969: 757). But while 'the North has all the appearances of an abnormal, aberrant society', Deane usefully reminds us that 'it makes plainly manifest "normal" injustices which are taken for granted elsewhere' (2003: 22). This emphasises Aaron Kelly's contention that Irish and, we should add here, Scottish literature should not

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<sup>5</sup> While McCrone's book, admittedly, ends on the note that the Scotland 'looks remarkably normal' when properly analysed (2001: 147), the apparent imperative to start off with registering its oddness was attested in a recent lecture McCrone held at the 2008 Crosscurrents conference in the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, 19 April 2008.

be regarded in terms ‘of peculiarity and anomaly, but rather of specificity and intensity’ (2001: 125). But analyses seeking to capture, explain and understand this specificity show a tendency to reinscribe the reputed singularity of the Scottish and Irish situation. Largely, this is due to the concomitant endeavour in both Irish and Scottish studies not only to analyse but also to rewrite these rather unhelpful assessments of their cultural past. If this has generated a set of comparable ‘enjoyments’ in both fields, it is, however, remarkable, as Craig observes, what different forms these national revisions have taken (2005: 62). With recourse to such diverse historical-political, ideological and aesthetic avenues as nationalism, postcolonialism, and modernism (which have in both fields become somewhat inextricably interlinked), and more currently, postmodernism and post-nationalism, the general response strangely resembles the advice a desperate emperor is given in one of Alasdair Gray’s short stories: ‘You [have been] dreaming the disease. Now you must dream the cure’ (1983: 76). In Gray’s ‘The Start of the Axletree’, the cure deemed capable of preventing the vanishing out of history of this doomed empire is the perpetuation of its existence in the form of a national monument, and it seems ironic that some of the various forms of ‘national enjoyment’ not only show the same desire but, in turn, reaffirm the anachronism of their nation’s historical trajectory. Firstly, I will explore the postcolonial ‘re-invention’ that has taken place in Irish studies, discussing approaches proffered here more elaborately as they inspire and partly intersect with my own postcolonial subaltern approach, before considering, more briefly, Scotland’s modern ‘self-fashioning’. Thereafter I shall turn to the postmodern ‘redemption’ that has recently inspired cultural as well as political discourses in the Atlantic archipelago.

## II. IRISH STUDIES: Ireland’s Postcolonial ReInventions

*‘It is common for post-independence ... states to seek to emphasise their singularity’*  
(John Hume, ‘Europe of the Regions’)

In Irish studies, it was predominantly the belated ‘discovery’ of Ireland’s paradigmatic postcoloniality that has occasioned one of the most profound

transformations in the understanding of its reputedly ‘failed’ cultural continuity. This kind of ‘re-reading’ of Irish culture has been particularly promoted by the Derry-based Field Day Theatre Company, founded by Brian Friel in 1980, which expanded its interest to the publication of a series of pamphlets on the intersections of culture and politics under the general editorship of Deane.<sup>6</sup> In his introduction to the collected booklets of Terry Eagleton, Frederic Jameson and Edward Said in *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*, it is accordingly him who asserts that ‘Field Day’s analysis of the [Irish] situation derives from the conviction that it is, above all, a colonial crisis’ (1990: 6). More specifically, Deane contends that ‘Ireland is the only Western European country that had both an early and a late colonial experience’ (3). Such assertions of this nation’s exemplary, if not unique place within a postcolonial framework have subsequently resonated through Irish studies.<sup>7</sup> For example, where the ending of Lloyd’s *Anomalous States* carefully suggests a link between ‘the atypicality of the Irish novel’ and ‘Ireland’s putatively “post-colonial” culture’, its introduction declares, rather unambiguously, that ‘for the theory and practice of decolonisation ... Ireland is, to a sometimes distressing extent, more exemplary than anomalous’ (1993: 155, 7). Furthermore, for Luke Gibbons, Ireland’s experience of ‘disintegration and fragmentation’ evinces the fact that ‘Irish culture experienced modernity before its time. This is not unique to Ireland,’ Gibbons concludes, ‘but is the common inheritance of cultures subjected to the degradations of colonialism’ (1996: 6). In *Inventing Ireland*, this pre-emptive modernity turns Ireland’s population into the precursor of decolonisation. ‘Because the Irish were the first modern people to decolonize in the twentieth century,’ Kiberd reports, ‘it has seemed useful to make comparisons with other, subsequent movements’ (1996: 3). Echoed in *The Novel and the Nation*, Gerry Smyth takes this, in turn, to attest to Ireland’s ‘anomalous cultural location’, which he again associates with somewhat deformed ‘psychological states’ (1997: 21, 175).

Such claims operate, as Graham observes, not only ‘through the boast of originality’ but often reaffirm an ‘outright exceptionalism’ (2003: 246). Therein, they

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<sup>6</sup> The notion of ‘re-reading’ was articulated by Deane in his 1985 pamphlet ‘Heroic Styles’: ‘Everything, including our politics and our literature, has to be re-written – i.e. re-read’ (2003: 26).

<sup>7</sup> It was Graham who, to my knowledge, first pointed out this rather difficult claim to exceptionalism in Irish postcolonial studies (see ‘Liminal Spaces’ 1994b/2001).

exemplify the above cited contention of the former leader of Northern Ireland's previously largest nationalist party (SDLP) and co-recipient of the 1998 Nobel Peace Prize, John Hume, that post-independence states – such as Ireland – often seek to reinstate the singularity of their situation (1988: 45). However, if this insinuates in the arguments of both Deane and Lloyd that Ireland might not only be the first, but also the last of the colonies, it seems not surprising that the issue of Ireland's postcoloniality has generated a rather noisy debate in the field. In their introduction to a special issue on 'Irish Studies and Postcolonial Theory', Graham and Maley suggest that 'the ways in which the postcolonial has been caught up in pre-existing debates has both promoted and stifled postcolonial theory's Irish existence so far' (1999: 150). Thus, even though Eamonn Hughes observes that the postcolonial model 'is now at a point where it can be identified as a dominant within Irish criticism' (2000: 8), Ireland's place within postcolonial studies remains, as Glenn Hooper asserts, 'both blurred and remarkably well-defined' (2002: 16). That is, where Hooper discerns on the one hand a cross-fertilising 'amok' within Irish postcolonial studies, he observes on the other a crystallisation into a "'for or against" response' that is invariably underwritten by 'a specific political agenda' (Ibid.). As Stephen Howe's refutation of Ireland's postcoloniality in *Ireland and Empire* demonstrates, the controversy is inextricably entangled in the antagonism between the revisionist and the nationalist camps, with the latter advocating the postcolonial approach that the former disproves.<sup>8</sup> Howe's book employs an empirical basis to forge what, he admits, is a rather 'polemical' argument (2000: 5). There is a comparable manoeuvre in Liam Kennedy's 'empirical enquiry' into economic and sociological trends in his article 'Modern Ireland: Post-Colonial Society or Post-Colonial Pretensions?' (1992-3: 119).<sup>9</sup> For Kennedy, postcolonialism is used by nationalists as an ideological means to 'give a patina of legitimacy' to 'Anglophobia

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<sup>8</sup> In his introduction to *Irish and Postcolonial Writing*, Hooper astutely observes how the 'conventional polarities' of methodological approaches within postcolonialism – namely, poststructuralism versus Marxism – have become associated with these 'two Irish traditions'. In consequence, he suggests, 'from one perspective a postcolonial reading can be identified as a stalking-horse for ultra-nationalism, and ... from another it may be seen as an alliance between neo-Unionist revisionism and poststructuralism' (2002: 17). In this respect, Hooper suggests that Howe's rejection of postcolonialism 'derives from an implicit association between support for postcolonial criticism and sympathy for the IRA' (16). For a rigorous critique of Howe's work, see Patrick McGee, 'Humpty Dumpty and the Despotism of Fact' (2003).

<sup>9</sup> For a critique of Kennedy's assumptions, see Graham, 'Liminal Spaces' (1994b: 38-9) and Lloyd, *Ireland After History* (1999: 8-12).

and anti-Unionism' in its 'traditional preoccupation with "England", as the never failing source of all Irish ills' (118). Kennedy usefully alerts here to an immanent danger of (post)colonial binary thinking in that it often results in what Edward Said terms the '*rhetoric of blame*'; a righteous moralism and mutual blaming that is responsible for much of the continuing violence and oppression in the postcolonial world (1993: 19). As Graham has perceptively shown, such unhelpful blaming, indeed, resonates through much Irish postcolonial readings.<sup>10</sup>

For another thing, if Kennedy's statistical comparison between Ireland and such 'self-evidently' postcolonial nations as India or Ghana crudely neglects to consider important differences in social stratification within these national wholes, his conclusion nonetheless reminds us of the uneasy 'fit' that Ireland (and even more so Scotland) poses when situating it as a homogeneous entity into 'a simple dichotomy between coloniser and colonised' (1992-3: 119, 116). It was for this reason that both countries were initially precluded from the postcolonial umbrella: in one of the discipline's foundational textbooks, *The Empire Writes Back*, its authors assert that 'while it is possible to argue that [Ireland, Scotland and Wales] were the first victims of English expansion, their subsequent complicity in the British imperial enterprise makes it difficult for colonized peoples outside Britain to accept their identity as post-colonial' (Ashcroft *et al.* 2003: 31-2). A possible framework for considering Ireland's as well as Scotland's concomitant implication in and disenfranchisement by Britain's expanding empire has been forwarded by Michael Hechter's application of the concept of 'internal colonialism' to what his title terms *The Celtic Fringe of British National Development*. Employing a Wallersteinian core-periphery model, Hechter's study investigates the uneven effects of modernisation within the British state formation, which created a division between advantaged and exploited social groups. But his analysis of a pan-Celtic nationalism that this regional inequality, according to him, triggered is liable to produce the same homogenising terms than the Manichean colonial model: 'The Celts,' Hechter asserts, 'are an internal colony

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<sup>10</sup> In his review of Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland*, Graham suggests that 'one can extrapolate from the idea that Irish nationalism is founded on the colonial model to blame that model, rather than its descendants, for the faults of Irish nationalism' ('Post-Colonial Theory and Kiberd's "Ireland"' 1996: 65). It is the same 'silent implication' that Graham discerns in Deane's critique of the 'ultimate failure' of the Irish nationalist project ('Liminal Spaces' 2001: 89). These kinds of criticism of the Irish nationalist movement will be further discussed below.

within the very core of this world system' (1975: 348). By contrast, a subaltern analysis permits a more subtle understanding of the specificities of iniquitous social relations *within* these Celtic fringes as informed by the dynamics of class, gender, race and so on.

Nonetheless, where Hechter's work indicates a useful archipelagic comparative approach, which recognises (with Gramsci) the 'affiliations' of minority cultures to dominant cultural formations while also identifying the inequalities between them, it also intimates the ethical imperative behind such quasi-'postcolonial' approaches. But ethical evaluations inevitably bring their problems, too, as they have not just been applied to the colonial divide but (mis)used for or against the postcolonial one as well. Kennedy ridicules the apparent fact that Irish postcolonialism seems to necessitate claims that the Irish are 'MOPE – the most oppressed people ever' (quoted in Gibbons 2002: 90). The ensuing tendency to assimilate or synchronise, and thus trivialise different forms of disempowerment and oppression throughout the world is apparent in the famous line of Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments* that has been often cited in relation to Irish postcolonialism; namely when Jimmy Rabbitte announces to his gasping band-mates: 'The Irish are the niggers of Europe' (1988: 9). While there is a danger here of annexing race for what is predominantly a class issue, the reverse side of the problematic is indicated when Howe's sweeping survey of the means of imperial expansion comes quick to the conclusion that compared to the sufferings and death-tolls in 'Britain's more distant possession's', Ireland got off more than lightly (2000: 230). This nicely contrasts with the view of *The Economist* that Graham deconstructs in his article 'Ireland (Postcolonialism) Scotland', in which Irish misery is, in turn, authenticated against Scotland's (putatively postcolonial) pretensions of victimhood.<sup>11</sup> But such a "compare and contrast" attitude to imperial suffering', as Graham notes (2003: 245), merely leads to what Bart Moore-Gilbert calls a 'distasteful ... kind of beauty parade in which the competitors are made to press their claims to have been the most oppressed colonial subjects or to be the most "truly" postcolonial subjects' (1997: 12).

But despite all apparently decisive empirical data, Ireland has nonetheless assumed a frontline place in this pageant to which Scotland remains an onlooker. And, as

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<sup>11</sup> See Digby Jones, 'Chips with everything', *The Economist*, 7-13 September 2002, p. 43.

discussed above, such an appearance has tempted (if not demanded) a new outfit – that if not exotic, must at least be original. As a result, the attempts to assert Ireland’s difference to the rest of Europe and, particularly, England seem to have gotten entangled in what Joep Leerssen cleverly calls ‘auto-exoticism’, namely ‘a mode of seeing, presenting and representing oneself in one’s otherness (in this case: one’s non-Englishness)’ (1996: 37). For Žižek, this ‘fascination with the Other’ – that is, here, the fascination with one’s own otherness (which is also well demonstrated in the fascination with Scotland’s oddity noted above) – forms the basis of the enjoyment of the ‘national Thing’ (1993: 206, 203).

### ***Interlude: Three Postcolonial Enjoyments of the ‘Nation-Thing’***

The extent to which this fascination has dominated the discursive field of Irish postcolonial studies is attested by its tendency to subsume and eliminate other forms of otherness related to identity issues of class, gender and race. Broadly speaking, this enjoyment has taken three different but related forms in the Irish field, which I preliminarily wish to call ‘pure enjoyment’, ‘wary enjoyment’ and ‘counter-enjoyment’ in order to trace their implications. All three modes attest to Žižek’s contention that nationalism ‘presents a privileged domain of the eruption of enjoyment into the social field’ (2003: 202). The first form describes the standard trajectory of the ‘post-colonial’ that is indicated in its name or, more precisely, in its rather controversial prefix.<sup>12</sup> Here, the reclaimed nation (that is, the post-colonial, independent nation-state) stands as the ultimate *telos* of the postcolonial; as Leela Gandhi notes, it becomes ‘the only legitimate end of decolonisation’ (1998: 111).<sup>13</sup> In ‘The Angel of Progress’, Anne McClintock argues that it is this ‘commitment to linear time and the idea of “development”’ that haunts the term ‘post-colonialism’, which obscures the often unchanged power-relations and continuing imperial

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<sup>12</sup> The contentions about the prefix concern, on the one hand, the implied notion of a new period in which colonialism and imperialism have been successfully superseded; on the other hand, they pertain to the apparent alignment with other ‘post’-discourses, such as postmodernism, which will be elaborated on below. See Ella Shohat ‘Notes on the “Post-Colonial”’ (1992: 101).

<sup>13</sup> See also Graham, ‘Liminal Spaces’ (1994b: 30; 2001: 82-3).

practices in the so-called ‘post-colonial’ world (1992: 85). As the work of Subaltern Studies has shown, these affect in particular subaltern formations.

The criticism implied here has become the hallmark of the second mode of enjoyment which, rather than unduly celebrating the reconstituted nation, remains largely suspicious of its actual form. So if critics such as Deane, Gibbons, Kiberd, Leerssen, Lloyd and Smyth are all – to a different extent and in different respects – endeavouring to retrieve various manifestations of national culture and nationalisms, they prove themselves cautious aficionados who have not only taken to heart Frantz Fanon’s warning of the ‘pitfalls of national consciousness’, but also the Subaltern Studies critique.<sup>14</sup> So whilst Kiberd chastises in *Inventing Ireland* the native elites for reproducing colonial structures instead of bringing about the meaningful radical change that was initially envisaged by the revolutionary movement, Deane records ‘the ultimate failure of that attempt to imagine a truly liberating cultural alternative’ (1990: 3-4). In what Graham observes sounds like an astounding echo of Ranajit Guha’s points (2001: 87), Deane argues that what has ‘prevented [Irish nationalism] from being a movement toward liberation, is that it is, *mutatis mutandis*, a copy of that by which it felt itself oppressed’ (1990: 8). Nonetheless, as Graham has shown, this does not mean that the special delight in ‘the national Thing’ has become abandoned or is dismissed – and whether it is enjoyed through the high canon of Irish modernism, popular ballads, or contemporary cinema and fiction remains individual choice.

This brings us to the third mode, which finds its source of pleasure exactly in this critique, and crystallises into what Lloyd describes as ‘nationalisms against the state’ (1999: 19-36). In Lloyd’s oeuvre, initiated in *Anomalous States*<sup>15</sup> and expanded in *Ireland After History* (1999), and also evident in Carol Coulter’s *The Hidden Tradition* (1993) (which will be discussed in Chapter 4) as well as Luke Gibbon’s work (1996), such counter-nationalisms occupy what Graham discerns as a putatively ‘subaltern’ position to official statist nationalism (2001: 108-9). For Lloyd (as for Coulter), it is in particular ‘their conjectural relation to other social movements’ which makes these nationalisms ‘emancipatory, rather than fixed in the repressive apparatuses of state formations’ (1999: 36). This ultimately poses some

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<sup>14</sup> See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961/2001: 119- 65).

<sup>15</sup> See especially Lloyd’s chapter on ‘Violence and the Constitution of the Novel’ (1993: 125-162).

problems; for in order to press its claims, the politics of nationalism must either subsume and subordinate, or dissolve and displace other forms of identitarian or emancipatory struggle. Consequently, Lloyd dispenses with Gramsci and, by dissociating the nation-state, suggests that the state does not necessarily have to be the *telos* of such subaltern nationalisms, which for Gramsci meant the end of their subalternity. Recruiting, instead, Walter Benjamin's critique of history as a self-fulfilling progression (which seems rather dubious for a nationalist project), Lloyd reads 'the "fragmentary and episodic" form' of subaltern movements as 'the sign of a possible intrinsic resistance to' and 'incommensurability with ... [the] state formation' (26). If this evokes Spivak's notion of the subaltern, for Lloyd, such subaltern counter-movements further instigate a different (form of) temporality that deviates from the official 'time-line of the state: the swerve that results from the invocation of the apparently past in a new place,' Lloyd writes, 'displaces historical determination and makes way for alternative cultural logics' (78). In this, Lloyd's project seems moreover to follow a Bhabhaian postmodern-postcolonial subalternist approach.

Where Lloyd as well as Gibbons validate 'alternative' forms of modernity, the postcolonial operates, for Homi Bhabha, as a site of 'contramodernity' that introduces 'other, incommensurable cultural temporalities into the invention of tradition' (1994: 175, 2). 'This kind of disjunctive temporality is of the utmost importance for the politics of cultural difference,' Bhabha claims in *The Location of Culture* (1994: 177). He elaborates these 'politics' through the concept of the 'time-lag', which signals 'a contingent moment in the signification of closure'; a delay 'between the event of the sign ... and its discursive eventuality ... where[by] intentionality is negotiated retrospectively' (183). If this seems like a fitting description for the applications of 'the postcolonial' to the Irish context, it is more important here that this 'discursive time-lag' constitutes, for Bhabha, the site of postcolonial or, rather, subaltern agency (198). Drawing on Spivak, Bhabha writes in 'In a Spirit of Calm Violence':

The emphasis on the disjunctive present of utterance ... allows the articulation of subaltern agency to emerge as relocation and reinscription ... [This process] happens in the temporal break *initiated through* the sign, deprived of subjectivity, in the realm of the intersubjective. Through this

time-lag – the temporal break in representation – emerges the process of agency both as a historical development and as the narrative agency of historical discourse. (1995: 329-30)

But this ‘agency’ pertains strictly to the linguistic realm, dwelling in ‘the enunciative present in the articulation of culture’ (1994: 178). Accordingly, and here Bhabha echoes Spivak’s notion of subaltern agency, it seems never transferable to an actual political project of mobilisation or emancipation.<sup>16</sup> This ‘iterative temporality’, in which every enunciation introduces a *différance*, becomes more like a time warp in which the possibility for decisive action and intervention perpetually lags behind (182). ‘The time for liberation is,’ for Bhabha (more than it is for Fanon who is paraphrased here), always ‘a time of cultural uncertainty and, most crucially, of signifiatory or representational undecidability’ (35).<sup>17</sup> This very much evokes the iterative, ‘sporadic’ recurrence of Lloyd’s nationalisms: for apparently without a distinct political interest, desire or ultimate (even if ulterior) motive, they seem to revolve in a perpetual circularity around their own logical endpoint; the disavowed *telos* of their own ontological enjoyment. Consequently, as with Spivak’s subaltern, such ‘subaltern’ nationalisms become entrapped in what Leerssen calls ‘the traumatic paradigm’ of Irish history, which describes ‘a sense of history as a nightmarish burden of uncanny familiarity, repeating the dreary pattern of revolt and defeat over and over again’ (1998: 45). Rather appositely, in this case, Leerssen associates such a model – which takes Stephen Dedalus’s exclamation in James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) that ‘History ... is the nightmare from which I am trying to awake’ as its battlecry (1990: 34) – with the term ‘subaltern’ (1998: 42-45). Indeed, Lloyd’s ‘Irish New Histories’ seem forever ‘Outside History’, as his later chapter title indicates (1999: 77). As argued in my introduction, such singularising notions forestall a meaningful ethical-political engagement as part of a subaltern *aesthetical* project. In *Outrageous Fortune*, Joe Cleary succinctly summarises such a critique by noting with regard to both Lloyd’s and Gibbons’ work that ‘a commitment to “alternative modernities” [does not] provide much by way of structural analysis or cognitive

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<sup>16</sup> Bhabha has been recurrently taken to issue on this point. For an engaged discussion of his cultural politics, see Aijaz Ahmad, ‘The Politics of Literary Post-Coloniality’ (1996).

<sup>17</sup> For a critique of Bhabha’s recasting of Fanon for his deconstructive-postmodern approach, see Neil Lazarus, ‘Disavowing Decolonization’ (1993).

mapping of the wider global conjunctures that any collective political movement must be able to diagnose to situate itself strategically' (2007: 6).

### III. SCOTTISH STUDIES: (a) The Obsessions of Scottish Postcoloniality

*'But until there is a State of Scotland, we have no choice but to be so obsessed'*  
(Joy Hendry, 'Editorial')

Whilst it has been predominantly through the impetus of postcolonialism that Irish studies sought to redefine the conception of its history and culture, in the main, as Ellen-Raïssa Jackson and Maley observe, 'postcolonial readings have been opposed or overlooked in Scotland' (2002: 69). Where a tentative avenue was suggested by Nairn, it was, however, ironically in opposition to his diagnosis of Scotland's 'deformed' culture that what is nowadays considered as postcolonial theory initially reached some prominence in the Scottish field. Both Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull's *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture* (1989) as well as Cairns Craig's *Out of History* utilise Frantz Fanon's concept of 'inferiorisation' to explain how an internalised parochial status can lead to what Craig describes as 'a profound self-hatred' (1996: 12).<sup>18</sup> In agreement with Fanon on the importance of nationalism for the reclamation of a native tradition, these Scottish critics posit that a reinvigorated national culture can resolve the identity crisis which sits at the heart of Scotland's political dilemma, as Craig asserts: 'Becoming properly "post-colonial" in a Scottish context would involve a re-grounding of our intellectual life in the traditions of Scottish culture' (2004: 241). This divulges the same propensity for a postcolonial teleology as in the first form of national enjoyment, delineated above. Joy Hendry expounds: 'The Predicament of Scotland ... is a pre-occupation which is admittedly inward and introverted ... But until there is a State of Scotland, we have no choice but to be so obsessed' (1983: 1). That is, until 'cured' by its full reassemblage into an independent nation-state, Scotland's obsession with 'the national Thing' appears not only necessary but almost inevitable, effectively suspending all other legitimate and necessary questions of identity and belonging. The need to authenticate the

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<sup>18</sup> See Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask* (1952/1970: 14)

imperative of this enjoyment is evinced in *The Modern Scottish Novel* wherein Craig promotes ‘an imagination of the nation as both the *fundamental* context of individual life and as the *real* subject of history’ (1999: 9; my emphasis). Furthermore, the tendency to subsume other issues under the privileged category of ‘the national’ is evident in Craig’s rather dubious adaptation of Fanon’s racial analysis for the Scottish context in his earlier book. To Craig, ‘it is not by our colour, of course, that we have to be recognised as incomplete within the British context, it is by the colour of our vowels: the rigidity of class speech in Britain ... is the direct response of a dominant cultural group faced by a society in which the outsiders are indistinguishable by colour’ (1996: 12). As with Doyle’s famous line about the Irish being ‘the niggers of Europe’, not only is there a risk here of conflating racist discrimination deriving from ethnic markers (‘colour’) with issues of class and nationality, but Craig’s observation also obfuscates existing class distinctions within Scotland itself by appealing to the nation’s sense of linguistic uniformity (‘our’). It is noteworthy that this collective sublimation of the nation’s heterogeneity (in terms of race, class, gender and so on) has been imposed onto both Scottish and Irish literature to which the job of disseminating the national enjoyment has been generously entrusted.

### ***Interlude: Devolved Enjoyments and the Literary ImagiNation***

In his seminal 1998 article on contemporary Scottish fiction, Christopher Whyte asserts: ‘In the absence of an elected political authority, the task of representing the nation has been repeatedly devolved to its writers’ (1998: 284). In Scotland, it was particularly the aftermath of Scotland’s so-called ‘devolution debacle of 1979’ that influenced readings of what has, as Gavin Wallace notes, been commonly designated as a second or ‘new – perhaps even more “real” – Scottish Renaissance’ in literature since the 1970s (1994a: 3, 1).<sup>19</sup> Although the ideas about Scottishness transmitted by this fiction were admitted to be more diverse, plural and confident than in the previous modernist renaissance, for many critics, the ultimate novelistic concern

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<sup>19</sup> See Douglas Gifford, ‘At Last – the Real Scottish Renaissance?’ (1990).

nonetheless seems to revolve around the essentialist kernel of a ‘distinct’ national identity. This is, for example, apparent when Douglas Gifford argues in his recent contribution to *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature* that,

It is tempting to see this change in confidence as somehow related to the 1979 Devolution referendum and the growing assertion of Scottish identity and its varieties that emerged almost in defiance of that quasi-democratic debacle. With this new confidence, Scottish fiction approached the millennium as a standard bearer for Scottish culture ... (2007: 237)

In Irish studies, a similar assignment was (rather notoriously) announced by *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* from 1991, whose general editor, Deane, promises in his introduction that all the writings over the 1500-year period covered by the tomes embody ‘a meta-narrative, which is ... hospitable to all the micro-narratives that, from time to time, have achieved prominence as the official version of the true history, political and literary, of the island’s past and present’ (1991: xix). If this invokes Craig’s endeavour in *The Modern Scottish Novel*, it is confirmed by Gerry Smyth’s *The Novel and the Nation* whose ‘broad interpretative overviews’ promote the Irish novel as ‘at once an effect and an articulation of the nation’ (1997: 1, 20). Both Craig and Smyth draw on the putatively postcolonial conviction of ‘the fundamental role of [the novel] in the formation of national identity’ (Craig: 10) and, thus, its centrality ‘for the emergence of the idea of the nation’ (Smyth: 19), advocated by Benedict Anderson, Timothy Brennan and Frederic Jameson, for example.<sup>20</sup>

If this suggests a postcolonial approach to the reading of Scottish literature, Berthold Schoene, who finds its literary tradition, indeed, exemplary of ‘the different successive postcolonial phases’ (as identified by Fanon), is however ‘doubtful ... that a postcolonial analysis of contemporary Scottish literature would be at all appropriate’ (1995: 110, 116-7). Asserting that ‘Scottish literature has over the last few decades ceased to be preoccupied with its postcolonial status’, Schoene evokes the temporal logic of ‘the post-colonial’ as determined by ‘the nation’. For Whyte, it is precisely this *telos*, namely ‘the setting up of a Scottish parliament [that] will at

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<sup>20</sup> See Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (1983: 33f.); Brennan, ‘The National Longing for Form’ (1990) and Jameson, ‘Third-World Literature’ (1986). I will discuss Jameson’s essay in the last chapter of this thesis.

last allow Scottish literature to be a literature first and foremost, rather than the expression of a nationalist movement' (1998: 284). This sentiment has subsequently been affirmed by post-devolutionary pronouncements on Scottish culture. Catherine Lockerbie, director of the Edinburgh Book Festival, asserts that 'now that devolution has been achieved, people don't have to prove they are Scottish writers anymore', and adds that it will also absolve authors 'to write those quasi-political novels' (quoted in Massie 2002: 1). Reducing the political to the level of the national, these critics ignore that the work of Scottish (as well as Irish) writers has always addressed a more complex matrix of issues and concerns that, in fact, transgress an exclusively national matter, whilst often also being directly critical of nationalist discourses. This effort to erase 'political' voices in the cultural realm is, then, complimented by the advocacy of literature as an autonomous realm, which has become the hallmark of the 'new aestheticism' that Whyte seeks to promote as well. He stresses in his *Modern Scottish Poetry*: 'Reclaiming such autonomy means that both history and politics must renounce any privileged status as tools for the interpretation of Scottish literature' (2004: 8). As with Thomas Docherty, literature, for Whyte, is to be grasped as a singular event, radically detached from its context. Yet, of course, his singular moment of Scottish writing also contradictorily relies upon a devolutionary context for it to take place. By contrast, my subaltern *aesthetics* regards the aesthetic as an ongoing negative critique either side of devolution.

## (b) Scotland's Modern Self-fashioning

*'Identity is claimed either from a position of marginality or an attempt at gaining the centre'*  
(Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*)

If Whyte and Lockerbie's notions suggest a certain wariness about 'the Nation Thing', the critical mode of national enjoyment has, however, been largely by-passed in Scotland, presumably as a result of its 'belated' statehood. Yet, there appears a comparable form of counter-enjoyment in Scottish cultural criticism, albeit in rather more ambitious terms. If Bhabha proposes in the above epitaph that it is either via marginality or centrality that identity is reclaimed, we can find in the context of Scottish studies both (1994: 177). Whereas Irish critics have asserted their culture's

place at the forefront of the postcolonial ‘margins’, Scottish academics have, in turn, attempted to position their nation not only at the centre of the postcolonial but also of the modern world. Yet, while there is a danger in (re)inscribing via auto-orientalism or exceptionality the singularity of Ireland’s position in the wider world, this risk is also evident in the Scottish context. For example, Robert Crawford’s provocative *Devolving English Literature* (1992) posits that ‘Scottish writing has often formed a model for writers in other countries concerned to escape from England’s cultural provinces’ since ‘it offers the longest continuing example of a substantial body of literature produced by a culture pressurized by the threat of English cultural domination’ (2000: 8). If this competes with the Irish claims to pre-eminence in the postcolonial field, Crawford presents Scotland, however, as *both* the source of postcolonial literatures *and* also as the very origin of the colonial cultural hegemony which it had to resist; namely, as the title of his 1998 book heralds, as the ‘inventor’ of English Literature as such.<sup>21</sup> This desire of what Bhabha describes as ‘gaining the centre’ finds an analogue in Arthur Herman’s *The Scottish Enlightenment: The Scots’ Invention of the Modern World* (2002). In his astute Irish-Scottish comparison of such claims, for Craig, this tellingly entitled study testifies, then, to *his* ‘nation’s pre-eminence in the formation of the modern world’ (2005: 62).

On the one hand, such national re-inventions have proven for both Scottish and Irish studies immensely enabling and emancipatory in affirming the importance and relevance of their cultural products to the wider concerns of academic research and university curricula. This has furthermore helped to challenge the Anglocentric bias of what is homonymically called ‘English Literature’. On the other hand, they indicate a tendency to recuperate a somewhat singular logic of national otherness that they initially set out to refute. This is made apparent when Craig extols at the ending of his comparative examination of Scotland and Ireland their national re-creations: ‘The margins of the British state have, in effect, remade themselves as the cultural capitals of the Anglophone empire which their near neighbour thought she had created’ (2005: 64). There is a risk here that such self-fashioning falls back onto the homogenising dichotomy between margin and centre. As a result, what is initially a laudatory endeavour to assert the vitality of one’s own culture can quickly turn into a

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<sup>21</sup> See Crawford, *The Scottish Invention of English Literature* (1998). This argument is inspired by Craig’s discussion of Crawford’s argument in ‘Scotland and Hybridity’ (2004: 238-241).

competitive cataloguing of this national culture over and against the imperial centre (whose hegemonic position this then affirms) – as well as setting one nation against the other in a manner in which the nation is the primary register of analysis. Moreover, given that these claims for national pre-eminence intimate a certain anachronism, they suggest a desire to transcend the socio-political specificity of other experiences, other concerns, and other histories that are very much determined by the present historical moment. The disempowering consequences that such assertions of singularity can produce for subaltern groups when implanted in the political realm have been well demonstrated in the Irish context by the Republic's 1937 Constitution which, in order to assert Ireland's difference to the rest of Europe, has had most oppressive effects, for woman in particular, as will be discussed in Chapter 4.

#### IV. POSTMODERN & POSTNATIONAL REDEMPTIONS: Irish, Northern Irish and Scottish

*‘the “post-“ of “postmodern” does not signify a movement of comeback, flashback, or feedback – that is, not a movement of repetition but a procedure in “ana-“: a procedure of analysis, anamnesis, anagogy, and anamorphosis that elaborates an “initial forgetting”’*  
(Jean-Francois Lyotard, ‘Note on the Meaning of “Post-”’)

If these enjoyments of national distinctiveness are in Slavoj Žižek's understanding always already generated by a putatively 'essentialist' kernel (that of 'the Real'), their discursive transmittance furthermore becomes liable to the charge of essentialism. It was through the intervention of postmodernism that a redemptive cure to such reductive paradigms of national identity has been promised. This rather diffuse term (which it shares with postcolonialism) is probably most cogently defined by Jean-Francois Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) 'as incredulity towards metanarratives' (1984: xxiv). But while this suggests, amongst other things, the abandonment of Marxist class politics and the belief in a socialist alternative after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it does *not* necessarily proclaim the end of the enjoyment of 'the national Thing', nor capitalism for that matter (more on that in a moment). Rather it indicates a more subtle and nuanced, a more plural, multicultural and

inclusive – to employ some of the favourite terms of this discourse – pleasure of both Irish and Scottish national culture. Significantly, this turn in rhetorical strategy has been emphatically hailed as politically enabling and emancipatory for the so-called ‘margins’ – not only of the Western world, but for the postcolonial one as well.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, this language reverberates in the field of Irish and, if to a lesser extent, Scottish studies, where Eleanor Bell finds that the ‘urge for essentialism has often remained largely untheorised and unchallenged’ (2004: 3).

If the previously discussed endeavour of the archipelagic British margins to position themselves as a new or alternative hub seems rather problematic (and essentialising), in the postmodern hermeneutics, the idea of such a totalising centre itself melts into air. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon advocates the liberating implications of this: ‘The local, the regional, the non-totalizing are reasserted as the center becomes a fiction – necessary, desired, but a fiction nonetheless’ (2000: 58). Somewhat ironically, the proponents of this notion of the postmodern as ‘*ex-centric*’ show the tendency to articulate similar eccentric claims to the refuted ‘essentialists’ before them. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, for example, who might be deemed the most emphatic advocate of Irish postmodernity, pronounces ‘the entire history of Anglo-Irish literature ... as a perennial site of the postmodern’ (2006: 6). Where for Kiberd, amongst the others, Irish literature was seen as a forerunner of the postcolonial, for Kennedy-Andrews, it has always already been postmodern. Although he duly acknowledges that the ‘Glossary’ to Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* (1800) indicates ‘a persistent conventional colonial attitude’, which seems, however, only due to the paternal ‘insistence on [its] inclusion’, ‘the main novelistic concern’ that Kennedy-Andrews discerns is truly postmodern as it lies ‘with the disruption, disintegration and dispersal of the new Catholic nationalist “centre”’ (2006: 6-7). More specifically has the postmodern vocabulary been proposed as a putative solution to what Heaney famously termed the North’s ‘anachronistic passions’. In *(de-)constructing the north*, Kennedy-Andrews asserts: ‘In a Northern Ireland context, postmodernism offers the possibility of

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<sup>22</sup> In the field of postcolonial studies, the entanglement of postcolonialism in a postmodern discourse has generated a hefty debate. For an important attempt to dissociate these terms, see Kwame Anthony Appiah, ‘Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?’ (1991) and ‘The Postcolonial and the Postmodern’ (1992: 137-157). For an astute critique of the postmodern turn of the postcolonial more generally, see Ahmad, ‘Postcolonialism: What’s in a Name?’ (1995).

deconstructing the perennial categories of Catholic and Protestant, Unionist and Nationalist; exposing the difference and *différance* within identity; exploring new horizons of identity altogether' (2003: 19). For Laura Pelaschiar, moreover, Northern Ireland's postmodernity seems to become almost a necessity for the 'redemption and rediscovery of the Northern capital and of its spirit'; she describes 'a post-modern [Belfast] as *the* only space where it is possible to build and articulate a (post)national conscience, the only location for any possible encyclopaedic, multivoiced and multi-ethnic development of Northern society' (2000: 117). However, postmodernism requires circumspection from my subalternist perspective since it is itself newly hegemonic and totalising in its arrogation of all difference into its own terms.

This is intimated by the fact that several recent anthologies and critical assessments of Irish literature employ female figures to generate what Anne Fogarty astutely calls 'a metacommentary about the present state of Irish society and of Irish fiction' more broadly (2000: 61). As Fogarty points out, this is, for example, apparent when Smyth's previously discussed study coins the neologism 'Robinsonian' to label the new generation of Irish writers emerging since the election of Mary Robinson as the Republic's first female President in 1990 (1997: 7). Furthermore, in his editorial 'Note' to the third edition of *The New Picador Book of Contemporary Irish Fiction*, Dermot Bolger uses the case of a neglected women writer (Maeve Brennan) to emblemise Ireland's recent socio-political changes (2000: xxxii-xxxiii). In a notably similar fashion does Colm Tóibín's preface to *The Penguin Book of Irish Fiction* uphold the work of several female authors (such as K. Arnold Price, Deirdre Madden, Emma Donoghue and Anne Enright) for being 'post-Freudian, post-feminist and, of course (three cheers!), post-nationalist' (1999: xxxiii). Such assessments seem to have inspired Eve Patten to argue that 'the fiction of the contemporary period is better categorised as post-national than as post-colonial', which she again associates with 'a feminine ethos' (2006: 259, 267). This strategic appropriation of women's previously neglected works seems rather ironic: while images of the feminine have been traditionally employed as a muted analogue for the nation's colonial trauma – as evident in the Irish *aisling* tradition in the figure of 'Dark Rosaleen', which was famously revived by William Butler Yeats' and Lady

Augusta Gregory's play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902) – they function nowadays to allegorize Ireland's postmodern recovery.<sup>23</sup>

Significantly, the postmodern transformation that is suggested here is repeatedly associated with postnationalism. A similar 'need for more self-conscious engagements with nationhood in order to escape the stasis generated by reductive formulations' is articulated by Bell in *Questioning Scotland*, which looks across to Ireland for theoretical inspiration (2004: 3). Bell specifically draws on the influential work of Richard Kearney, whose *Postnationalist Ireland* galvanises this link with postmodernism. 'It has been suggested,' Kearney writes,

that postmodern theory can have radical implications for politics. One frequently encounters the claim, for instance, that the postmodern critiques of the centre ... challenge the categories of established power. The most often cited examples here relate to the critique of totalitarianism, colonialism and nationalism. The postmodern theory of power puts the 'modern' concept of the nation-state in question. It points towards a decentralising and dissemination of sovereignty which, in the European context, at least, signals the possibility of new configurations of federal-regional government. (1997: 61)

Kearney's post-national vision proffers an apt description of the reconfiguration of political power that has by now taken place within the British state as well as the Irish Republic. The dissolution of traditional notions of 'absolutist' national sovereignty was particularly well attested by the 1998 Good Friday or Belfast Agreement (GFA), whereby, as Kearney notes elsewhere, 'both sovereign governments signed away their exclusivist sovereignty claims over Northern Ireland – and came of age' (2000: 21).

In his article 'Toward a Postnationalist Archipelago', Kearney evokes a rite of passage for 'teenager'-like nation states such as Ireland: 'fine when full of questions but impossible when they get too sure of themselves' (2000: 21). As indicated in the introduction to his earlier edited collection, *Across the Frontiers: Ireland in the 1990s*, Ireland's need for maturity derives, for Kearney, specifically from the stasis, austerity and 'impossible' Catholic nationalist traditionalism into which it matured in

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<sup>23</sup> The codification of the feminine as a national symbol will be elaborated on in chapters four and six. For an, in my view, rather problematic argument about the female figuration of Ireland as a clandestine means of resistance under colonialism, see Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture* (1996: 18-22, 129-33).

the post-independence era under Eamonn de Valera. ‘Our present state of affairs is, by most accounts, bleak’, Kearney states and notes the growing inequality, poverty and emigration of the population, besides the declining economy and welfare, as well as ‘the continuing bloodshed in the North’ as symptoms (1988: 7). It is, then, in face of such a crisis that postnationalism is prized as a panacea to put Ireland, and particularly the Northern Irish state, back on the right evolutionary track. Significantly, Kearney’s idiosyncratic metaphoric divulges here the same historical logic than in the first nationalist-postcolonial model outlined above: a ‘Postnationalist Ireland’ is presented as the logical and organic product of successful maturation. This is furthermore attested by his explicit assertion that postnationalism ‘is not to be confused with anti-nationalism’ (1988: 26 FN10a). Hence, rather than abandoning ‘the Nation Thing’, it is, as Graham contends, ‘placed in a “natural” politico-cultural teleology which is poised into a new post-national phase’ (2001: 98). But in assuming the form of an ‘evolutionary’ transcendence of the national problematic, the post-nationalist hermeneutic prevents a sustained critique of the ideological constituents and oppressive structural components of and within the national whole that Kearney initially appeared so concerned with.

It is notable how this progressivist thrust resounds through the language of Ireland as well as Scotland’s politico-economic (post)modernisation. Ireland’s economic boom in the 1990s, commonly referred to as ‘the Celtic Tiger’,<sup>24</sup> has been charted as ‘re-inventing’ the twenty-six counties from an economic casualty to what Ray MacSharry and Padraic White hail ‘a shining light and beacon to the world’ (2000: 360).<sup>25</sup> Similarly, where the evolutionary logic of the term is only slightly concealed behind the prefixed letter ‘d’, Scotland’s devolution has been presented as a radical and wholesome solution to its democratic deficit, promising in the titles of manifold publications, such as *New Scotland, New Politics* (2001) or *Tomorrow’s Scotland* (2002), that a new phase has now been reached. In the context of the Northern Irish Peace Process, it was in particular the signing of the BA that heralded for many commentators, as Joseph Ruane notes, ‘the end of a long, dark period in Irish history,

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<sup>24</sup> The term ‘Celtic Tiger’ was coined in 1994 by Kevin Gardiner of the Morgan Stanley investment bank in London to characterise Ireland’s nascent economic boom in comparison to the ‘tiger’ economies of South-east Asia (see Coulter, *The end of Irish history?* 2003: 3).

<sup>25</sup> The notion of Ireland reinventing itself stems from Rory O’Donnell and has influenced the recent publication of essays, *Reinventing Ireland*, edited by Peadar Kirby *et al.* (2002: 1).

and the beginning of something completely new' (1999: 146). This sentiment is perhaps best summed up when Tony Blair, just after the event, voiced the hope that 'the burden of history can at long last be lifted from our shoulders' (cited in Ruane 169 FN1). Whereas the postcolonial hermeneutic focused on contemplating the past with its inequities and sufferings, the postmodern mode seems, in turn, to indulge in the overcoming of such a disavowed history.

This seemingly 'postmodern' need to resist any '*comeback, flashback, or feedback*' and, instead, to realign these former malformations with a linear, normative and 'natural' development adumbrates the significance of its prefix that Lyotard ponders about in his postmodern 'Note': as he suggests, it indicates 'a procedure of analysis, anamnesis, anagogy, and anamorphosis that elaborates an "initial forgetting"' (1993: 50). But what this prefixed proclamation – which also pertains to other 'post'-discourses such as postnationalism and postcolonialism, as well as post-Marxism and post-feminism – of a 'new' period or temporal succession, if not supersession, seeks to forget is already intimated in the 'rare' meaning of the term 'anamorphosis' itself, which designates, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a 'repetition of the same form at a later stage of development; return to an earlier form'. As Walter Benjamin reminds us, the deluding 'glimmer' of newness merely masks an underlying continuity and repetition; namely, that the nature of capitalist relations of production invariably remains within the spectrum of the same.<sup>26</sup> 'The new and the always the same [*Immergleiche*] are the categories of history's apparent glimmer [*Scheins*],' Benjamin writes in one of his notes on the *Arcades Project* (cited in Jennings 1987: 79).<sup>27</sup>

This becomes clear when Kearney explicates the postnationalist cure as prescribed by 'the economic imperative' for free markets across the frontiers, as evinced in his promotion of 'a postnational model of interdependence' (1997: 84, 60). This has found a notable echo in the changed position of the Scottish National Party, which nowadays aspires, as Scotland's current Cabinet Secretary for Justice,

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<sup>26</sup> This argument is inspired by Patrick William's and Laura Chrisman's innovative usage of Benjamin with regard to postmodernism and postcolonialism in their introduction to *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory* (1994: 12).

<sup>27</sup> Quoted from Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* (1972-89), Volume 5, p. 1251. In the following, references hereto will be designated by *GS* with the volume in Arabic numerals and pagination in parenthesis in the text.

Kenny MacAskill, intones, towards ‘Independence in an Interdependent World’ (2004: 23). ‘Recognising that a competitive economy is essential’, Scotland’s former recalcitrant camp unambiguously promotes ‘Devolution, Globalisation, and a New World Order’ (MacAskill: 16, 27). It is significant that this subordination to the dictates of the global market economy is not merely eulogised as the most beneficial means for social amelioration, but that it is also conceived as both ‘irreversible’ and ‘inevitable’, as Kearney stresses (1988: 9). In this line, the sociologist and Third Way architect, Anthony Giddens, argues in his promotion of the political strategy that has become the dominant formula of Tony Blair’s New Labour: ‘No one any longer has any alternatives to capitalism’ (1998: 43). As a result, one of the most primary guarantors and tenets of any working democracy – that is, the healthy cultivation of opposition and dissent – is repressed. The extent to which this discourse effectively suspends any possibility of choice other than itself instigates an aporia of the ethical that proves much more profound than the undecidability that Spivak confronts in her ‘Moral Dilemma’. Such rhetoric culminates in the enunciation of the ‘end of history’, an idea that has been most notably revived by Francis Fukuyama. Fukuyama’s account of a capitalist utopia, safely tucked beyond ideological debate as well as political and historical change, presumptuously conjoins free-market economy with democracy, in order to announce that we have reached, in his words, ‘the end-point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government’ (1989: 3-4).<sup>28</sup> This sentiment that an end state has been reached has influenced readings of both the success of Ireland’s Celtic Tiger and the Peace Process in the North.<sup>29</sup>

Such an apparently irresistible historical development that entraps us into a self-same future that is already decided upon is well captured Benjamin’s famous *Gedankenbild* (thought-image) of the Angel of History in section IX of his ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’:

His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and

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<sup>28</sup> A salient critique of Fukuyama’s thesis from a Marxist position is offered by Perry Anderson, ‘The Ends of History’ (1992: 297-375) and Stanley Aronowitz, ‘Class Rules: Utopia On Hold’ (2002).

<sup>29</sup> For a critical analysis of such readings in the context of the Celtic Tiger, see particularly Coulter’s introduction to *The end of Irish history?* (2003); with regards to the Belfast Agreement, see Ruane ‘The End of (Irish) History?’ (1999), and Kelly, ‘Geopolitical Eclipse’ (2005b: 550).

hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (1999a: 249)

The concept of progress that so conspicuously underpins the current political and economic redevelopments in the Irish-Scottish archipelago involves, for Benjamin, not only the ‘progression through a homogeneous, empty time’ (1999a: 252), but is furthermore inextricably ‘grounded in the idea of the catastrophe’; he expounds in ‘Central Park’: ‘That things “just go on” is the catastrophe. It is not that which is approaching but that which is. ... Hell is not something which lies ahead of us, – but this life *here*’ (1985: 50). If in the Irish and Scottish context ‘hell’ (or simply history as such) was what, in turn, was hoped to be left behind, the dialectical counter-logic of Benjamin’s angel exposes the pile of debris, the catastrophe that lies concealed under the current storm of progress, which presents itself under the rationale that it will prove beneficial to all people respectively. Hence, both Irish societies and Scotland display all the class divisions and inequalities that are the hallmark of an iniquitous, patriarchal and racially structured capitalist system.<sup>30</sup> The poor and the unemployed, the abused and the oppressed are the conveniently silenced, yet necessary products of such a progressive storm. As such, they designate the structure of a symptom as Žižek, following Jacques Lacan, describes it: as unavoidably results they are endowed as ‘exceptions’ in order to sustain the ‘capitalist utopia ... that through appropriate measures ... this “exception” could be – in the long term and in principle, at least – abolished’ (1997: 46). Today’s subaltern, thus, function as ‘a permanent reminder of how the immanent logic of late capitalism works’ (Žižek: *Ibid.*); namely, as Colin Coulter stresses with regard to Ireland’s Celtic Tiger, that ‘it has been entirely inevitable that the distribution of the advantages of economic growth should have been neither even nor universal’ (2003: 21).

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<sup>30</sup> For the context of the Celtic Tiger, see Kirby, *The Celtic Tiger in Distress* (2002); Kieran Allen, *The Myth of Social Partnership* (2000); for the context of New Labour (as illustrative for Scotland), see George Monbiot, *Captive State* (2000); and for specifically Scotland-related policies after devolution, Mooney and Poole, “‘A land of milk and honey’?” (2004). On class politics in Northern Ireland, see Coulter, ‘The Absence of Class Politics’ (1999).

Accordingly, when Michael Gardiner describes devolution as ‘*the* terminal step of decolonisation in the Anglophone world’ it seems, rather, like a *re*-colonisation via global capitalism (2004: 274). Hence, instead of necessarily bringing ‘a light to the world’, as Gardiner’s essay-title proclaims,<sup>31</sup> the current redevelopments adumbrate the moment that Aaron Kelly appositely terms ‘geopolitical eclipse’ (2005b: 547). This entails that the actual hegemony of the market (alongside its rather unpleasant aspects) is conveniently obfuscated by a culturalist discourse that, while promoting the validity of all identities, involves an ideological displacement of the class problematic. As Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin assert in their introduction to *Reinventing Ireland*, ‘culture has become the handmaiden of a particular type of economy’ (2002: 2). As the cultural logic of late and global capitalism, as Jameson famously describes it (1991), postmodernism exemplifies the mechanism of a Gramscian ‘transformist’ hegemony: a process through which popular sectional interests are absorbed and then reinscribed by the dominant classes. In the language of pluralism and multiculturalism, the demand for universal equality becomes rewritten as inclusiveness; an inclusion which entails the assimilation and containment of the various identity struggles and forms of otherness within the hegemonic norms of the bourgeoisie which pertain, as Wendy Brown points out, ‘to the white masculine middle-class ideal’ (1995: 61).<sup>32</sup> This is, for instance, illustrated in the ways in which ‘the feminine’ has been harnessed by recent Irish anthologies, as well as by poststructuralist and postmodern theories, which I will expound on in the last chapter. For rather than expressing an ethical concern with the specific place and condition of women in Irish society, such acts of appropriation emphasise the importance of Ranajit Guha’s critique: by using femininity to chart Ireland’s postmodern transformation, such efforts secure the silence and passivity to which women have been traditionally relegated.

As several critics have pointed out, it seems, indeed, highly suspicious that at a point in history when women and other marginalised groups have, even if still often

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<sup>31</sup> Gardiner takes his title from the opening speech of Scotland’s new parliament by Donald Dewar.

<sup>32</sup> That this bourgeois norm can assimilate identitarian ‘claims to injury and exclusion ... claims to the political significance of their difference’ but not those of class is attested by Brown’s contention that ‘identity politics require a standard internal to existing society against which to pitch their claims, a standard that not only preserves capitalism from critique, but sustains the invisibility and inarticulateness of class – not accidentally, but endemically’ (*States of Injury* 1995: 61).

to a restricted level, started to reclaim their voice to articulate claims for justice, judgement is declared indeterminate, endlessly deferred by a *differend*,<sup>33</sup> truth and meaning are demolished; reality is supposedly no longer cognisable and the subject considered as a residual essentialism in an age of postmodern flux.<sup>34</sup> Against these rather unhelpful deconstructive propensities, Rosi Braidotti saliently asserts from a feminist perspective that,

one cannot deconstruct a subjectivity one has never been fully granted; one cannot diffuse a sexuality which has historically been defined as dark and mysterious. In order to announce the death of the subject one must first have gained the right to speak as one; in order to demystify metadiscourse one must first gain access to a place of enunciation. (1989: 237)

This illuminates the foundational gap that separates the current Western theoretical discourses from their theorised ‘objects’. As Graham argues, this is also demonstrated by the definition of identity that underpins the Northern Irish Peace Process (2007: 175-176). Here, the way in which the rhetoric of cultural diversity is mobilised for the reconciliation endeavour seems initially to proffer an enabling means to transcend the sectarian template. This state-sponsored philosophy finds, for example, expression in the implementation of socio-cultural initiatives such as the Cultural Traditions Group whose endeavour, indicated in the titles of two conferences, ‘Varieties of Irishness’ (1989) and ‘Varieties of Britishness’ (1990), and as stated in their 1995 report *Giving Voices*, is to foster ‘a multi-cultural society with pluralist values’ (1995: 40, 9).<sup>35</sup> It is, however, the institutional consolidation of this ‘Two Traditions’ paradigm through the GFA that again contains and assimilates alternative forms of identity and dissenting voices, which will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

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<sup>33</sup> Lyotard defines this as ‘a case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgement applicable to both arguments’ (*The Differend* 1988: xi).

<sup>34</sup> For an engaged critique of those issues with regard to postmodernism, see Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism* (1989); Christopher Norris, *The Truth About Postmodernism* (1993) and *Reclaiming Truth* (1996).

<sup>35</sup> The Northern Ireland Cultural Traditions Group operates since 1990 as part of the Community Relations Council and has become a major funding body. On their work, see the collection of essays edited by Maurna Crozier (1989; 1990; 1992). For a discussion and critique by several academics (such as Edna Longley and Seamus Deane), see Lundy and MacPóilin (eds.), *Styles of Belonging* (1992); and also Alan Finlayson, ‘The Problem of “Culture” in Northern Ireland’ (1997).

This indicates the extent to which postmodern discourses have lost touch with the experiences of disenfranchisement, oppression, exclusion and poverty that still and increasingly mark the lives of millions of people. The ways in which this ideology has been hailed as what Gibbons astutely calls a normalising ‘global cure’ for social malaise bases the diagnosis on a notion of progress (2002: 9). Here Theodor Adorno’s critique of George Lukács in ‘Reconciliation under Duress’ (1961) is apt. Adorno argues that ‘the dichotomy of healthy/sick is as undialectical as that of the rise and fall of the bourgeoisie, which derives its norms from a bourgeois consciousness that has failed to keep pace with its own development’ (1977: 156). Adorno’s indictment of the Western bourgeoisie’s inability to supply adequate maps of its own continuous transformations provides a pertinent description of today’s proliferating ‘post’-discourses, which, as Aijaz Ahmad saliently argues, are fundamentally imbricated with the post-historical condition in which we apparently live (Ahmad 1997). I wish to call such a condition an *ethical* interregnum; that is, an ethical pause or standstill, a moral void in which the aporia lies not so much in the question of decision but, more specifically, in the need to reclaim choice and alternative histories.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, when the falsity of today’s choices precipitates for many a detachment from the dominant ideologies, such a situation is perhaps best adumbrated by Antonio Gramsci’s notion of the interregnum, as described in his *Prison Notebooks*:

If the ruling class has lost its consensus, i.e. is no longer ‘leading’ but only ‘dominant’, exercising coercive force alone, this means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously, etc. The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; and in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear. (1971: 275-6)

As Richard Kirkland saliently reminds us, the ‘disruptive energies’ released by these morbid symptoms have, for Gramsci, ‘more positive than troubling aspects’ (1996: 8); they instigate a possibility that Kirkland relates to Benjamin’s notion of a

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<sup>36</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists as its fourth definition of the ‘interregnum’: ‘A breach of continuity; an interval, pause, vacant space.’ The period after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the ensuing collapse of the socialist project has been recurrently associated with an ‘interregnum’; see, for example, *The Interregnum: Controversies in World Politics 1989-1999*, edited by Michael Cox *et al.* (1999).

‘messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past’ (Benjamin 1999a: 254). It is this notion of an ethical interregnum or disjuncture and the disruptive force it exerts on the logic of progress and development that the next chapter will elaborate on.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SUBALTERN COUNTER-HISTORIES IN THE SCOTTISH-IRISH ARCHIPELAGO<sup>1</sup>

James Kelman's 'Naval History', Robert McLiam Wilson's 'The Dreamed', Patrick McCabe's *The Dead School* and James Kelman's *You Have to be Careful in the Land of the Free*

*'We will not have come to terms with the past until the causes of what happened then are no longer active. Only because these causes live on does the spell of the past remain to this very day unbroken'*

Theodor W. Adorno, 'What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?'

#### I. TOWARDS A COUNTER-HISTORICAL APPROACH

##### **The Burden of History: James Kelman's 'Naval History'**

*'History ... is the nightmare from which I am trying to awake'*  
(James Joyce, *Ulysses*)

In James Kelman's short story 'Naval History' [NH], published in his 1991 collection *The Burn*, we are confronted with a situation in which his namesake protagonist is literally burdened with history. On leaving a bookshop, James is stopped by two old acquaintances who, disregarding his protest, load his arms with huge tomes: 'They started lifting other books from here and there, piling them on top of the first one at a fierce rate with this crazy fucker Alan insisting I dont say a word and each time I tried he did this stupid finger-into-the-ears routine with big laugh at his misses' (NH 93). Redolent of the postmodern condition that I delineated through

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this chapter will be published as 'Subaltern Counter-Histories in the Scottish-Irish Archipelago: Ethics and the Burden of History in James Kelman, Patrick McCabe and Glenn Patterson', in *A Further Shore: Essays in Irish and Scottish Studies*, eds. E. Agnew *et al.* (pending, 2008).

Benjamin's Angel of History above, James is given no choice but to contemplate with bewilderment the proceedings; how these two, as he notes, are 'plying me with these enormous tomes just to weigh me down' (NH 100). Robbed of his agency and any means to protest or defend himself, James is accused by his former colleague: 'Aye, you've no changed [...] You're a failed scholar, he said, a failed trades-union organiser, plus you're a failed socialist [and] more importantly ... you're skint' (NH 93, 95). This interpellation of James as a perpetual social and economic failure serves to disparage and ultimately to occlude his oppositional politics and engaged artistic production as a playwright. In Alan's language, his realist plays transmute into 'wee stories with a working-class theme' (NH 95). In overwriting his own voice, these two furthermore create their own version of his past and present, rewriting not only his self but also his needs, interests and desires – with both Alan and his wife telling him about the books: 'You need them [...] you'll like them, because you always did' (94, 96). It is in such a situation in which his own history 'threatens to disappear irretrievably' that James needs to 'seize hold of a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger', as Walter Benjamin describes it (1999a: 247). For Kelman's protagonist, this emphasises not only the necessity to reclaim 'the reality, how things truly were' (NH 94) but also to trust his memory: 'There was something up here and my memory was trying to warn me' (NH 100).

It is significant that the books that are piled on his arms are mostly naval histories, as also some on Hollywood movie-stars. These topics evoke, on the one hand, for James, 'an unhealthy fascination with the trammels of empire building' (98); on the other hand, they signal the globalising spread of American imperialism. In short, these military and cultural histories proclaim the triumphant march of Western progress. In his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', Walter Benjamin famously argues that this kind of 'historicism rightly culminates in universal history', which aims to canonise a certain version of history that consolidates the political and ideological hegemony of the rulers by annexing the countervailing challenges of an alternative, here a socialist tradition that James represents in Kelman's story (1999a: 254). As Benjamin reminds us: 'Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate' (248). From the perspective of those below, this version of history

becomes, as with James, a nightmare – as he, in resonance with James Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus, repeats: ‘it was like a nightmare, me wondering if I was about to wake up or what’ (NH 94). Furthermore, the so-called cultural treasures that he is forced to carry and which James, as Benjamin puts it, ‘cannot contemplate without horror’ (1999a: 248), operate as a strategic burden ‘to slow [him] down’ so that he is in the end helplessly delivered to ‘the polis’, which his two former mates represent (NH 103, 102). In Kelman’s story, the Glaswegian expression ‘polis’ for police resonates with Jacques Rancière’s association of the Greek *polis* with a police order that controls and regulates what can be said, thought and done in order to enforce consensus, as Kelman’s protagonist has to experience. Hence, instead of enabling a disruption of this coercive aesthetico-political regime, the books with which James is burdened illustrate Benjamin’s famous dictum: ‘There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism’ (1999a: 248). It is from such a model of history as an ‘irresistible’ process of self-fulfilling progression that Benjamin demands a radical dissociation from: the task is, Benjamin implores, ‘to brush history against the grain’ (1999a: 252, 248). This chapter hopes, then, to develop a methodology for such a ‘brush’ as the basis for the following readings.

### **The Traumatic Paradigm: A Subaltern Understanding of History**

In many ways, Kelman’s story represents an experience that most of the novels chosen to be discussed in this thesis engage with; an experience which includes the denial of choice, the feeling of entrapment and stasis, the silencing and erasure of other voices and histories. Moreover, it is the sense of such a history as progress that becomes an irreducible burden, which cannot be easily lightened or overcome as certain versions of postmodern revisionism would like it, that these texts convey while trying to negotiate it.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Irish as well as Scottish literature have for long been considered to be overpowered by such a burden and collapsed into what Joep Leerssen describes as a ‘traumatic paradigm’, expressing a sense of historical stasis

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<sup>2</sup> I will briefly discuss the implications of Irish revisionism with regard to McCabe’s *The Dead School* below. On the endeavour to ‘alleviate’ the burden of history see, for instance, F.S.L. Lyons 1978 lecture, ‘The Burden of Our History’ (1994). For Lyons, it is more specifically the ideological distortions of ‘certain’ events, such as the Easter Rising and the Battle of the Boyne, that Irish Revisionism seeks to straighten and re-align.

or paralysis whereby history seems to revolve in a repetitious cycle and ‘no longer progresses’ (1998: 45). In ‘The War Against the Past’, Declan Kiberd calls this the ‘Yeatsian view of history’ and he deprecates the fact that it has become the foundation of the Irish national imagination (even, as he notes, making its way into schoolbooks). For Kiberd, such a model is ‘not really historical at all, based as it is on a rupture of chronology by the endless repetition of familiar crisis, with no hope of resolution’ (1988: 28). In *Out of History*, Craig similarly criticises the ways in which Scotland has been recurrently represented by its writers as ‘a purgatorial eternity; [a] world of endless and appalling repetition: beyond narrative; beyond change; outside history’ (1996: 40). However, if Leerssen’s model invokes the sense of being entrapped ‘outside history’, it constitutes by no means an unhistorical conception, but instead offers an alternative historical understanding, which proves highly circumspect of the narrative of national progress. It is such a conceptualisation that I wish to outline in the following.

In 1882, Ernest Renan famously postulated that nations are forged by the shared experience of suffering. However, he also emphasised the necessity ‘to forget’ this foundational trauma as it ‘brings to light deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations’. Forgetting, in his words, is thus ‘a crucial factor in the creation of a nation’ (1994: 11). Such a wilful amnesia underpins not only the postcolonial nation-state, as Leela Gandhi argues in her *Postcolonial Theory* (1998: 4), but also its postnationalist transformation. By contrast, the historical model that Leerssen describes is, as with Benjamin’s materialist historiography, based on a model of remembrance – of the injustices, the barbarism and violence that lie beneath the proclaimed ‘victories and success stories’ of the nation (Leerssen 1998: 43). Therein, it expresses not only a specifically ‘subaltern’, but also, as Leerssen notes, a ‘gothic’ view of history (45). If in very different ways, both terms share a concern with marginalised and oppressed (or suppressed) states of being and with what is marked ‘other’ to Western progress and epistemology, specifically in relation to colonialism. Describing a form they term the ‘postcolonial Gothic’, David Punter and Glennis Byron note its concern with ‘the impossibility of escape from history, with the recurrent sense in Gothic fiction that the past can never be left behind, that it will reappear and exact a necessary price’ (2004: 55). The Gothic thus introduces a

logic of haunting, a sense of return and repetition that makes out the traumatic thrust that Leerssen's model denominates.

The history of Irish literature, in particular, but also that of Scottish writing, chart a long tradition of engagement with the gothic genre (for example, in the works by writers such as Sheridan Le Fanu, Charles Robert Maturin, Bram Stoker; and James Hogg, Sir Walter Scott, Robert Louis Stevenson).<sup>3</sup> In *The Novel and the Nation*, Gerry Smyth discerns in the Anglo-Irish Protestant imagination 'a fixation on the ways in which the past persists in the present', which he relates to the Gothic as a specifically colonial form of expression (1997: 52). But a gothic sensibility is also noticeable in contemporary fictions of both regions. Here, what Smyth describes as 'the incursion of the past onto the present' occurs not only through memories but also, generating perhaps a more disturbing effect, through ghosts and other supernatural elements (1997: 53). In contemporary Irish fiction, this is, for instance, apparent in Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark* (1996), Anne Enright's *The Wig My Father Wore* (1995) and, her latest novel, *The Gathering* (2007), Patrick McCabe's *The Dead School* (1995) and Robert McLiam Wilson's 'ghost' story 'The Dreamed' (2003) from his forthcoming novel, *The Extremists*; the latter two will be discussed in this chapter. In Scottish fiction, it is especially the work of A.L. Kennedy, in particular *So I Am Glad* (1995), that triggered what Douglas Gifford describes as 'a return of the supernatural in Scottish writing' (2007: 247). But a gothic mode is also inherent in Elspeth Baker's *O Caledonia* (1991), Alasdair Gray's oeuvre, particularly *Poor Things* (1992), and Janice Galloway's *The Trick is To Keep Breathing* (1989), besides others.

Interestingly, while the gothic form is in the Irish context generally associated with the island's colonial experience, Punter takes what he terms 'the Gothic Condition of Scotland' as an 'inevitable' result of its 'suppressed, stateless culture' (2002a: 123-24). Accordingly, the various gothic images, elements and psychic states that he (in many ways similar to Smyth) finds in a number of contemporary Scottish novels become, for Punter, a putative means for 'Reconstructing An Absent Nation', as the subtitle of his essay proclaims. But in reducing the multivalent array of such apparently 'gothic' themes as abuse, disempowerment, imprisonment, madness and

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<sup>3</sup> On the literary tradition of Scottish and Irish Gothic, see, for example, Punter, 'Scottish and Irish Gothic' (2002b); Siobhán Kilfeather, 'The Gothic Novel' (2006).

violence to a seemingly singular national condition, Punter ignores that these experiences are always underwritten by a specific economic and socio-political position that can often be designated as subaltern, informed by class, gender, race and so on. Nonetheless, as Punter saliently stresses, the Gothic offers ‘an alternative, more [haunted] view of history’, disputing the notion that history has come to an end and can simply be buried – as Fukuyama, for one, would have it – which enables ‘a deeper engagement with the difficulties of the present’ (2002a: 107, 124).

In contrast to this, Scottish literature since the 1980s bespeaks, for Gifford, ‘a theme of emergence from trauma’, evoking ‘a new spirit’ and ‘new optimism’ that indicate that Scotland seems to have, finally, ‘transcended’ its traumatic paradigm (2007: 245). This observation can, to the regret of Kiberd, not be made with regard to contemporary Irish fiction. In his 2003 Parnell lecture, he bemoans the inclination of Irish writers to deploy a sceptical ‘rear-mirror view’ rather than duly celebrating Ireland’s current achievements: ‘many writers find it hard to believe sufficiently in the shiny surfaces of [the] Celtic Tiger,’ he concludes (2005: 276). I would concur with the scepticism that Kiberd discerns; for rather than indicating a postmodern recovery that is underwritten by the desire to forget the traumatic past, the current global conjuncture exemplarily brings to the fore what Richard Wright describes as history’s ‘morbidly unfinished business, [the] ghosts and strange potencies that seep round the edges of every reforming design’ (1991: 165).

In a similar fashion, if to a different end than Kiberd, Joe Cleary complains in his latest book: ‘To date, very little Irish writing ... can be said to have contemplated the vagaries and vicissitudes of the new global order of which Ireland is a constituent part’ (2007: 12). But if contemporary Irish novels seem out of touch with the present politico-economic situation – which is, in turn, desperately wished for by Christopher Whyte with regards to Scottish literature – I want to suggest that the Scottish, Northern Irish and Irish fiction selected for discussion here proves, instead, more concerned with mapping the actual socio-ethical disjuncture that lies concealed underneath it. In the majority of the works I consider, the past keeps a haunting or even traumatic impact on the present, whether through the form of memories and dreams, or ghosts and spirits. In many cases this indicates that there is much unfinished business that needs not only to be addressed but also redressed. The

burden of history that several of these texts engage with is then always, at the same time, the burden of responsibility – not only for the past and the present but also specifically for the future. As Theodor Adorno suggests in this chapter’s epigraph: ‘We will not have come to terms with the past until the causes of what happened then are no longer active. Only because these causes live on does the spell of the past remain to this very day unbroken’ (1986: 129). However, such an engagement with the past does not need to divulge a stasis. Before turning to the novels, I thus wish to reformulate Leerssen’s ‘traumatic paradigm’ by elaborating it through Craig’s model of counter-history in conjunction with Fredric Jameson’s concept of the political unconscious, Jacques Derrida’s notion of spectrality and Benjamin’s materialist historiography.

### **Out of *History*: Subaltern Counter-Histories and Ethics**

In *Out of History*, Craig traces in nineteenth-century Scottish novels, such as the historical novels of Sir Walter Scott for example, the continuous re-emergence of those forces and events that are conventionally left out of official historiography, that indeed must, as David Hume observes, be ‘buried in silence and oblivion’ for the construction of the history of ‘a civilised state’ to take place (cited in Craig 1996: 68).<sup>4</sup> As what is occluded, silenced and forgotten erupts and returns to contaminate the present, such counter-historical forces exert a disruptive effect on the narrative of progress. Craig writes: “‘Progressive’ history is not the story of humanity, but the story humanity tells itself in order to conceal the deeper reality which it is the business of the novel, as *counter-history*, to tell’ (1996: 72). This exposes the forged nature and imposed linear order of progressive history, redolent of Hayden White’s propagation of history as just another (meta)narrative, dependent on literary genres and the rhetoric use of tropes.<sup>5</sup> In this regard, it is important to establish a distinction to a clichéd postmodern position in which the question of historical truth is disparaged and dismissed as history itself is conceived as nothing more than a verbal fiction. Simultaneously, care needs to be taken not to reinscribe a realist

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<sup>4</sup> Cited from Hume, *History of England*, Volume 1 (London, 1834), p.1.

<sup>5</sup> See White, *Metahistory* (1973).

epistemology in which literature is, in turn, seen as directly reflective of some objective underlying ‘truth’ or ‘reality’.

For this, I wish to galvanise Craig’s notion of counter-history with Jameson’s concept of the political unconscious. Through Louis Althusser, Jameson affirms history as an ‘absent cause’, which, he stresses, ‘does not at all draw the fashionable conclusion that because history is a text, the “referent” does not exist’ (2002a: 20). Therefore, he proposes the following reformulation: ‘history is *not* a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious’ (Ibid.). This reflects Benjamin’s insight that ‘the events surrounding the historian and in which he takes part will underlie his presentation like a text written in invisible ink’ (1999b: 476). Building upon Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory*, Jameson’s insistence on ‘*the ideology of form*’ thus allows us to understand the formal structures of literary productions, in which memories and forces of the past break into the present, and thus fracture, haunt and halt chronological, linear narration, as a politically inspired ‘rewriting or restructuring of a prior historical or ideological subtext’ (2002a: 84, 66). So rather than being *out* of history – that is, located in an evasive anti-historical outside – such counter-histories are created out of *History*.<sup>6</sup> As Craig saliently states: ‘Counter-history is the inevitable product of a history that, by claiming to be the only inevitability in human life, leaves so much out of history’ (1996: 81). Furthermore, ‘the production of aesthetic or narrative form’ has, for Jameson, also ‘the function of inventing imaginary or formal “solutions” to unresolvable social contradictions’ (2002a: 64). I wish to propose that the return of a disavowed past in much of the fiction discussed by this thesis disrupts the hegemonic versions of history and reality, which Rancière associates with the police order. In opening up a space for previously silenced subaltern voices to emanate or re-emerge, these fictions pose a potential challenge to the distribution of the sensible. That this can precipitate an ethical address and, possibly, a utopian redress of the current

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<sup>6</sup> The capitalisation of history, which I will occasionally use throughout this thesis, is intended to emphasise what Jameson calls the ‘inexorable *form*’ of History, that is, the ‘historical or ideological *subtext*’ that underpins, challenges and disrupts literary productions as ‘the experience of Necessity’ (2002a: 66, 87-8).

interregnum is suggested by Derrida's *Spectres of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (1994).

Taking inspiration from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1623) whose tragic hero complains in the epigraph of his book that 'The time is out of joint', Derrida argues that we inhabit a profound ethical disjuncture in history which needs to be set right. Accordingly, he reworks Levinasian ethics to suggest this 'disjuncture [as] the very possibility of the other ... one that opens up the infinitive asymmetry of the relation to the other, that is to say, the place for justice' (1994: 22). Where Emmanuel Levinas' demand for 'ethics as first philosophy' emphasises the need to preserve the radical alterity of the other against its violent incorporation and thus sublation through ontology, Derrida coins the homonym '*hauntology*' to advocate what he considers a spectral '*politics of memory*' (10, xix).<sup>7</sup> He explains: 'To haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept. Of every concept, beginning with the concepts of being and time. That is what we would be calling here a hauntology. Ontology opposes it only in a movement of exorcism. Ontology is a conjuration' (161). It is important to stress here that Derrida's 'ideologeme' of spectrality (as Jameson calls it) offers an important critique of the Fukuyamaian version of the perpetual presence of the 'new world order'. Jameson elaborates this point in 'Marx's Purloined Letter':

It is as though Derrida, in what some call postmodernity, is in the process of diagnosing and denouncing ... a present that has already triumphantly exorcised all of its ghosts and believes itself to be without a past and without spectrality, late capitalism itself as ontology, the pure presence of the world-system freed from all the errors of human history and of previous social formations, including the ghost of Marx himself. (1999: 59)

It is precisely from this moment of the declared death of both past and future that Derrida insists – via Hamlet – on the return of the repressed: 'After the end of history, the spirit comes by *coming back* [*revenant*], it figures *both* as a dead man who comes back and a ghost whose expected return repeats itself, again and again' (1994: 10). Reversing the teleological understanding of history, the repetitive logic of

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<sup>7</sup> Derrida's spectral politics and, specifically, his endeavour to reconcile deconstruction with Marxism have generated various responses which are collected in *Ghostly Demarcations. A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Spectres of Marx*, edited and introduced by Michael Sprinker (1999).

the spectre operates here not as an indicator of stasis or paralysis but, as with Craig's counter-historical forces, as a disruptive uncontrollable force. Derrida notes: 'One cannot control its comings and goings because it *begins by coming back*' (11). This uncanny return heralds a demand for justice, reminding us of our infinite responsibility towards the other 'beyond all living present' (xix). As with Levinas, Derrida asserts what he calls the 'spectral asymmetry' of our relation to the ghost: while we can feel its presence, the force of its look – 'This spectral *someone other looks at us*' – the power of its demand – 'who makes the law, who delivers the injunction' – we are incapable of seeing it, what Derrida terms 'the *visor effect*' (6-7). In other words, for Derrida the spectral other remains, as with Spivak's subaltern, inaccessible to and incommensurable with conventional models of epistemology and ontology.

Notably, this also underpins the psychoanalytic understanding of trauma: as with the spectre, the traumatic experience exceeds full assimilation in memory, consciousness or narration, but returns 'in flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena' (Caruth 1996: 91). In *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth outlines the ethical importance of trauma (which aligns it with Derrida's spectral 'politics'), when she notes that trauma, which in Greek originally means 'wound' inflicted on the body and came, mostly through Sigmund Freud, to connote an injury of the mind, is 'much more than a pathology': 'it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in its attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available' (1996: 4). Caruth argues that this voice that calls out represents, on one hand, 'the other within the self that retains the memory of the "unwitting" traumatic event of one's past'; but it can also be read as 'the way in which one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which the trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound' (8). Caruth's understanding of trauma resonates with Rancière's approach to aesthetics in the way in which the traumatic story struggles to articulate and to bring to light that which cannot be said, what is silenced and repressed on both the individual and social level. The listening to the traumatic experience of another precipitates, then, not only a questioning of the existing

political order, but it also becomes the basis of an ethical relation to the other, as I will show in Chapter 5.

As a direct effect of History, the temporality that trauma introduces seems, however, paradoxically to remain forever ‘outside’ history. L.L. Langer notes in his study of Holocaust survivors that trauma ‘stops the chronological clock and fixes the moment permanently in memory and imagination, immune to the vicissitude of time’ (1991: 174-5). Indeed, many of the novels that will be discussed in the following arrest the forward movement of time and, thereby, formally evoke a temporal stasis which appears always historical as well: a putative ‘end-of-history’ scenario. In order to resist conceiving such a temporality as reflective of a dehistorical limbo, I want to suggest that these texts can be read to configure a Benjaminian standstill. For Benjamin, historical materialism ‘cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to stop’ (1999a: 254). But this stillness does not signify immobility but posits an ‘arrest’ of thought in order to bring the past in a dialectical constellation with the present, so that ‘it crystallises into a monad’ (Ibid.) – or what he elsewhere calls a ‘dialectical image’. It is such a configuration that offers the ‘revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past’ that Richard Kirkland evokes in relation to Gramsci’s interregnum. For Benjamin: ‘There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* messianic power, a power on which the past has a claim’ (1999a: 245-6). The fact that this claim of the past on the present cannot, as Benjamin stresses, ‘be settled cheaply’ is illustrated in Robert McLiam Wilson’s ‘The Dreamed’ [TD], which furthermore attests to the specifically ethical burden that it might bring.

### **The *Ethical* Burden of History: Robert McLiam Wilson’s ‘The Dreamed’**

In Wilson’s short story, an unnamed ‘old man’ seems truly endowed with the ‘messianic power’ that Benjamin evokes in his rather magical ability to generate the return of the dead. But these are not just any deceased persons but the past generations of men who fought in previous wars. ‘There were never any women. Or

children,' we are told by the omniscient narrative voice. 'There were no non-combatants. No civilians. They were all soldiers, sailors or pilots' (TD 312). Significantly, this capacity to dream up the military deceased is shown to have developed as a result of the man's inclination to disavow the grisly reality of the erupting Second World War: 'He had a great gift for not thinking. He distrusted empathy, he distrusted the way his eyes would fill with reasonless tears. Why weep over suffering that didn't belong to him? What was the possible use of such a habit?' (308). However, it is when confronted with such cruel disrespect towards human suffering by watching schoolboys who snigger over photos from a concentration camp that what he later comes to call 'his habit' emerges (TD 320): dreaming that night 'for the last time', the man wakes up to find himself face-to-face with the French resistance fighter Sylvain who passed away in 1941 (TD 309). This becomes from then on endlessly repeated: as soon as 'the dreamed' man, substituting henceforth his real dreams, leaves his house, another one arrives. Notably, these men are initially not aware of the fact that they previously died on the battlefield; that they have returned from death as what Derrida calls the *revenant*.

As with the Derridean spectres, these returnees confront Wilson's protagonist with an irreducible demand for responsibility, an 'eternal obligation', as he puts it (TD 322). The opening of the story illustrates this inaudible command in remarkably Levinasian language. Arousing next to a 'young man in the bed beside him', the old man is described to step 'with infinite patience and care' out of bed: 'Silently he stood at the bedside and tried to lean over the sleeping form that he might see more of the face. The young man stirred and more of his features became visible. The old man stared curiously' (TD 303). It is the young man's face, what Levinas calls 'the face of the Other', that intrigues the old man; in contemplating it, the old man is, as Levinas suggests, confronted with the 'invisible death [that is] ignored by the Other ... becoming the death that stares [him] in the face'. In 'Ethics as First Philosophy', Levinas expounds this with remarkable relevance to Wilson's story which I have, accordingly, parenthesised:

The other man's death calls [the old man] into question, as if, by [his past and] possible future indifference, [he] had become the accomplice of the death to which the other, who cannot see it, is exposed; and as if, even before

vowing [himself] to him, [he] had to answer for this death of the other, and to accompany the Other in his mortal solitude. (1989b: 83)

It is, then, as if a somewhat uncanny ethical redress of the protagonist's previous endeavour to neglect his responsibility towards the other is brought about.

As with all the *revenants* before him, this younger man is the older man's personal charge and, as Levinas would put it, sole responsibility. Pre-empting his needs by having upon his wake a huge breakfast prepared, the old man must next carefully re-introduce his protégé to 2000 England. The story delineates here a generational bond that transgresses both temporal as well as national boundaries: the departed arrivals are not only all younger than him, while simultaneously belonging to the past generations, but also come from all over the world; if predominantly from Europe, the languages they speak include 'Hausa, Catalan, Djiboutin' (TD 315). Levinas proposes: 'It is as if the other established a relationship or a relationship were established whose whole intensity consists in *not* presupposing the idea of community' (1989b: 84; my emphasis). But if this suggests a move beyond conventional forms of social organisation, 'the dearly departed', as the old man calls with some irony those who left his own house, quickly establish in Wilson's story another 'form of society', which has, however, not the ethical impetus that it seems to promise (TD 316, 317).

On the impulse of Sylvain, a procedure is developed, whereby each new arrival is discharged as quickly as possible 'so that others might come': 'Over the years, the technique of processing the young men had improved to something close to mechanical ease' (TD 315, 314). Significantly, Sylvain connects these increasing returns of the dead militia with 'the Resistance', the insurgent French opposition movement against Nazi occupation (TD 314). Amongst the growing pool of returnees, a 'magnified, monstrous' bureaucratic organization is created: 'It became a secret society, a ghostly mafia, a discreet empire. It endorsed schools and clinics, university scholarships and addiction centres,' we are told (TD 316). With its burgeoning businesses and rising financial power, it offers the new arrivals moral and economic support to facilitate their smooth integration into the contemporary world. This entails, however, that they keep silent about the facts of their existence: 'nearly two hundred of the men had ended up long or short terms in psychiatric

institutions for trying to tell the truth' (TD 318). As the old man knows, what is necessary for successful assimilation is to forget one's past and history, the old self and its experiences in order to undergo a rather postmodern reinvention, which he observes his latest arrival doing: 'Christian would be one of the successes ... He was already formulating his new self, liberated from the bonds older than death. He was reinventing. He hadn't been simply brought back to life, he was being rewritten' (TD 319). The notable alteration between active and passive voice here suggests that the possible revolutionary-ethical thrust of these ghostly returns is absorbed and reworked by an indiscernible, inexorable force – namely History itself, what Jameson calls 'the experience of Necessity' (2002: 87). Hence, rather than instigating a possibility for a meaningful social change – what Antonio Gramsci would term an 'expansive' hegemony – Wilson's story exemplifies a Gramscian 'transformism', whereby the apparent opposition that these *revenants*, according to Sylvain, represent, transmutes into consensus, a repetition of the ever-same. The old man stays markedly critical of to their so-called 'empire', lampooning 'its power and success, its sincerity and commitment' (TD 316). It is furthermore significant that their apparently exemplary form of ethical 'togetherness' turns out to be an 'unusual brotherhood', a patriarchal community tellingly devoid of any woman (TD 317). As mentioned previously, Levinas also upholds an ultimately masculine form of community, the apparently neutral 'human fraternity', as the apex of ethical universality (1979: 214).

Given his role as a vehicle for what has become a rather tiresome process of mechanical reproduction of somewhat 'ideal' capitalist citizens, for the old man, his ability does not indicate some messianic miracle, which is indeed what '[h]is life lacked ... His life needed more magic' (TD 321). By contrast, it becomes an arduous task that he accordingly designates as a '*habit*': 'Habit suggested monotonous accumulation and private vice at the same time. It was a bad habit he had ... It was a habit he could not give up' (TD 321). Additionally, rather than affording him new insights, this spectral begetter desperately tries to stay as indifferent as before: 'He was still good at not thinking ... He feared that understanding would bring some onerous new addition to the duty ... For that is what it was ... an endless burden' (TD 322). I want to suggest that the understanding that the old man is so anxious to

repress is what Wilson's story divulges as the real ethical burden, which is notably similar to the one I discussed with regard to Kelman's 'Naval History' above: namely, it is here not so much the infinite responsibility for the other but the recognition that no historical 'other' is available anymore that becomes burdensome; the fact that the old man is seemingly eternally obliged to reproduce the same version of history while being robbed of his dreams and, thereby, the hope for a different future. It is this complicity and entrapment in a dominant historical paradigm that both McCabe's *The Dead School* and Kelman's *You Have to be Careful in the Land of the Free* confront, to which I will now turn.

## II. 'HISTORY STANDS SO STILL, IT GATHERS DUST': Patrick McCabe's *The Dead School*

*'The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; and in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.'* (Antonio Gramsci)

### **The Ethical Interregnum between 'Traditional' and 'Modern' Ireland**

The period between the 1920s and the 1970s is generally held as an era of profound transitions in Irish society, marking the end of Eamon de Valera's traditional Ireland and generating the birth of a new Irish state. Luke Gibbons asserts in *Transformations in Irish Culture* that the year 1959, in which Seán F. Lemass was appointed Taoiseach, is 'with revisionist hindsight taken as the *annus mirabilis* of modern Ireland ... dispelling the mists of traditionalism which had obscured the path to progress and industrialisation ... [and breaking] with the protectionist policies of the previous generation [in order to extend] an open welcome to foreign investment and multinational capital' (1996: 82). The Republic's 1973 entry into the European Union (then EEC) consolidated these developments, exposing its society to what Gibbons tellingly describes as 'the ways of the world' (Ibid.). There is, then, a distinct turning point or rupture considered to have occurred during this epoch, which is based on what Jameson describes as 'a powerful act of dissociation whereby the present seals off its past from itself and expels and ejects it' (2002b: 25). In this

regard, Joe Cleary argues that ‘post-1960s “Lemass’s Ireland”’ is set up against ‘de Valera’s Ireland’ as ‘its repudiated antithesis’ (2007: 8).

Published in 1995 (with Ireland now moving into the Celtic Tiger period), Patrick McCabe’s *The Dead School* [DS] revisits this transitional era – from just before the Irish War of Independence to the very end of the 1970s. The novel takes the form of a somewhat typical McCabean gothic tale, recuperating an oral tradition; its omniscient and rather patronising narrator addresses us in the opening chapter, entitled ‘Hello There’: ‘Boys and girls and I hope you are all well. The story I have for you this morning is all about two teachers and the things they got up to in the days gone by’ (DS 1). This pedagogical framework of the novel is interlinked with its allegorical form, whose temporal mode is retrospection. For the context of the *The Dead School*, it is interesting that Walter Benjamin argues that the allegorical imagination emerges in a time of profound social disruptions.<sup>8</sup> Notably, the postmodern era has itself been proclaimed as an ‘allegorical age’ (Quilligan 1979: 155), most famously described in Craig Owens’ two-part essay ‘The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism’ (1980).

Formally fragmented into short chapter-sections, McCabe’s novel juxtaposes, intersects and, towards the end, superimposes the personal histories of its two protagonists, Raphael Bell, born in 1913, and Malachy Dudgeon – retold from their very beginning to their disastrous end in 1979. But this does not imply linear or progressional sequentiality, for the novel’s two narrative strands constantly displace and foreshadow one another. Nonetheless, the enormous time-frame covered by the flash-back, flash-forward structure of this book has been read as a distorted allegorical *Bildungsroman*, tracing what Clare Wallace describes in her discussion of the novel as ‘the maturation of the independent Irish State’ (2004: 145). Malachy is born close to the crucial Lemassian caesura in 1959; and his embrace of liberal values, drugs, rock music and American consumer culture seems, indeed, to symbolise the supersession of Raphael’s traditionalism and patriotic endorsement of ‘all things Gaelic and Irish’ (DS 107). However, as Tom Herron points out in

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<sup>8</sup> Benjamin develops this idea in his study of the German *Trauerspiel* (1963) with regard to the protracted civil war during the Baroque era, and expands on it in relation to the upheavals of modernity (with specific focus on Charles Baudelaire) in the fragments of his *Arcades Project* (1982). For a perceptive discussion of Benjamin’s notion of allegory, see Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing* (1989: 168-78).

‘ContamiNation’, the present is in McCabe’s novel ‘thoroughly contaminated by [the] past’, which produces serious dislocatory and traumatic effects for both protagonists (2000: 169). This, I want to argue, furthermore undercuts the evolutionary thrust of Ireland’s post-nationalist teleology.

Setting out from Malachy’s story in the late 1950s, the way in which chronological narration is constantly ruptured – not only through Raphael’s intersected story but also in the form of memories and dreams – ostensibly captures Gibbons’ famous notion that ‘Ireland is a First World country, but with a Third World memory’ (1996: 1). But the spatial distinction that Gibbon’s formulation draws erects a temporal boundary that obscures the implication of these rather problematic terms with the dynamics of global imperialism. Moreover, Cleary suggests that a similar difficult distinction is reflected in conceptions of the period in question, which is furthermore underwritten by a simplistic evaluative ethics: ‘if “de Valera’s Ireland” has become a magnet term around which to constellate every negative inference of the word “tradition,” the term “Lemass’s Ireland” or, more commonly, just “contemporary Ireland”, likewise accrues to itself all of the uncritically positive connotations of the word “modernity”’ (2007: 8). Such a ‘dyadic conception’, Cleary astutely observes, has the tendency to obfuscate the fact that oppressions and repressions are operative in both eras and that it is mainly a question of class and gender position as to whom they affect most (Ibid.). This conceptual division is overturned most clearly by McCabe’s novel.

Rather than attesting to the optimism that marks this period as a distinct break or succession of nationalist stagnation, McCabe’s novel maps it as an ethical interregnum that is truly contaminated by Gramscian morbid symptoms. In contrast to Herron who argues that madness is ‘the inevitable consequence of the clash of two [competing] systems’ (2000: 169), I contend that McCabe’s pathology derives from the fact that Malachy’s postmodern present represents not so much an opposition, but the inevitable outcome of Bell’s morality. Herein, the novel’s very form as a perverted fantasy that enfolds into an increasingly nightmarish dream-structure enables an uncovering of both de Valera’s ‘traditional Ireland’ and Lemass’s ‘modern Ireland’ as ideological fantasies masking an ethical void. Accordingly, the madness and morbid symptoms at the novel’s close indicate the anaesthetisation of

ethical responsibility and social mapping for both protagonists to divulge the novel's realisation that other historical possibilities are occluded by both systems.

### **Love is in the Grave: Traumatic Adulterations**

Malachy Dudgeon's childhood in a small Irish town is characterised by bullying and harassment because of his father's social status as a failure: 'the biggest bollocks in town', as he is introduced (DS 1). His wife, Cissie, has an affair with 'Jemmy the cowman' which is publicly known, making him an object of derision behind his back. Herein, Packie Dudgeon becomes the paradigm of what Declan Kiberd describes in his chapter 'Fathers and Sons' in *Inventing Ireland* as 'the inadequate Irish male' (1996: 381). Emasculated by his wife's promiscuity, Packie's desperate attachment to her would, for Kiberd, attest to the extent to which he stands 'under the mother's control' (1996: 391). Cissie's adultery becomes for Packie furthermore a betrayal of the de Valerian patriarchal vision of an Ireland 'bright with cosy homesteads [and] comely maidens' (1980: 466), which he seeks to bequeath to his son: 'Just you remember, Malachy – once you are a happy family that's all you need' (DS 15). But it is precisely the attempt to maintain the image of this national fantasy that leads to the adulteration of any meaningful social relation in the Dudgeon household: the farcical performance of their marriage serves to hold any sustained confrontation with reality or truth at bay. Herein, the novel gestures to the deeper structural problem which is not – as Kiberd suggests – that of a 'failed' or 'emasculated' masculinity but, rather, I argue, that of a pretentious morality underpinning every social institution of this community.

In his chapter on 'Adulteration and the Nation', David Lloyd contends that 'adulteration undermines the stable formation of legitimate and authentic identities' (1993: 10). Yet, if this instigates, for Lloyd, positive subversive effects, for father and son in McCabe's novel it has rather tragic outcomes. When Malachy takes on the identity of an American detective to spy upon his mother, the confrontation with the adulterated primal scene has a traumatic effect on him that lasts, as the narrator tells us, 'for the rest of his days' (DS 17). In his dreams, Malachy is haunted by the image of 'Love in the Grave', embodied by his father. For Packie, on the other hand, this

adulteration drives him into suicide, suggesting, as Kiberd notes, his 'refusal to assume full responsibility' (1996: 391). However, within the context of McCabe's novel, this failure stands not as an isolated case but as the product of the wider community's refusal to face their own implication in his desperate deed. In the ludicrous display of compassion during his wake, the real motif of Packie's death is tellingly rewritten as a sad accident.

This disavowal is furthermore exemplified in the intersected story about Mrs McAdoo's baby who died as a result of her adherence to the instructions of the town's dominant representatives: the neighbours, the doctor and, especially, the Canon of the Church renounce any responsibility towards the death of her six-month-old. Just as with Packie's wake, so too this funeral performs a social spectacle of communal harmony, whereby the principally culpable Canon transmutes the tragedy into a 'happy, *happy* occasion' by praising, in his words, the 'peacefulness of a community united as one in grief' (DS 30). Denying Mrs McAdoo thereby any possibility or place to mourn the insurmountable injustice done, her uncontrollable outburst yet exerts a powerful disruption of this unitary farce: 'The screaming was bad enough to begin with but by then it had become so intolerable that in the end there was no point in anyone pretending or even hoping that they could ever go away from that cemetery saying it had been a glorious day or a day of community solidarity or anything like it' (DS 31). Mrs McAdoo's outcry expresses what Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer call a 'wound in civilisation'. 'This is why mourning is watered down more than anything else and consciously turned into social formality,' they explain in their fragment 'On the Theory of Ghosts' (1997: 216). In the novel, this is demonstrated by the enforced silence with which this event is sought to be buried in the communal consciousness. As 'Nobby the Funeral Expert' repeatedly exhorts: 'I never want to hear another word about it' (D 23). This urge to forgetting is consolidated by the public erasure of McAdoo: nobody wants to have anything to do with her, and no one cares when she dies soon afterwards.

## God save Ireland: Colonial Trauma – Postcolonial Recovery?<sup>9</sup>

Malachy's dismal upbringing, which he spends after the death of his father in contemptuous resentment of his adulterous mother, drastically differs from the bucolic Irish idyll of Raphael's 'happy and holy family' (DS 39): caring and respectful towards his mother and filled with utter pride towards his well-respected father, Mattie Bell, Raphael is the delight not only of his parents but the whole community. However, similar to Malachy, the sudden murder of his father at the hands of Black and Tan soldiers in the War of Independence brings a severe disturbance. As the memory of this traumatic event returns to haunt Raphael, it exerts a similar determining influence on his life as Malachy's childhood trauma has on him, but with different effects. Mattie's death initially marks him as a patriotic martyr, as his Uncle Joe confirms: 'Your father was a hero son. ... He died for Ireland' (DS 48). The extent to which Raphael identifies with this heroic image is indicated when he dreams of himself in the role of an IRA freedom fighter, commanding the killing of the 'British coward' who murdered Mattie. Consecutively, he imagines his own heroic execution alongside Patrick Pearse through the firing squad trailing the 1916 Easter Rising: 'Raphael clenched his fist and thumped the air, crying "God save Ireland!" and felt the soul of his father enter his body' (DS 51). Having promised his dying father to look after his mother, Raphael decides to make her 'the proudest mother in the whole of Ireland' (DS 48). As a devout Catholic and brilliant scholar attending teacher training college in Dublin, he seems on his best way to realise it.

Although Raphael is still occasionally haunted by 'a mask of horror' of the imperial archfiend, in 1931, one year before hosting of the Eucharistic Congress and the electoral success of de Valera's Fianna Fáil, Ireland seems to have truly left the burden of its colonial past behind; and Raphael enthusiastically anticipates his role as the educator of 'the first free generation of a country for centuries in chains' (DS 92). And rightly so, the narrator affirms, for 'that all belonged to the pages of history now, there consigned because of the courage of men like Raphael's father' (Ibid.). Marching proud and sturdy into an all-bright, all-Irish future, while topping his rising

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<sup>9</sup> I have borrowed this title from David Lloyd's 2000 article, 'Colonial Trauma/Postcolonial Recovery?'

career as a teacher with becoming the Principal of St. Anthony's Boys' National School, Raphael's success as its headmaster is described as transforming the 'drab old battleship [of a school] into a phantasmagorical galleon soaring towards the future at full sail across the skies' (DS 112). But such a teleological progress narrative becomes ultimately distorted as the novel exposes the dark underside of Bell's triumphs.

True to the insights of Subaltern Studies, the singularising logic of Bell's righteous nationalism recuperates colonial structures that he celebrates as replaced. Wallace perceptively notes that as headmaster, Raphael takes on the role of 'the arbiter of justice', ruthlessly controlling 'St Anthony's [as] his microcosmic empire' (2004: 150). Bell's ideology is consolidated by a compulsive moralism that strikes out to punish at what questions its validity. In *Politics Out of History*, Wendy Brown argues that moralism can be seen as the symptom of an ungrievable loss causing 'impotence and rage' (2001: 21). This seems, indeed, to apply to Raphael whose desire for righteous punishment is underwritten by the traumatic event of his father's death. Already when head prefect at college, Raphael imposes his authority with physical violence, for example when 'mercilessly' beating 'the well-known bully Lally [for] mistreating a junior' (DS 59, 58). It is significant that this confrontation transmutes for Bell into the scene of his father's death, with him now having to revenge Mattie's principles against 'a coward of a Black and Tan with a smoking gun and Lally's face' (DS 59). Raphael's furious reactions to any breaches and trespasses against his rules represent the exact opposite to the measured and deliberate judgement associated with morality.<sup>10</sup> McCabe demonstrates such discord of morals when '*Mister* Raphael Bell, God's gift to Irish education', as he is introduced to us on the very first page, disciplines a disobedient 'bully' whose offence drives him into 'headless' rage: "'Did you take his marble?'" he shouted at him again, their noses almost touching. "Did you?" ... It took another eight slaps to get the truth out of him. Raphael was exhausted. But it was worth it' (DS 109-10).

Nonetheless, Raphael's paradigmatic development reaches its symbolic climax in his marriage to Nessa Conroy from the 'Wee North' (DS 116). By annexing the border between the Northern and the Southern state, their marriage allegorises the

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<sup>10</sup> See Brown's discussion of the distinction between morality and moralism in *Politics Out of History* (2001: 23).

nationalist dream of unification. Yet, it is noteworthy that the eagerly anticipated offspring of their union – a ‘little Tumble-Curls Maolseachlainn’ – is a stillbirth (DS 127). This event comes to mark a drastic disjuncture to the happy days spent in harmony and future-dreams. Ringing in a sense of loss and ruin, the newborn’s death uncannily resonates Gramsci’s notion of the interregnum wherein ‘the old is dying and the new cannot be born’ (1971: 276). However, as Herron points out, ‘there is a rebirth of sorts when 16 years later, the “one and only” Malachy Dudgeon lands job at Raphael’s school’: ‘Malachy is the anglicized form of Maolseachlainn’ (2000: 179). But while Malachy’s arrival at the school comes to herald the decay of the ‘old’ – that is, Raphael’s ‘traditional Ireland’ – it does *not* indicate the shift into a new period but instead precipitates the morbid return of all that has been silenced and repressed.

### **Blaming the (M)other: Moralising Against History**

Malachy appears as the reverse mirror image of the hero-headmaster Bell; yet their trajectories show remarkable parallels – not only in the fact that Malachy unwittingly follows Raphael’s footsteps by pursuing a teaching career and attending the same college, St Patrick’s in Drumcondra, about 40 years later. While both men are similarly traumatised by the death of their father, they use very different cultural coordinates to rewrite their painful past. For Raphael, it is pride in his national heritage, preserved by such cultural institutions as *The Walton Programme*, that functions as an empowering tool against the colonial nightmare. For Malachy, on the other hand, it is through identifying with rock music and American consumer culture that he seeks to renounce both love and past: For ‘now ... it was bye bye love as far as he was concerned’, with ‘the past all bundled up and buried, kicked into the grave where it belonged’ (DS 62, 64). Their attempts to overcome a traumatic history are furthermore underpinned by their comparable imitation of the at the time dominant models of masculinity. Mimicking the male heroes of Hollywood movies, Malachy’s mask of the self-confident, lonesome hero allows him for some time to reinvent his former subaltern victimhood, and even lands him private success with Marion, his great love. But Malachy remains haunted by the ghost of his father’s failure who

comes time and again to remind him that he is nothing but the ‘son of Packie Dudgeon – that humpy cunt!’ (DS 74). In turn, Raphael’s aspired model of Irish manliness relies on the phallic assertion of authority, strength, bravery and so on, as represented by his father.

Equally determined by rather opposite versions of paternal figures, it is significant that both characters neglect their mothers. Malachy’s utter disdain of his adulterous mother is, as with Bell, symptomatic of a reproachful moralism that in only adhering to the overarching principle of self-righteousness becomes an effective means for ethical narcotisation. When home for the summer, Malachy almost shows some empathy with his remorse-smitten mother – but only almost:

She looked sad and broken ... and it was hard not to feel sorry for her. But then he came to his senses and thought to himself well too bad ain’t it – that’s what you get when you make your own bed. You have to lie in it, don’t you? Which is absolutely true of course as he was going to find out himself, and a lot sooner than he thought, standing there in the kitchen like a preacher and passing judgements on a helpless, choked-up wretch who ... was beginning to look more like a scarecrow than someone you would be inclined to call mother. (DS 88)

The determinism of his judgements consolidates an equally deterministic version of history which he, indeed, soon comes to suffer. But even Raphael’s initial promise comes to nothing, as he, neglectful of both mother and wife, is far too concerned to safeguard his (and by extension his father’s) principles from their threatened perversion by the encroaching ‘new times’. For Bell, the amorality and contamination they bring to ‘The Holy Catholic Irish Republic’ are, on the one hand, paradigmatically embodied by the *Terry Krash Show*, replacing his beloved *Walton Programme* with broadcasted discussions about women’s desous, rape and sex before marriage (DS 173). On the other, it is the member of the parent committee, ‘Miz Evans, Batchelor of Abortion’, who invades his school with demands for changed policies on uniforms and the introduction of non-competitive sports (DS 208); she even manages to replace the annual school visit to Kilmainham Jail with a trip to Waterworld. Particularly this final victory of his feminist nemesis, achieved through the support of Raphael’s best friend Father Stokes, unleashes a moralism that borders on insanity – and which is primarily discharged against his innocent wife,

mother of his stillborn child: ‘His face was blood-red and his eyes were wild. He squeezed her arm again, even harder and bellowed, “Do you hear me? Listen to me when I’m talking to you! Whose side are you on? Whose side are you on, Nessa Conroy?”’ (DS 212).

In the novel, the figure of the mother operates as the silenced other, signalling the hollow moralism of a patriarchal system. In what Edward Said terms the ‘rhetoric of blame’, Malachy and Raphael equally lay sole responsibility not only for personal tragic events but for History as such on symbolic (m)others: whereas Malachy reproaches his biological mother for the adulteration of the national fantasy of a bright, loving and cosy home, for Raphael, violence, horror and tragedy are the sole fault of the imperial British ‘motherland’, while the ruin of his world and principles is caused by such perverted mothers as the abortionist Evans. In particular, Bell blames the transformations in Irish culture for blighting the honoured memory of Ireland’s history; what the nationalist historian, Brendan Bradshaw, describes as ‘desensitising the [colonial] trauma’ (1989: 339). Francis Mulhern terms such an obsessive focus on the colonial past ‘postcolonial melancholy’, and he argues that it obfuscates the culpability and responsibility of the ‘indigenous propertied classes and their politico-cultural elites’ in perpetuating and conserving forms of oppression in the current state system (1998: 161).<sup>11</sup> Both of McCabe’s protagonists prove equally unwilling to recognise their own implication in a moralistic patriarchal order that evades ethical liability towards the other.

Their reproachful moralising is, as Brown notes, symptomatic of ‘political paralysis’, indicating ‘a misrecognition of the political logics now organising the world’ (2001: 29). This is exemplified as Raphael sees Malachy as the personification of all modern evil, the declined morals of a perverted new world-order, instead of recognising him as the product and offspring of his own conduct and vacuous ideology.<sup>12</sup> In turn, Malachy takes the headmaster’s bigoted

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<sup>11</sup> Mulhern takes this notion from Benjamin’s essay on ‘Left-wing Melancholia’, republished in *Screen* 15.2. (Summer 1974): 28-32.

<sup>12</sup> In *ContamiNation*, Herron makes a similar point by observing that the name Malachy also means ‘messenger’: ‘Instead of reading [Malachy’s message] as a salutary parable of the damaging silences embedded within his own belief in and love of all things Irish, Raphael reads the younger man as the embodiment of all things foreign, of everything presently contaminating the purity of Irish education in particular and Irish life in general. Though he expels the implications of Malachy as a foreign body, Malachy is, as his name suggests, Raphael’s own progeny, albeit in disguise’ (2000: 182).

traditionalism and rigid rules as the reason for his downfall. In a scene dark with sarcasm, McCabe performs such an empty rhetoric of mutual blaming, nearly ending in reciprocal slaughter; burgling into Raphael's house, Malachy is attacked by his former head teacher:

'You! After all you've done you come back here to my house! ... I'll kill you! I'll destroy you like you destroyed me!', which he did his best to do as he sent poor Malachy flying across the room ... 'You made me lose my wife!' he screamed. '... and you ruined my life!'

'No! No, you fucker! You ruined mine!' were the words that Malachy, more than anything, wanted to utter, but as another blow thudded into his ribs, they left him and there was nothing but silence ... (DS 327-8)

Allegorically, what this venomous confrontation exemplifies is, as Brown writes, a 'moralising *against* history in the form of condemning particular events or utterances, personifying history in individuals, and disavowing history as a productive or transformative force' (2001: 30).

### **What Hurts: The Return of a Renounced History**

This signifies the extent to which both their histories are collapsed in a Leerssenian 'traumatic paradigm'. Herron testifies to this by remarking upon McCabe's 'strongly deterministic vision': 'there is nothing the subject can do other than follow the path laid down by family and history. There is no sense in *The Dead School* that history may be brushed against the grain' (2000: 189). However, whilst this possibility is denied to both characters, I want to suggest that McCabe nonetheless configures such a Benjaminian 'brush' by dissociating the novel's political unconscious from a progressivist trajectory as a means of mapping the ethical void beneath it. Part of the novel's pedagogical framework is, then, to trigger the disturbing return of a renounced History, a horrendous Real and a silenced Other that function as ethical reminders and remainders of all the cruelties and injustices hidden under the proclamation of historical progress.

For Raphael, the outbreak of the political upheavals in the North, in particular the atrocities committed by the IRA, seem a ghastly betrayal of the methods and

principles that his father stood for. Seeking to preserve this heroic image of the past, Raphael passes onto his students stories about the noble struggle for Irish freedom of his father's generation. But not only the outer world, also his memories have undergone horrific deformations and revisions. In a nightmare immediately following the appalling news about an IRA bombing, Raphael is confronted with the horror and barbarism hidden under the honoured memory of national liberation. He dreams that the beloved horses of his uncle burn at the stake with 'melting eyes'; utterly paralysed by what is happening, he comes to face the culprit of this cruel deed whom he eagerly tries to disavow:

[Raphael] was still rooted to the spot ... when he looked up and saw a man in a mask emerging from the charred shell ... 'Well – what do you think of my handiwork? Impressive, eh?'

What made Raphael go cold all over was the fact that he recognised the voice ... when the mask came off ... Raphael found himself looking into the eyes of his own father ... His laughter was even louder than the death-cries of the horses. 'Cooked fucking horse!' he shouted. (DS 149)

In the merciless slaughter of vulnerable horses – which are offered as symbols of all innocent victims – this dream-vision exposes the claimed righteousness of terrorist warfare as unethical and reckless. As with the other dream-revisions of his father's death, the image of his hero-father transmutes into that of a cowardly 'murderer' no longer distinguishable from the British imperial forces who killed him (DS 150).

Such revisions of the nation's official history certainly 'debunk the nationalist meta-narrative', as Herron argues (2000: 171). Yet, rather than locating McCabe's text 'unequivocally in the revisionist camp', as Herron does (Ibid.), I suggest that McCabe's dialectical vision is equally critical of the ideological underpinnings of Irish Revisionism. As George Boyce and Alan O'Day assert in their introduction to *The Making of Modern Irish History*, 'revisionism' is in the Irish context driven by 'liberal and pluralistic' impulses and thus revealingly rooted in the specific cultural-political logic that I outlined in the previous chapter (1996: 4). Coming to the fore in the late 1930s but reaching its peak during the 'Troubles', Cleary argues that the revisionist rewriting of an 'objective' and 'more "standardized" (meaning "Europeanized") version of Irish history [is conducted to] facilitate the Republic's integration into the European Union' (1996: 233). Bradshaw has accordingly called

revisionism ‘a consensus theory’, and Willy Maley deprecates that it is, in his words, ‘concerned as much with concealing as with healing the wounds of Irish history’ (cited in Maley 1999: 21; 18).<sup>13</sup> Other critics such as Seamus Deane and Terry Eagleton have pointed to its ideological complicity with capitalism, whose ‘ultimate political expression is pluralism’ (Deane 1994: 239).<sup>14</sup> But as I have argued above, it is exactly this logic of progress that the counter-historical thrust of the *The Dead School* brushes against the grain.

Consequently, a putatively ‘postmodern’ lifestyle offers Malachy neither a viable alternative nor a hoped-for analgesic amnesia. After his girlfriend cheated on him and left him, and one of his pupils dies on his responsibility, Malachy’s escapades in London’s drug-scene end in a mental institution. Declining into madness, Malachy is haunted by disturbing memories of his past. In a nightmare, he is confronted by the Dummy, a dumb destitute from his hometown who committed suicide just a week before his father. To the community, the Dummy always appeared as utterly content with his voice- and powerless status; he is considered as ‘the happiest man in town’ (DS 278). However, as with the farcical marriage of Malachy’s parents and the pretentious funeral ceremonies, the happiness that is projected in his ‘great big face’ serves to exonerate and absolve the community from their utter indifference towards him and his situation (D 283). The Dummy thus returns to remind Malachy that there is no escape from the pain inflicted by people’s lack of concern for the other: ‘Your father did it after me because he thought it would bring him peace. He thought the waters would close over him and there would be no more pain. ... But there is! ... There is and there always will be! ... For all eternity he will rot there in pain – as I did! And now you! You too!’ (DS 283-4). In McCabe’s determinism, there is no escape from the trauma of History possible. Refusing to cauterise the wounds of the past, *The Dead School* literalises Jameson’s contention that ‘History is what hurts’: ‘it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective

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<sup>13</sup> Cited from T. Graham, ‘A Man with a Mission: Interview with Brandan Bradshaw’, *History Ireland* 1.1(1993): 52-5, p. 53.

<sup>14</sup> See also Eagleton, ‘The Ideology of Irish Studies’ (1997) and ‘Revisionism Revisited’ (1998: 308-327). On different responses to the Irish revisionist debate, see the collection of essays edited by Ciaran Brady, *Interpreting Irish History* (1994). For the proposal of a ‘post-revisionist’ phase, see Tom Dunne, ‘New Histories’ (1992).

praxis, which its “ruses” turn into grisly and ironic reversals of their own intention’ (Jameson 2002a: 88). This is well illustrated by the novel’s ending.

### **Dust: Historical Destruction and Decay**

Having both ‘retired from society in or around the same time’, as the narrator puts it, Raphael and Malachy’s mutual decline and deteriorating mental state signify the utter meaningless that their experiences, actions and intentions have obtained for them (DS 291). While Malachy collapses as a result of his girlfriend’s betrayal as well as his own betrayed responsibilities, Raphael, feeling deceived by both his best friend and wife, disintegrates into inebriated conspiracy theories, in which all the precious moments of his life turn into ‘Dust’: ‘Because when you examined them that was more or less what they turned out to be. They were what you would call a big useless pile of dust, of absolutely no use to anybody’ (DS 253). Furthermore, we are told: ‘Worse than any dust is lies’ (DS 254). But what for Raphael, in his morbid detachment, are lies, is in reality the truth that he refuses to recognise or listen to; hereby this inversion divulges the extent to which his defensive moralism covers in dust what nationalistic or revisionist historiographies cover in silence. Dust, as silence or lies, thus, symbolises the ways in which ideological myths obscure the violence and inequities of historical events by anesthetising the senses – and thus forestall ethical responsibility and social mapping.

In *The Dialectics of Seeing*, Susan Buck-Morss describes how the backwards glance of Benjamin’s Angel of History shatters the myth of historical progress so that ‘history stands so still, it gathers dust’ (1989: 95). It is this temporal stillness that McCabe’s novel captures in the actual ‘Dead School’ that stands at the end of the novel, opened by a truly deranged headmaster in the attempt to perpetuate his beliefs that have come under extinction. Barricaded from the winds of change, what Bell desperately attempts to erect is an enduring monument attesting to the former wholeness and greatness of his world on the foundation of the cultural touchstones of his past, such as ‘*A New English Primer. Catechism for Boys and Girls ... JC Beckett’s History of Ireland. My Friend Our Lady*’ (DS 263). But their language has become for him so unstable that they literally defy the possibility of grasping their

meaning: ‘just as he was about to start reading again the words went and swooshed away off the page round the room like wordy tornadoes ... He tried to get hold of them, shake some sense into them, but it was like trying to wrestle smoke’ (DS 264). This signifies the irresistible dissolution of the world he seeks to preserve. Rather than indicating a monumentalisation, with its accumulated piles of debris and haunted by the ghosts of his past, the Dead School stands as a ruin of decay. In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin elaborates a theory of Baroque allegory in which the ruin becomes the paradigmatic emblem for the melancholic reflection on the ultimate transitoriness of all social, cultural and ideological constructions and aspiration; in short, the apprehension of History as *Naturgeschichte* (nature-history):

The word ‘history’ stands written on the countenance of nature in the characters of transience ... In the ruin history has physically merged into setting. And in this guise history does not assume the form of the process of an eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay. Allegory thereby declares itself to be beyond beauty. Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things. (Benjamin 2003: 178)

It is through this materialistic understanding of history as ‘irresistible decay’ that allegory becomes, for Benjamin, ‘the antidote to myth’ (1985: 46). This is evident in McCabe’s allegorical imagination in which History appears neither as progress nor petrified stasis; instead the novel summons its violently destructive effects, which are visualised in the final image of the Dead School’s rotten detritus with its former master’s disfigured and exposed body ‘swinging from the ceiling’ (DS 334).

But while allegory is expressive of the devastating forces of History and time, its exegesis relies on a framework of existing codes and values of meaning that, in a way, preserve the historical logic that it shatters at the same time. Benjamin writes in ‘Central Park’: ‘That which is touched by the allegorical intention is torn from the context of life’s interconnections: it is simultaneously shattered and conserved’ (1985: 38). Hence, while Bell is annihilated, Malachy lives on, and with him – as the product of the values and ideology that Raphael represented – the repressions, cruelties and denied responsibilities of his world. However, the novel performs a somewhat macabre redress in the fact that Malachy is for the rest of his life condemned to the responsibility that he so hard sought to disavow: he returns to his provincial hometown to nurse his senile mother. Yet, rather than being an example of

ethical care, like headmaster Bell, Malachy has lost any touch or interest in his present world and merely wallows in nostalgic reminiscence of the long passé happy times he spend with Marion. Through this standstill, *The Dead School* signals the dangers of a melancholic contemplation that in chasing after some imaginary lost ideal neglects to face the ethical obligations of the present.

### **An Ethics of Memory: A weak Redemption**

But despite all his determinism, McCabe nonetheless intimates a redemptive possibility through the processes of remembrance that he concomitantly indicts. For, as Benjamin, suggests: ‘The destructive powers release those which lie in the idea of redemption [*Rettung*]’ (GS 1.3: 1245-6; cited in Wolin 1982: 261). That is, by blasting ‘a specific era out of the homogenous course of history’, the past is brought in a new constellation with the present, affording it ‘a *weak* Messianic power’ (Benjamin 1999a: 254, 246). Hence, shortly before their final destruction – which is for Raphael literal, for Malachy more metaphorical – both men are, once again, confronted with a dream-image of their past; yet this time it bears a weak, yet nonetheless noticeable, promise of redemption. Although the idyllic memory of his past is for Raphael already irreversibly tainted by the forces of the present (tellingly figured by Evans), just before he dies he is rescued by the ghost of his late wife: ‘Then her white arms reached out and he left Evans far behind, felt them touch him as once they had touched him ... her soft perfumed skin close to his as she whispered his name over and over and at last he was free’ (DS 334). Malachy, on the other hand, has a utopian vision of his hometown in which all the dead are resurrected and they joyfully celebrate together the birthday of Mrs McAdoo’s son. With McCabean irony, it is the Canon himself who is presented here as the caring heart of the community, lovingly looking after The Dummy whom he rescues from the lake.

In the bleakness of McCabe’s historical imagination, this image offers a glimpse of hope by proposing alternative historical possibilities through forms of solidarity and social responsibility for the other that were impracticable and unimaginable for both characters. This impossibility of living out any alternative makes, as Herron rightly asserts, ‘not only the present an unliveable moment ... but the past, too, has

become a nightmare from which there is no relief' (2000: 169-70). But as the novel's last chapter makes clear, it is precisely this nightmarish burden of the past that is hoped to be swept away by all the postmodern socio-economic and cultural changes that are now taking place in 1980s Ireland. At the novel's close, no one remembers Raphael, and his history becomes, as Hume appositely put it, buried in silence and oblivion. Against such historical erasure and analgesic forgetting, *The Dead School* faces us with the full burden of History, which affiliates it with Kelman's novel.

### III. 'THESE TRAUMATIC MOMENTS OF PRECARIOUSNESSOSITY': James Kelman's *You Have to be Careful in the Land of the Free*

*'It was one of these end-of-the-world scenarios where time stood still'*  
(James Kelman, *You Have to be Careful*)

#### Scotland and Devolution

When the Scottish Parliament was after an adjournment of over 290 years 'reconvened' in May 1999, it was by many proclaimed to generate a dramatic change, comparable to the one delineated with regard to Ireland above. In an example that is typical, the sociologists Richard Mitchell and Danny Dorling praise devolution as 'the progression to a different kind of politics', offering 'prospects for a healthier, wealthier, more inclusive Scotland' (2002: 168). This idea of a 'new' phase in Scottish politics is underlined in the pledged tenet of the Scottish Executive, voiced by the late First Minister Donald Dewar, to provide 'Scottish solutions for Scottish problems' (cited in Mooney and Poole 2004: 470). It is specifically with regard to this promise of a distinctively *Scottish* social democracy that post-devolutionary Scotland has been proclaimed as 'the land of milk and honey', as Douglas Fraser and James Cusick do, considering it as a genuine alternative to 'The Third Way' of Blairite Britain (2001: 12). However, as Gerry Mooney and Lynne Poole contend, this myth of a distinctively 'New Scotland' obscures the fact that the devolved Scottish Parliament 'is committed to the same kind of Third Way/neo-liberal policies', underpinning an iniquitous, patriarchal and racially structured

capitalist system (2004: 475). They point to the noteworthy fact that the UK's largest investments of private finance in public sectors through PFI and PPP programmes (that is, via council housing stock transfers and schools Public-Private Partnerships) have taken place in Glasgow. Ironically, their findings are confirmed when Mitchell and Dorling, after promising to provide the 'latest evidence on progress in terms of health, poverty and social exclusion' in the 'new Scotland' have to admit (already on the very next page) that 'almost nothing has changed' (2002: 168, 169).

Nonetheless, the rhetoric that is disseminated in the political realm resonates through the cultural sphere as well, where 'Scotland's transition from subnational status to devolved home-rule independence is', as Berthold Schoene hopes to demonstrate in his edited *Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, seen as initiating 'a new period in Scottish literary history' (2007a: 1). As indicated above, this apparent 'change' in Scottish writing is related to the idea that devolution works as a putative panacea of unburdening writers from both history and politics. Thus, where critic Alex Massie acknowledges that the 'rebirth' of the Scottish Parliament has actually been for many a disappointment, for him, as indeed for Catherine Lockerbie and Christopher Whyte (see Chapter 1), it will ultimately 'prove a blessing for literature in this country since it may free novelists from overtly political writing. Devolution, so banal in other ways, may perversely liberate the imagination' (2002: 2). If it is here politics, or rather a specific political commitment, that is considered an obstacle to be surmounted, for Gifford, the current developments furthermore offer Scottish fiction an apparent transcendence of experience as such: 'What marks this fiction as dealing with contemporary Scotland in a new spirit, however, is the way in which both the events and the symbolic implications of the fiction allow the protagonist to break free and speak for new and affirmative possibilities. The old experience and older Scottish attitudes can now be transcended' (2007: 245-6). In the first book-length study of James Kelman, published in the caesural year of Scotland's devolution, author Dietmar Böhnke considers Kelman's work as exemplary of this new confidence in the Scottish nation that Gifford evokes:

This recent development and what will follow from it can be regarded as an – at least indirect – outcome of the more confident mood in Scottish culture and especially literature of the past years and decades ... In fact, the concern of

Kelman (and other contemporary writers) with Scottish national identity ... certainly played part in bringing about this new situation. (1999: 7)

For Böhnke, Kelman becomes, then, a crucial advocate of a 'new', reconciled notion of Scottish identity in relation to the reconvened nation; and he concludes his study by claiming that Kelman should 'be regarded as a Scottish "nationalist"' (93).

But Kelman's work has always been notably critical if not outright averse to nationalist positions.<sup>15</sup> This is attested to by the fact that his pre-devolutionary fiction is concerned with the subaltern conditions of the working-class, living on the margins of Scottish society. If this already ruptures a nationalist appropriation of his writing, it is as if in view of such attempts that his post-devolutionary novels have initially been displaced outside Scotland: the fragmented and episodic statements in *Translated Accounts* stem from the 'somewhere nowhere' of 'an occupied territory' (2001: 202, ix), and *You Have to Be Careful in the Land of the Free* [YH]<sup>16</sup> takes place in the United States.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, at a time of such boisterous proclamations of confidence in national progress and development, Kelman's latter novel implores us, in the imperative of its title, to caution. In the light of the above contentions, it is noteworthy that – in contrast to his previous novels – Kelman uses here (as in *Translated Accounts*) a first-person perspective to retrospectively delineate the personal experiences of the Scottish migrant, Jeremiah Brown, in his twelve years spend abroad.

### **Skarrish: Memory, Home and Belonging**

The novel is set at the evening before Jeremiah's planned return to his native 'Skallin' in an indeterminate American town close to an airport, which he describes as 'a town-whose-name-escapes-me kind of town' where 'sensory perception acted in a dysfunctional manner' (YH 278, 359). Redolent of Jameson's contention that in global capitalism 'structural coordinates are no longer accessible to immediate lived experience', what Kelman's novel exemplarily does is to invent, as Jameson

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<sup>15</sup> In his critical writings Kelman has clarified his position; see *Some Recent Attacks* (1992: 72); "*And the Judges said...*" (2002). See also Laurence Nicoll, 'This is not a nationalist position' (2001).

<sup>16</sup> I will abbreviate the title of this novel in the following with *You Have to be Careful*.

<sup>17</sup> His latest novel *Kieron Smith, Boy*, published in 2008 by Hamish Hamilton, is again set in Glasgow.

proposes, ‘new languages and forms’ (1988: 349). Where his previous work phonetically transcribes Glaswegian working-class speech, *You Have to Be Careful* adds to this a multicultural dimension. Accordingly, it is in particular the different nationalities that are with wonderful Kelmian idiosyncraticism phonetically hybridised. For instance, when describing local football matches in ‘Uhmerika’, Jeremiah notes that ‘there were eyetalian teams and mehican teams and joymin teams and skarrish, inkliz, velsh and oirisch teams’ (YH 118). As Simon Kövesi asserts in his 2007 study, *James Kelman*, such linguistic playfulness certainly denigrates ‘the sanctity of those same national categories’ (2007: 179). But the defamiliarising transcription of his own national categories, where Scotland becomes ‘Skallin’ and Scottish ‘Skarrish’ – evoking the words ‘scaling’, ‘scalding’ and the latter, specifically, ‘scar’ – intimates a more profound and painful rupture than just the ‘joyful play in difference’ that Kövesi observes (180).

While this novel, as his previous ones, makes no formal or linguistic distinction between direct and indirect speech, thoughts and dialogue (which includes the rejection of quotation marks), it is, as Aaron Kelly points out, significant that Kelman occasionally puts the term ‘home’ in inverted commas (2007: 182). For Jeremiah, the notion of ‘home’ is inscribed with his own constant dis- and relocations, which makes it rather difficult to define: ‘What do I mean by “Hame”?’ he wonders when catching himself using this term. ‘I had a home, I had another home, maybe homes are ten a penny, I have had fucking millions of them. Except in the land of my birth’ (YH 68). In contrast to the promotion of Scotland as a utopian ‘land of milk and honey’, ‘bonné Skallin’, as Kelman’s protagonist jocosely calls it, does not offer him a safe and stable place of identity and belonging. Alienated from his family and community, Jeremiah approaches his impending return with increasing undecidability and stresses: ‘It had nothing to do with homesickness or notions of a motherland. Fuck the motherland, blood and guts and soil and shite, it didnay matter a fuck to me, it was just ... I needit to get out right now’ (YH 26-7). His flight seems motivated by the need to attain some critical distance for ethical evaluation; he states that he has ‘memories to dumb’, ‘to sort out the rights and wrongs ... [and] lick [his] wounds’ (YH 279, 288).

This process of reflection and recovery is already inherent in the analeptic structure of his narration. Visiting a couple of bars, Jeremiah is haunted by memories of his experiences in the US, which ‘these capitalist fuckers and their money-grapping politico sidekicks had turned into a horror’ (YH 2-3). Trapped in a subaltern social position on the economic margins of American society, as with the characters of McCabe’s novel, Kelman’s protagonist feels collapsed in a traumatic paradigm, inscribing him as a perpetual ‘failure’: he describes himself as a ‘failed husband and failed parent, failed father ... a failed fucking immigrant!’ (YH 20). Having been through a series of menial jobs, Jerry, as his American friends call him, has been unsuccessful in achieving an economically stable position to support his recently estranged partner Yasmin and their daughter. Taking recurrently part in gambling, wherein he never gets lucky, he has neither managed to get on with writing the ‘private eye’ story that he imagines could bring him social and financial success. He admits: ‘The last couple of years had been a nightmare. My life had gone to pot ... I hadnay realised how much of a nightmare it had been but now, yeh, I could see the reality’ (YH 29-39).

Notably, it is in particular his present situation that is, for Jeremiah, characterised by a temporal stasis. ‘If we are discussing time: ’tis often at a standstill,’ he remarks (YH 436). Recurrently, he voices the sense that ‘time has stopped’: ‘I noticed the time on my witchwatch. How come nayn was passing?’ (YH 273). As with *The Dead School*, I propose that in this standstill Kelman dissociates the novel’s political unconscious from a (d)evolutionary trajectory in order to trace the return of a disturbing past. Through Jeremiah’s narration, *You Have to Be Careful* confronts us with what he describes as ‘these traumatic moments of precariousnessosity’ that flash up in ‘a moment of danger’, emphasising with Benjamin the necessity to seize hold of these memories; to wrest experience away from the conformist myth of historical progress that is about to overpower it (YH 410; Benjamin 1999a: 247). For someone in a precarious situation, like Jeremiah, ‘the present willnay leave the past alone’ (YH 408). This process of memory-mapping serves Jeremiah, on the one hand, as a means of comprehending his sense of disorientation and displacement in relation to the indiscernible network of power-structures in which he finds himself entangled. On the other hand, conversely to the hopes of Massie, Whyte and Lockerbie, the

‘fairly overtly political’ reflections of his protagonist, as Kelman describes them in an interview, stand as an ethical indictment and exposure of the inequities and contradictions of the current social order (Close 2004: n.p.).

### **Furnirs: Happy Multicultural Land?**

Interestingly for Kelman, who similarly to his character identifies himself as a ‘libertarian socialist, anarchist’ (McNeill 1989: 1), his protagonist is given a ‘Bible name’, as pointed out by one of the bar tenders who asks Jeremiah for his ID (YH 12). His naming thus associates him with the messianic prophet of the Old Testament, whose stern rebukes of the injustices of religious leaders and urgent warnings of Israel’s impending doom went largely unheeded. While this certainly does not imply some religious exegesis – with both Kelman and Jeremiah being avowedly atheist – I nonetheless want to suggest that it is with this specific role in mind that we have to understand Jeremiah’s narration, which he suspiciously dismisses on the very last page as ‘no polemical diatribe against the evils of imperialism, colonialism, capitalism and all the rest of it. No sir, being a guest in the place I shall not abuse ma host, nor query the criteria relating to /quid bonum est’ (YH 438). The gap left here by the unfinished sentence, followed by the appropriate Latin phrase in the next paragraph, intimates that the novel’s seemingly exaggerated vision of the ‘Land of the Free’ establishes a number of discernible links between American and British policies in the aftermath of the 2001 September 11 attacks.

In clear allusion to the ongoing debate in Westminster about the introduction of compulsory identity cards – architected and championed by former Home Secretary David Blunkett, and now soon to be implanted – Kelman, somewhat prophetically, introduces a ‘colour-coded federal authorization’ system that categorises aliens according to their inclination and aptness for smooth assimilation, which Kelman’s protagonist – in contrast to the *revenants* of Wilson’s ‘The Dreamed’ – defiantly resists (YH 20). Accordingly, Jeremiah’s rather precarious immigration status is stigmatised by the possibly lowest category, the Red Card Class III, which he is constantly forced to produce as an unmistakable identification of him ‘being an unassimilatit alien socialist’ (YH 379). In the mode of political satire, Kelman

delineates a truly Kafkaesque system of panopticon surveillance and control in which the paranoia about foreigners and national security has reached sinister new levels. Feeling constantly observed, it is not only Jerry's 'Skarrish' voice and language use, including recurrent swearing, that foreground his alterity; he describes the pub in which he sits as 'a homogenous hotbed of poisonous fuckers all staring at ye because ye are the wrang "thing": religion, race, class, nationality, politics; they know ye as soon as look at ye, boy, you is alien' (YH 26).

Jeremiah's experiences as an immigrant harshly contrast with the ideas about migrancy in the works of Homi Bhabha and Salman Rushdie, for whom the figure of the migrant embodies the emancipatory aspects of postmodern hybridity. If 'the truest eye' belongs, for Bhabha, 'to the migrant's double vision' (1994: 5), for Rushdie the experience of disruption and displacement 'teaches migrants: that reality is an artefact, that it does not exist until it is made, and that, like any other artefact, it can be made well or badly, and that it can also, of course, be unmade' (1992: 280). Furthermore, in Rushdie's novel *Shame* (1983) the most prominent attribute of an immigrant's identity consists in the lack of gravity: 'It is the emptiness of one's luggage. I'm speaking of invisible suitcases, not the physical, perhaps cardboard, variety containing a few meaning-drained mementoes: we have come unstuck from more than land. We have floated upwards from history, from memory, from Time' (1995: 87). In *In Theory*, Aijaz Ahmad saliently exposes the problematic ideological underpinnings of such celebratory notions of migrancy, which reside, as he notes, 'in the key fact that the migrant in question comes from a *nation* which is subordinated in the imperialist system of intra-state relationships but, simultaneously, from the *class*, more often than not, which is the dominant class within that nation' (1992: 12). Conversely, through Jeremiah who sarcastically describes himself as 'a Celtic male with pink skin' yet belongs to the working-class, Kelman affirms the full burden of History and the grisly reality of migrancy – that cannot simply be 'unmade', as Rushdie would like it (YH 20). Furthermore, in contrast to Bhabha's celebration of hybridity, which is, as Ahmad points out, 'remarkable free of gender, class [and] identifiable political position' (1996: 287), Jerry's mimicry of different cultural sociolects is notably driven by his specific subaltern status. For example, when once again confronted and required to identify himself, he adopts the stereotypical

registers of an African American slave and a Mexican emigrant: ‘Yeh massa, here’s the ID massa, thanks for asking massa. Let me bow let me scrape, you ees uhmereekaan ameeego, you ees meester heroec figyoor, you ees meester cool meester magneefecohh’ (YH 194).

As one amongst many ‘furnirs’, neither his racial resemblance of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) ideal nor his uncertain American roots prove for Kelman’s protagonist helpful or empowering (YH 9). His liminal status as a Scottish immigrant in a WASP-hegemonic American society is illustrated in his hazy heritage. He tells his friend Ranjit, a ‘thirty-eighth generation Indian’, that one cannot be sure whether one of his ancestors was not ‘employed by the imperialist Brit fuckers, executing women, weans and men to keep the wolf from the door’, or if he was, instead, ‘a subversive [who] ... helped the locals fight the raj bastards’, because his ambiguous presence has been erased from historical records; for, Jeremiah explains: ‘Working class people, we dont have history’ (YH 45-6). Since such obfuscations cause wilful distortions of historical facts in constructing Western national formations as homogenous prosperous entities, Jeremiah’s reminiscences serve to reinscribe the nation’s continually obliterated subaltern spheres. ‘But this is Uhmerika buddy, land of the free,’ he asserts, ‘home from home for the dispossessed, the enslaved, the poor unfortunates; this is everybody’s goddamn country. My people were slaves as well. [Yasmin] found that hard to believe. The trouble was I coudnay remember my historical source’ (YH 407).

In a way, Scotland functions in the novel as a prism through which to fracture the Manichean binary of imperial power-relations between national wholes from a distinctively subaltern viewpoint. But *You Have to be Careful* refuses to promote any easy notion of solidarity, or conjoin and compare different forms of disempowerment amongst the oppressed. The extent to which most of the other minoritarian identities that Jeremiah encounters shy away from any sustained political engagement is telling, evoking the current attempt to contain and eliminate ‘political voices’ such as Jeremiah’s from the cultural sphere. Recurrently, Jerry feels ‘excluded from the debate’ (YH 76). A Ghanaian taxi driver relapses into silences when confronted with Jerry’s eager attempts to relate to him, and his ex-partner, an African-American jazz singer from New York, has explicitly outlined several ‘taboo subjects of discussion

and politics was up at the top of the list' (YH 103). These topics specifically concern American human rights issues, revolving around class and race. (Notably, gender inequalities are not addressed by Jeremiah.) Their break-up is partly a result of Jeremiah being a person who simply cannot silently endure any circumstances that he considers unfair or that involve any form of victimisation. Repeatedly embarrassed by her boyfriend's outspoken and often aggressive behaviour, Yasmin withdraws from him both emotionally and physically – by 'silence' and by avoiding him, what he describes as 'her legendary vanishing acts' (YH 337). From his present state, Jeremiah contemplates their estrangement due to their increasing misunderstandings for which he, in contrast to Raphael and Malachy, self-critically takes the blame: 'We were supposed to speak the same language but did we did we fuck. Much of it was my ayn fault and I would never have denied that' (YH 26).

### **The Individyou-ell: Gender and Sexuality**

In Kelman's novel, there is no common language of redemption available for his characters. As with McCabe's fiction, here and in his other works, Kelman refuses to offer a simplistic reconciliation with the other under the rubric of sameness, whether this is registered via a national, communal, familiar or romantic union. The 'Land of the Free' that is depicted here is certainly no 'Happy Multicultural Land', as Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* would have it (2000: 398). As apparent in his 'I'-centric narration, Jeremiah is out there on his own, a solitary 'individyou-ell' struggling to survive in a harsh and grisly reality (YH 309). At the same time, however, indicated in this idiosyncratic transcription of the most crucial ideological unit of bourgeois hegemony, Jerry always seeks to establish meaningful relations with others – to bring the 'individ' in relation to the 'you', as it were. 'I wantit to blast through conventions and get some level of communality,' he explains. 'Let us share the fucking burdens. Let us find a way ahead. Stop all this one-by-one-by-one stuff' (YH 226). But the aspirational socio-ethical communality that Kelman achieves so admirably on the linguistic level becomes with Jeremiah ultimately problematic with regard to the suffixed '-ell' above, namely in his relation to women. For all his concern with victimisations and oppressions, women are in Jeremiah's narration recurrently

reduced to exactly this suffixed status of masculine identity, becoming static objects of male desire. From Sally, the ‘luscious’ waitress of the bar and his obsession with her ‘pert nipples’ (YH 110), over several work colleagues, such as Sharifa with ‘a beautiful pair of upper damn thingiwi tits’ (YH 201), to his ‘damn sexy’ girlfriend Yasmin (YH 56), the female body is in his gaze fetishistically fragmented, functioning for Kelman’s protagonist as a fantasy screen on which to project and transcribe his obsessions and feeling of impotence.

Given that his reminiscences are at their heart concerned with his relationship to Yasmin, it is indicative how rarely she is afforded a voice or opinion; more often than not, she is confined to the silence by which she shields herself from him. In the text, as for Kelman’s character himself, the ‘ex’ – as well as all the other women he encounters – ultimately remains ‘a mystery’ (YH 430). Jeremiah declares: ‘I could never explain myself about women, I knew nothing about them and never would ... they were a total mystery’ (YH 111). The incommensurable alterity that is inscribed here onto women conspicuously corresponds to Levinas association of the feminine with alterity, which makes her for Levinas a privileged space for ethics. However, as will be expounded in the last chapter of this thesis, such equations of women with silence, mystery and otherness reiterate to the most repressive female stereotypes. This proves not only politically flawed, but becomes – within my reformulation of ethics through *ethos* – also ethically problematic.

Hence, rather than suggesting an ethical sensibility towards the specific social position of the female other, I want to suggest that Kelman’s representations of women attain the status of Lacanian *sinthomes*.<sup>18</sup> That is, when ‘woman’ is foreclosed from the symbolic realm – exemplifying Jacques Lacan’s famous statement that ‘woman does not exist’ – she returns, as Slavoj Žižek explicates in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, ‘as the symptom of man’; a fantasy means to safeguard the consistency of the male subject, yet simultaneously exposing his radical inconsistency and contradictions (1989: 73). This is well illustrated by Jerry’s attitudes towards masculinity and male sexuality. For example, while he openly boasts to Yasmin about his ‘arousal’ by other women – what he considers ‘a basic factor in masculinity’ – he keeps, on the other hand, a jealous and rather

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<sup>18</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire Livre XXIII: Le Sinthome* (Paris: Seuil, 2005).

overprotective eye on her during her performances, trying to shield her from ‘the hypocrisy’ of ‘all these so-called male audience members’ (HY 203). In his eagerness to affirm his own potency, Jeremiah, in ways comparable to the two protagonists of *The Dead School*, proves largely incapable of recognising his own implication in a patriarchal social order that objectifies and silences its female ‘other’.

### **Gambling: Historical Phantasmagoria**

As with McCabe’s novel, it is then partly through Jeremiah’s own contradictions that *You Have to be Careful* exemplifies the ‘inexorable limits [set] to individual and collective praxis’ (Jameson 2002a: 88). These come furthermore to the fore through Jerry’s obsession with gambling. On the one hand, private poker evenings, betting or casino visits offer Jeremiah an escape from the monotonous routine of his life, marked by stasis and boredom, and open a possibility for change. ‘The thing with gambling,’ he reflects, ‘there was aye that wee chance like ye could do something, change something .... I needit money and I needit to change my life’ (YH 138). In *The Age of Change*, Gerda Reith remarks upon the ‘separateness’ of chance games from the ‘usual stream of life’, lending gambling the ‘quality of an adventure’ filled with the thrill of excitement (130). It is noteworthy that the masculine world of gambling also serves for Jerry as a means to prove his manliness to Yasmin. He admits: ‘all I wantit was to impress her. I wantit to surprise her. Us men, that is what we do, we surprise women ... I wouldnay have played just for the hell of it. It was for her benefit’ (YH 388). Interestingly, in his notes on the *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin associates gambling with male impotence, noting for example that ‘gamblers are types to whom it is not given to satisfy the woman’ (1999b: 513). Susan Buck-Morss explains in her article ‘The Flâneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore’ that gambling becomes for Benjamin ‘a manifestation of the alienation of erotic desire (in the man) when it surrenders itself to fate’ (1986: 120).

But Jeremiah’s repeated tempting and evocation of ‘The fates!’ should neither be read as an expression of a superstitious belief, nor a yielding of desire. Instead, it symbolises a defiant challenge against a specific version of history that masks itself

as 'fate', entrapping him in a predetermined paradigm from which there seems no possible escape: 'All my life I've been battling against the odds and the worst and most prolonged struggle has been against the fates,' he states. 'If it gets to a showdown I aye get beat. Yet I do the right thing, the appropriate thing. And I still get beat' (YH 388). It is in face of such political, rather than sexual, impotence, then, that gambling – what Harvie Ferguson describes as 'the wagering on any kind of uncertain outcome ... that is everywhere and all the time' (in Reith: xix) – serves to reaffirm the radical openness of history and the utter contingency of the distribution of wealth. Reith contends that the temporality of chance plays is characterised by a 'sense of urgency and intensity' comparable to that in the face death, exploding what Benjamin calls 'homogeneous empty time' by absorbing 'the immediate Here and Now' (Reith: 139, 132).

On the other hand, an intrinsic factor to gambling is repetition: 'We know what happens if ye lose but what if ye win? The same again maam thank you maam, only this time with mair money' (YH 69). As Jeremiah knows, each game must always be repeated, so that gaming is experienced as '*a constant repetition of a fleeting present*' whereby each single moment, redolent of trauma, is dissociated from both past and future, thereby history as such (Reith: 140). It is this aspect of gambling which converts, for Benjamin, 'time into a narcotic' (1999b: 12). He associates this disintegration of experience with the activity of the factory worker:

The manipulation of the worker at a machine has no connection with the preceding operation for the very reason that it is its exact repetition. Since each operation at the machine is just as screened off from the preceding operation as a *coup* in a game of chance is from one that preceded it, the drudgery of the labourer is, in its own way, a counterpart to the drudgery of the gambler. The work of both is equally devoid of substance. (1999a: 173)

Such a scenario, in which one is being 'cheated out of experience', represents in Benjamin's view the prototypical experience of modernity (1999a: 176) – and even more so of postmodernity. 'Nothing is ever produced in gambling,' Reith notes, 'and in lieu of any such creative activity we have the endless circulation of money ... The constant repetition of the ever-same implies a cycle of no real change' (142). Gambling thus becomes not only, with Benjamin, a 'phantasmagoria of time', but also one of historical change (1999b: 12). This certainly proves true for Jeremiah,

who also notices the ‘passivity of gambling’ and describes this experience as ‘fucking running on the same spot – one of these nightmares’ (YH 114, 83).

### **Persian Perishing: A Subaltern Hauntology**

However, the specific way in which *You Have to be Careful* employs the motif of gambling exposes the more subversive aspects of its repetitive logic through what I want to call a subaltern hauntology. After having, once again, substantially lost during a casino visit, the ‘non-assimilated alien, Jeremiah Brown’ ironically lands a job as a security operative at the airport, facilitated by the alarming situation resulting from the so-called ‘persian bet’ emergency (YH 107). ‘Persian’ betting involves the wagering on one’s own survival or perishing on cheap airplane flights, ‘perishing’ transmuting in vernacular into ‘persian’ (YH 97). With this ‘graveyard humour’, as Jeremiah calls it, Kelman not only satirises the post-9/11 paranoia concerning flying, foreigners and national security but also indicts the American policies of ‘perishing’, exemplarily practiced in their intervention in the Middle East (Ibid.). But the novel furthermore emphasises the gender and class issues that underlie such existentialist wagers. For one thing, Jerry records that ‘a majority of males had regarded the plane-crash probability as a gender test ... and there was aye a macho quality to certain cheap flight options’ (YH 98). For another, this suicidal betting becomes especially for those who have nothing else to lose a means of affirming their marginal existence that falls outside the official definition of ‘being’. ‘It had something do with the “last vestiges” of humanity’, Jeremiah remembers: for ‘those who speculated on the “persian bet” were poverty-stricken bodies on an income so far below what official government experts reckoned it took to stay alive that the term “income” was dropped. These included young-folks and asylum-seekers, immigrants, refugees; war vets, down-and-outs ... It was like a majority of the population’ (YH 124, 127).

Notably, it is specifically ‘ordinary Uhmerikins, moistly true-borns’ who swamp the airports, shattering for ‘Uncle Joe public’ the myth of a classless society (YH 135, 124-5). Their presence at this unstable, strictly policed borderland-territory takes on a truly subversive force since ‘they didday do what the authorities telt them

to do and were ignoring all the rules and regulations' (YH 135). When the airlines try to restrict their gambling by increasing the fares, 'these folks formed same-interest groups to buy tickets then raffled them amongst themselves. It was great!', Jeremiah rejoices. 'Auld forms of combination were being rediscovered ... nay wonder diverse capital interests were irritated' (YH 128). As a result, the authorities seek to contain this problematic by erasing it from 'the national consciousness', for 'it reflected badly on ethical capitalism' (YH 125, 97). But despite official sanctions of declaring airports as 'down-and-out-free zones' and driving them out of town, like 'phantom apparitions or something', Jeremiah recalls, 'these folks returned, and kept on returning' (YH 197, 135, 196). If the communist revolutionary dream was predicated on a certain spectre haunting Europe, in Kelman's novel, the subversive potential of the underclass lies exactly in this uncanny presence.<sup>19</sup> Illustrating Derrida's notion of the *revenant*, the disruptive force of these ghostly returns is exemplified in the figure of the 'legendary grocery-cart-pusher' (YH 227). His co-workers at the airport associate this homeless poor with 'supranatooral magic' and even with the devil (YH 215). Jeremiah states that they 'awarded the individual apparitional status, a goddamn ghost' (YH 230). The uncertainty of this character's gender, age, descent, and name – combined with a mysterious face that is 'not to be gazed upon' – undermines all attempts at identification and categorisation, and Jerry and his group start placing bets on these aspects. This resolute indeterminacy signals an incommensurable alterity that Levinas would relate to a state 'beyond being', redolent of Spivak's notion of subalternity as 'a position without identity' (2005: 4). This quasi-paradigmatic subaltern spectre seems, in accordance with Derrida's notion, indeed inaccessible to modes of nomination and cognition, which poses severe problems for the security staff. However, conversely to Levinas, Derrida and Spivak, Jeremiah solves this 'tricky moral dilemma', as he calls it, by empowering this homeless figure with the name "'The being'" while gendering 'it', as with Spivak's subaltern, as female (YH 231). With regard to the representations of women discussed above, this association with the feminine proves, indeed, significant.

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<sup>19</sup> See the opening statement in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel's *The Communist Manifesto* (1848): 'A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism' (1976: 78). It is also this phrase which inspired Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* (1994).

Whereas Jeremiah himself ‘had never seen her’, he as everyone else becomes totally ‘obsessed by the being and her coming and goings’ (YH 233). Notably, it is through the encounter that two female colleagues describe to him that ‘her’ traumatising power becomes fully unfurled – both on a national as well as on an individual level. Designating the grocery-cart pusher in contrast to Jerry as male, his co-worker Suzanne reports: while ‘attempting to halt his progress’, the being ‘paused’ in front of them – ‘he moved from one foot to the other like marching time ... marking time’ – and then disappears behind them (YH 238-41). ‘It was like time got lost someplace, if it was trapped,’ she tells him, ‘we just could not move, we was rooted to the spot’ (YH 243). Paradoxically, ‘the being’ comes here to allegorise the march of an unstoppable progress that, with reference to Benjamin, is experienced for those ‘who are lying prostrate’ as a petrified stasis (1999a: 248). This reversal of power, whereby those who as security operatives are supposedly in control are literally immobilised, is also signalled by the being’s subsequent appearance in the airport’s VIP-lounge: a transgression which ‘heralded a system heading out of control’ (YH 248). Vanishing in front of the security forces who attempt ‘to assert control’ while the cart explodes in ‘an inferno of flames leaping angrily skywards’, ‘the being’ rematerialises ‘like a charioteer from the very bowels of the earth’ (YH 249).

It is noteworthy that, when listening to his workmates’ report, Jeremiah becomes entirely infatuated with their sexuality which, by projecting his own fantasies onto them, leads to an erection:

Even as it was but sex was into and permeating my brain and there was nay chance of concentrating the way my heid was, as if the two female comrades had other business and I was the man they were looking for ... I rarely engaged in whimsical sexual fantasies but something was going on here and yet again and yet again I was experiencing the stark pulsatory desire for baith of these comrade females and manifold variations flitted through my mind and till it seemed my knee joints were beginning to weaken. (YH 242-43)

The repetitiousness and fragmentation of his thoughts, as he renders them, signal the traumatic impact that both the account as well as the female presence have on him, bringing him to a point of radical dissolution. It is as if the uncontainable *jouissance* of ‘the being’ is transferred onto these female bodies, which exemplifies their status

as *sinthomes*. In face of such ‘unbound’ enjoyment, which intimates, according to Žižek, ‘literally “the end of the world”’, ‘woman’ becomes for Jeremiah ‘the only positive support of [his] being’, the ‘symbolic formation which assures a minimum of consistency to ... being-in-the-world’ via affirmation of his sexuality (1989: 75).

But it is not only Jeremiah that ‘the being’ – conceived here as both *sinthome* as well as symptom – disturbs: through reappearing inside the airport terminal, the grocery-cart pusher becomes an indelible reminder of the radical instability and underlying horror of a patriarchally structured capitalist system by confronting air passengers and authorities with an ‘image ... of a possible future ... a vision of themselves in years to come, or even month’ (YH 249). This shatters the ideological fantasy that capitalist progress makes available riches and success to everyone equally. However, this immanent reality is, as Jeremiah astutely notices, displaced by giving the defiant returns of these subalterns ‘an otherworldly aspect’ (YH 251). Some of the ‘extravagant explanations’ furthermore involve ascribing the disappearances of ‘down-and-outs’ from the airport to ‘a cranky multibillionaire with a heart of gold’ who takes them into his care (YH 252).<sup>20</sup> But rather than affirming such vanishings as exceptional, Jeremiah reminds us that ‘there was nothing unique in such a disappearance. Down-and-out folks were aye doing it’ (YH 251). This confirms Benjamin’s insight that ‘the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the “state of emergency” in which we live is not the exception but the rule’ (1999a: 248). As in McCabe’s novel, this state of emergency is amplified by the ending of *You Have to be Careful*, which culminates in the standstill of Jeremiah’s present.

### **Attacking Big (Br)Other: The Non-Duped Err**

On his way to the bathroom, Kelman’s protagonist is sent on a ‘DETOUR’ whereby he utterly loses his orientation: ‘I had just come down the stairs ... and that back alley where/ I couldnay mind being in nay back alley ... I definitely could not

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<sup>20</sup> Through the ideology of ‘philanthropy’, Kelman wonderfully satirises the fundamental contradictions of ‘ethical capitalism’, which are exemplified by the figure of the Scot-descendent ‘inhumanoid multibillionaire strike-breaking’ Andrew Carnegie, whom Jeremiah’s repeatedly attacks (YH 397). The fact that the ‘philanthropic’ deeds of the rich are generally based on an initial exploitation of labourers and, in the case of Carnegie, crushing their unions, divulges an ethical void that is, yet, conveniently concealed by their turn to charitable causes.

remember an alley. Nay such entity existed, no in the real world. So if there was nay back alley in the real world then ergo I couldnay do a piss down it' (YH 404). It seems as if Jeremiah has here unleashed the Lacanian Real. No longer able 'to buckle down to reality', as he calls it, the narration disintegrates with his growing paranoia, signifying the breakdown of his symbolic universe. 'It was one of these end-of-the-world scenarios where time stood still,' he remarks, constantly exhorting himself to caution: 'I just had to be careful for Christ sake careful ... I would get out fast, fast, they wereneey gauny kill me' (YH 421, 404-5). In this traumatic moment of 'precariousnessosity', Jeremiah becomes increasingly haunted by all 'these ghostly personages' of his past, particularly by Yasmin who seems to send him a distinct warning: 'NO. NO./ That was the ex's voice! I could hear her! She was shouting into my lugs. She had come to my rescue. What a dame! I aye knew she loved me deep down. So it was her my guardian angel' (YH 404-5). Her presence as his most personal *sinthome* is here fully unfurled, remaining for him the most crucial point of support as he strays utterly lost in the snow. 'Hallucinations are better than nothing,' Jerry explains (YH 420). In *Looking Awry*, Žižek confirms that the paranoid construction must ultimately be regarded as 'an attempt to heal ourselves, to pull ourselves out of the real "illness", the "end of the world" ... by means of this substitute formation' (1991: 19).

On another level, paranoia is characterised by a radical distrust and disbelief in the symbolic order, implying the existence of what Lacan calls 'the Other of the Other'. This is the 'Other of paranoia', Žižek explains, a hidden subject 'who holds and manipulates the threats of the deception proper to the symbolic order' (1991: 81). Jeremiah voices the distinct feeling that there is a conspiracy against him: 'Nay doubt it was all a plot,' he contemplates. 'That sounded right. They wantit rid of me' (YH 427). However, rather than surrendering to this 'Other of paranoia' who confines him to an utterly passive, powerless position – entrapped in someone else's 'plot', or history for that matter – Jeremiah affirms his agency: 'I felt like fucking screaming. So that was a good sign. Nay reflection and nay thoughts, just action, action action action: action! action!' (YH 427). Evoking Lacan's homonymic pun on *le nom du père* (the name of the father) as *le non-dupe erre* (the non-duped err) as taken up by Žižek, Jerry does not let himself be 'duped' by any symbolic, authorial

or omnipotent Other (Žižek 1991: 69). As a result, he does indeed indicate some propensity to ‘err’, as Žižek and Lacan would have it, by randomly attacking any potential Big Other that crosses his path; for example a pedestrian walking his dog:

Mister fucking Frankenstein and his fucking Bigfoot outer yet! ah well, here we go.

Jeremiah! Spoke a voice.

What?

But without awaiting further hallucinatory stimuli I pulled back my arm, raised by left foot, and with a whoooosh I hurled that dang no-good snowball fucker straight for the rottweiler’s arse ... I definitely wasnay powerless. (YH 413)

Defying insinuated warnings, rules or regulations, Jeremiah’s ‘irrational’ behaviour insists on his recalcitrant agency (YH 412).

As with ‘the being’, his unruly presence takes on the structure of a symptom: he makes himself deliberately seen by a surveillance camera in order to confront the Big BrOther of capitalist progress with its disavowed reality:

I had stopped beneath it ... just to let them gawp the wintry conditions, what these actually mean to living individuals ... The forces of law and order have to be reminded about life and its sanctity. Dont let the bastards off the hook. They try to act like we arenay real live human beings. They arenay seeing us properly, us people I am talking about. (YH 433)

Emphasising the radical ontological – and *not* just hauntological – conditions of existence, Jeremiah’s indictment of the indiscernible forces of the state pertains as well to certain versions of postmodern and/or poststructuralist theory which tend to forget, as it seems, that they are dealing with ‘real live human beings’. Jeremiah’s effort to relate his own specific experiences of displacement and disempowerment to those of others necessitates an understanding of how such disenfranchisements interrelate in a universal network of power structures. This is the task of subaltern *aesthetics*: to reintegrate the fragmentary, differential materials of disempowerment with the ongoing and overarching systemic continuities which cause them. Hence, Jeremiah’s following contemplation: ‘All these different parts of the body [i.e. society] in constant engagement with one to another, not only one another but with various outside parts of the material universe’ (YH 434). It is this capacity of social

memory-mapping that, in a way, rescues Jeremiah at the novel's close: cornered by a 'stolid' cop who obstructs all possible escape-routes, in a flash of illumination Jeremiah not only regains his orientation but is also 'reminded of a time [when he was similarly] in the middle of danger territory' – and elatedly 'swaggered' off (YH 436).

Despite their evident differences, the standstill configured by both Kelman's and McCabe's novels serves 'to blast open the continuum of history', as Benjamin describes it, in order to allow repressed and silenced voices to re-emerge as historical symptoms of the present, disrupting and indicting any celebratory proclamation of national or global progress (1999a: 254). In the mode of satire, both novels intensify the confrontation with historical forces, which entrap the individual in a seemingly predetermined paradigm. But whereas both Raphael and Malachy succumb to its destructive forces, even if his means of escape are equally obstructed, the defiance of Kelman's protagonist affirms a radical ethical attitude; as he notes: 'Everybody has decisions to make. On the other hand' (YH 463). To this unfinished sentence we might add: but not everybody has a choice. However, in ceasing neither choice nor desire, Jeremiah's political diatribes insist on the fact that 'there *are* times when the world changes' (YH 90; my emphasis). Such a constitutive change is heralded by the Northern Irish Peace Process, which the subsequent chapter will explore.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE PEACE PROCESS AS *ARKHE*-TAINMENT? <sup>1</sup>

Glenn Patterson's *That Which Was* and Eoin McNamee's *The Ultras*

*'The archival ... work involved here is indeed a task of "measuring silences"'.  
Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?'*

The Peace Process in Northern Ireland has been marked by the endeavour to find a lasting solution to the long-running political upheavals, commonly referred to as the Troubles. The Joint Declaration on Peace (or Downing Street Declaration), issued on 15 December 1993 by the British and the Irish government, expresses the hope 'to remove the conflict' by overcoming 'the legacy of history' (Paragraph 1).<sup>2</sup> In a similar sense, Paragraph 2 of the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement of 1998 states:

The tragedies of the past have left a deep and profoundly regrettable legacy of suffering. We must never forget those who have died or been injured, and their families. But we can best honour them through a fresh start, in which we firmly dedicate ourselves to the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all. (Northern Ireland Office 1998: n.p.)<sup>3</sup>

This repeated entreaty to leave what has happened behind discloses a political strategy aimed at consigning the North's burdensome past to the residue of a disavowed history. It is perhaps best exemplified by the Agreement's cover image,

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter won the 2007 BAIS Essay Prize and has been published under the same title in the *Irish Studies Review* 15.4. (2007): 507– 520. I wish to acknowledge the inspiration for this piece from a book review by Dr Eamonn Hughes, entitled 'Limbo: Glenn Patterson's *That Which Was* and Eoin McNamee's *The Ultras*' (2005).

<sup>2</sup> The full text is available at: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/dsd151293.htm>. (accessed 31 May 2006)

<sup>3</sup> Available from Northern Ireland Office at: <http://www.nio.gov.uk/agreement.pdf>. (accessed 4 May 2007)

which pictures a nuclear family watching united what supposedly symbolises the new dawn that awaits Northern Irish history.<sup>4</sup> However, the first startling aspect is that this is actually a sunset and, secondly, since Northern Ireland does not have a western coastline that the photo was taken by a German photographer in South Africa.<sup>5</sup> Despite the auspicious proclamation that ‘This Agreement is about *your* future’, the new dawn transmutes here into a geographically superimposed sundown that is ironically devoid of the utopian coordinates that it announces. This transformation seems, indeed, symptomatic of the strategic containment of history that Colin Graham discerns in a recent article to be supported by a conspicuous archive fever. Graham notes that part of the Peace Process ‘has been to filter out that which does not fit into or attend on the present moment ... Thus the difficult and the embarrassingly recent past, or the non-conforming present, is archived’ (2005: 568).

The symbolic tensions of the Agreement’s cover-image are inherent in the etymological meaning of the word ‘archive’ itself. In *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Jacques Derrida discusses the double connotation of the Greek *arkhe*, which nominates ‘at once *commencement* and *commandment*’ (1995: 9). The term thus connotes, on the one hand, beginning in an ontological sense, on the other hand what Derrida terms its ‘archontic principle’ that ‘is not solely topo-nomological’ but also implies ‘the power of *consignation*’; the ‘*gathering together* [of] *signs*’ (10). With regard to the Peace Process, this ‘*gathering together*’ consists, then, in the attempt to cram, in Graham’s words, ‘all that glistens with the not-so-gold of the Troubles into a memory bank of material culture and traumatic non-recall’ (2005: 567-8). As Derrida remarks, this principle does not allow for any ‘secrets and heterogeneity [which] would seem to menace even the possibility of *consignation*’ (1995: 10). It is in this sense that Derrida compares the concept of the archive to the process of memory in psychoanalytic terms, which involves the mechanism of repression and suppression as an archival ‘violence of forgetting’, and the act of remembering that concerns not only the past but also carries the exhortation, ‘remember to remember the future’ (51, 50).

However, rather than signalling this creative principle of investing the archive with a preparative remembrance for the future, the archive fever that underpins the

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<sup>4</sup> The cover image is viewable at: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/agreement.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> See Richard West, ‘It’s Your Decision?’ (1998).

Peace Process divulges a strategy of containment that seems designed to obscure the implication and responsibility of both governments, the police and the security forces in the conflict. It is also demonstrated by the way in which the Peace Process redraws a ‘two traditions’ paradigm of Northern Irish society, which proposes that the conflict is reducible to the intractable sectarianism of two mutually opposed communities.<sup>6</sup> Pete Shirlow remarks with regard to the ‘institutionalised sectarianism’ of the Belfast Agreement: ‘The facts that members of the Northern Ireland Assembly must designate themselves as nationalist, unionist or other and that all decisions taken must have majority support from both the nationalist and unionist blocs means that the capacity of alternative political interpretations is hindered’ (2004: 196). This approach elucidates Derrida’s curiously footnoted and italicised assertion that ‘*there is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory*’ (1995: 11). I wish to call such a repressive desire an *arkhe*-taintment; that is, the contemporary ideological efforts for regulation over the archive *taint* and *contain* not only its dialectical principle but thereby also the creative process of memory-mapping alternative, ethical histories for the future. Derrida emphasises that ‘as much as and more than a thing of the past ... the archive should *call into question* the coming of the future’ (26). I want to suggest that two recent Northern Irish novels, Glenn Patterson’s *That Which Was* [TW] and Eoin McNamee’s *The Ultras* [U], capture the tensions inherent in the *arkhe* of the archive. However, rather than partaking in officially induced amnesiac evasions, both texts confront and problematise the ethical implications of such ideologically driven *arkhe*-tainting strategies.

Published in 2004 and written in the aftermath of the Good Friday Agreement, *That Which Was* and *The Ultras* can be considered as Peace Process novels. It is noteworthy that both works share the backward look that is actually represented on the Agreement’s cover. Yet, in contrast to the historyless vacuity that is transmitted by this image, they do so by fictionalising Belfast’s recent history. For that, they draw on the archive. Like McNamee’s previous groundbreaking success with

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<sup>6</sup> For an explanation of the Northern Irish conflict as an ethnic conflict, see Brendan O’Leary and John McGarry, *The Politics of Antagonism* (1992). For a critique of the containment strategy that underlies the internal conflict explanation, see Liam O’Dowd *et al.*, ‘From Labour to the Tories’ (1982: 72–90) and Joe Cleary, “‘Fork-Tongued on the Border Bit’” (1996: 227– 76).

*Resurrection Man* (1994), which presents a fictionalised account of the notorious Shankill Butchers, *The Ultras* is based on the various available facts surrounding the SAS Officer Captain Robert Nairac, whose mysterious undercover activities in the 1970s make him one of the more controversial figures in recent Northern Irish history. Patterson's *That Which Was* insinuates historical actuality already in its very title. Set in the immediate context of the Belfast Agreement, Patterson frames his latest novel through chronological key-events of Belfast's socio-political history in the year 2000. The novel traces the loyalist feuds erupting on the Shankill Road in August and September; the effects of the resumed Bloody Sunday Inquiry, reopened in March 2000; the Dalai Lama visit on October 19; and ends with the Clinton address at the recently opened Odyssey complex on December 13. Significantly, both authors play with the form of the thriller. In doing so, they focus on those secrets that the official archontic consignment would much rather retain in archival oblivion. In *The Ultras*, Blair Agnew, an alcoholic ex-policeman, tries to shed light on Nairac's obscure entanglements in paramilitary atrocities on the border, such as the Miami Showband massacre and the murder of the PIRA commander John Francis Green. Patterson's novel focuses on the attempts of Ken Avery, a Presbyterian minister, to unravel the mysterious case surrounding Larry who claims to have murdered three people in the 1970s but believes that his memory has been erased by a surgical intervention of the security forces.

### **Archive Fever as *Arkhe-taintment*?**

If both novels draw on the archive to partake in the crime novel's search for a discernible truth or convey historical verisimilitude, this endeavour is severely problematised. While memories are not reliable, the subsequent turn to the archive proves even more disappointing. When Larry first approaches the minister in Patterson's novel, Avery misinterprets his admission of having 'blood on [his] hands' as the guilty consciousness of one of the recently released paramilitary prisoners (TW 12). Considering Larry's hazy recollection about what exactly happened as a 'classic' sign of his 'reluctance to accept responsibility' (TW 13), Avery disbelieves his conspiracy theory about forcefully induced amnesia. But

Larry's returning memories, which struggle to surface images of innocent victims and the details of a cruel murder for whose unsanctioned return he feels simultaneously haunted by some shadowy authority, signal an ethical urgency for disclosure. He confides to Avery: 'I believe that memories come back to haunt you, even when someone has tried to erase them' (TW 49). Avery resolves, then, to uncover the truth behind Larry's conviction of his guilt. But the archive is either not publicly accessible, as in Avery's futile attempts to attain Larry's medical record as a proof of his story, or deluding: to find evidence for the murders that Larry fears he has committed, Avery consults David McKittrick *et al.*'s *Lost Lives* (2001), a journalistic anthology of the Troubles dead. But within the novel, the entry points to the possibility that Larry himself has read it and made up his story accordingly, whereas the real version of the book does not contain any reference to such murders. The archive is furthermore clouded in anxiety and ambiguous silence; the note Avery receives from his doctor friend, Tony, about the never received medical record gives an explicit warning: '*Remember, you didn't get anything from me ... Nothing*' (TW 274).

In *The Ultras*, Agnew's obsession with amassing an archive on Nairac's activities stands in an ironic contrast to his reluctance to consult his daughter's archive in form of her diary that could provide a clue to decipher her silences, and thereby arrest the process of her anorexic self-destruction. Like Larry, Agnew is driven by the feeling of guilt about his own implication in the security force collusion with loyalist paramilitaries. Since his own memories about his presence at several atrocities prove, similar to Larry's, unreliable, Agnew turns to the official archive. However, as for Avery, official records on Nairac's case are difficult to attain for the ex-policeman, and his task is furthermore aggravated by repeated attempts to *arkhe*-taint his archive fever. His friend, the police-sergeant Mallon, warns him that the official archive controls its secrets not only by destroying records and misplacing files 'when anybody gets too nosy', but that it will also adopt tougher measures to taint his desire like that of the murdered RJ Kerr (U 71). Already earlier, Agnew was confronted by the manipulative power over the archive when imprisoned 'for conspiracy to murder' (U 141): he remembers the deliberate alterations his statement underwent to 'omit' any reference to 'the matter of Robert Nairac' (U 142). As in *That Which Was*,

material evidence proves in this novel equally untrustworthy. In a comparable form to the factual proof that Larry supplies Avery in form of the locket that belonged to one of the murder victims, the photographs, films and documents that the intelligence unit with which Agnew is connected accumulates prove inadequate means to establish any certainty about events. For example, the Polaroid of the dead body of John Francis Green, allegedly taken by Robert Nairac himself, defies the possibility to gain any knowledge about his murder. The novel emphasises the ‘shadowy trajectory that the photograph would take, its provenance becoming uncertain, its very existence being questioned, its meaning transmuting. It gathered authority to itself. Its jurisdiction was unwavering’ (U 175). But, as the last two sentences insinuate, the photograph conveys a powerful weight; an authoritative *arkhe* that contains a command for justice, despite the deliberate allusiveness surrounding it. This sense is also transmitted by Lorna’s hidden diary. Agnew describes his daughter as a ‘huddled archivist’ who has found ‘her own means of compiling documentation’ (U 19) and wonders

if she concealed the diary to protect her own thoughts as they were written or to protect those who would read it as the hidden words began to clothe themselves in lore, drawing authority to themselves ... if [it] would provide an explanation for her illness, or was the book, the text the thing that was driving her ... the jurisdiction of the unseen. (U 140)

It is this awareness ‘of the power of the hidden, of that which was removed from the common gaze’ that compels both Agnew’s and Lorna’s archive fever (Ibid.), as also, for that matter, that of Avery and Larry.

In spite of the officially imposed *arkhe*-taintment, *The Ultras* divulges that it is exactly in the ambiguities and secrets of the archive that the dialectical principle of *arkhe* is reopened. As Agnew notices, especially handwritten statements ‘seemed more open to interpretation and to implication ... The meanings were unspoken, had not been formed in words’ (U 73). Language proves insufficient to contain the dark secrets that Agnew confronts: their full meaning is located beyond language; the signified escapes its signifiers.<sup>7</sup> It is this uncontainable excess, the uncertainty that

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<sup>7</sup> This is most notably expressed in a sentence in McNamee’s first novel, *Resurrection Man* (1994), which emphasises in face of the horrific, uncontrollable violence the necessity that, ‘New languages would have to be invented’ (2004: 16).

permeates the meaning, which makes out the weight of the archive itself; when lifting a document, Agnew notices ‘the signifying heft of it’ (U 74). These ambiguities work as the generator of multiple interpretations and conspiracy theories. In a document about Robert that Agnew finally receives,

he found that whole paragraphs had been blacked out. Agnew was glad to see this. It opened up new fields of speculative discourse ... Of meaning carefully revealed. ... There was a powerful sense of subtext to the way the document had been handled. Agnew thought that he was being directed towards some subordinate but nonetheless compelling truth about the whole affair. (U 238)

While truth as such is certainly not something graspable in this novel, McNamee drives towards a sense of truth that lies hidden in the secrets and silences. As with his daughter Lorna, Agnew’s archival attitude is less concerned with actual facts than with both hunting and being haunted by its generative principle. In this, the novel captures Derrida’s notion of the spectral dimension at work in the concept of the archive, which ties it to a truth-content: ‘The truth is spectral, and this is its part of truth which is irreducible by explanation’ (1995: 55). *That Which Was* similarly generates such a ‘spectral truth of delusion or of hauntedness’ (Ibid.): while the ending tries to convince us that Larry is simply a ‘Fantastic Confabulator’ (U 93), and the mystery that Avery has been trying to resolve merely a case of insanity, this explanation is ultimately undermined by Avery’s elusive silence at the very end: ‘I really can’t say ... No, I mean really, I can’t’ (U 274).

## **I. THE ETHICAL BURDEN OF *ARKHE*: Glenn Patterson’s *That Which Was***

Despite their different strategies, the archival work that both thrillers confront is what Gayatri Spivak calls ‘a task of measuring silences’ (1994: 82). Excavating the guilty secrets that precariously underpin the Peace Process, their work recognises and disrupts the ideological *arkhe*-taintment at work. But this response is not simply a form of political dissent; rather it is deeply ethical. For Larry’s involvement with Belfast’s archived past must be seen as an act of responsibility. Making himself

accountable for a crime that he has presumably not committed, Larry burdens himself with an irreducible responsibility for what happened. The barman of the place where the shootings happened in 1976 says about him: ‘you’d have thought he was carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders’ (TW 271). As noted in my introduction, Emmanuel Levinas describes such a responsibility as both non-reciprocal and asymmetrical: ‘The I always has one responsibility *more* than all the others’ (1985: 99). For Levinas, it is furthermore unconditional; but Larry’s story demands a hearing, a publicity that acknowledges its weight; that is here the weight of the archive itself. There is some great underlying irony in the intention to reveal Larry’s silenced story of police intrigues involving the abuse of socially deprived teenagers, economic bribery and gruesome surgical manipulation at Clinton’s symbolic affirmation of the USA’s unceasing support and appraisal of the economic achievements of the Peace Process.<sup>8</sup> This juxtaposition elucidates an underlying class issue: where Larry’s story divulges the injuries and injustices that were inflicted, in particular, on the lower classes during the Troubles, as indicated in my first chapter, the Peace Process has been severely criticised for contributing to the inequities suffered by the poor in continuing their marginalisation and oppression.

Larry’s marginal presence in the novel parallels his subaltern status in society: we never get to fully know him nor his thoughts, or the veracity of his story. Clouded in silence, yet located in between the verisimilar and the fictive, his history exists as a Lloydian ‘subalternity effect’ of an amnesiac Process that remains recalcitrant to the desire for archival absorption or wholesale denunciation by re-emerging as an irreducible and uncontainable *ethical* excess at the end of the novel.<sup>9</sup> Larry’s significance in the novel can be understood through Levinas notion of ‘the trace’: ‘A trace would seem to be the very indelibility of being ... its immensity incapable of being self-enclosed, somehow too great for discretion, inwardness, or a self’ (1986: 357). Resisting enclosure in the *arkhe*-taintment of the archive and the sameness of historical conformity through the Peace Process, Larry’s memory-traces of the crime

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<sup>8</sup> Besides other issues, Clinton emphasises the possibilities that the Peace Process offers for multinational and, particularly, American investments for the redevelopment and regeneration of Belfast; he also praises the work of the police force. The Clinton speech is available at: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/bc131200.htm> (accessed 12 January 2007).

<sup>9</sup> For David Lloyd, a ‘subalternity effect’ designates subaltern social spaces ‘emerging in and between historiographical discourses’ that prove ‘recalcitrant to any straightforward absorption’ (*Ireland After History* 1999: 77).

– committed by both anonymous, faceless individuals and unconceivable state formation – signify ‘the trace of the Other’. With specific reference to the detective work on a crime scene, yet in contrast to the conventional crime novel and its attempt to discern an ultimate pattern or readable code, Levinas notes: ‘Its original signifyingness is sketched out in, for example, the fingerprints left by someone who wanted to wipe away his traces and commit a perfect crime. He who left traces did not mean to say or do anything by the traces he left. He disturbed the order in an irreparable way’ (1986: 357). If we consider this ‘someone’, the ‘he’ who is responsible for the crime (that is, firstly, for the murders themselves; secondly, for the erasure of Larry’s memory; and, thirdly, for the declined responsibility for both) in Levinas’ sense as the socio-political or legal domain of ‘the third party’ (*le tiers*) – which is comparable to Derrida’s archontic principle of the archive – Larry’s indelible memory traces disturb the sense of order and control by confronting ‘the third’ with a necessary ‘answering to an irreversible past’ that ‘he’ would much rather forget or forcefully obliterate (1986: 355).

Such an ethical engagement, according to Derrida, ‘should *call into question* the coming of the future’ (1995: 26), and therein opens *arkhe* as an active process of memory-mapping that concerns not only the crime wiped away by the individual or ‘the third’, but also gestures towards the indiscernible network of power-structures, legal relations and questions of justice that involve the social whole. The mystery surrounding Larry’s crime exemplifies Fredric Jameson’s notion that ‘it is society as a whole that is the mystery to be solved’ (1992: 39). In a comparable way to James Kelman’s protagonist Jeremiah (discussed in the previous chapter), Larry’s paranoid conspiracies function as a form of ‘cognitive mapping’ as Jameson formulates it:

the ‘conspiratorial text’, which, whatever other messages it emits or implies, may also be taken to constitute an unconscious, collective effort at trying to figure out where we are and what landscapes and forces confront us in a late twentieth century whose abominations are heightened by their concealment and their bureaucratic impersonality. (1992: 3)

Larry’s conspiratorial memory-traces signify the desire for an alternative archival of Northern Ireland’s history, which questions the responsibility of the authorities, the state and the governments. While Avery’s own final silence adumbrates the

continuing silences of the present, 'That which was,' Patterson writes in an article about his chosen title, 'still has questions to ask of that which is to be' (2003: n.p.). It is in this sense that we have to understand Derrida's insistence that 'the question of the archive is not a question of the past ... It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow' (1995: 27).

### **Utopian Anarchy: *Arkhe* Unbound**

In one way, Larry's suspicion and mistrust in political authority and the state could be read as exemplary of unionist distrust in the government. The novel captures the sense of political insecurity that permeates post-ceasefire Belfast, for example in the anxious display of cultural symbols in Avery's east Belfast neighbourhood: 'from the windowsills ... a startling array of flags flew: Ulster flags, UVF and UDA flags (though never close together), Scottish flags, Canadian and Australian flags, even the occasional Union Jack' (TW 15). Paramilitary punishment beatings still occur, enforcing a mutilating silence over its victims and crimes. Tony is seriously beaten up in some mysterious connection to the medical record that could verify Larry's story. Avery reflects on the 'literalness of the beating': 'It was clear to him what concentrating on the mouth meant. Don't talk' (TW 215). Patterson furthermore delineates the moralistic implications of what has become known as the 'siege mentality'.<sup>10</sup> When Avery visits the Protestant mother of a boy who got injured at a cross-community football tournament by a Catholic, he is confronted with her open prejudice and feelings of injustice that the government is now, since the Good Friday Agreement, always on the Catholic side. She relates this to the reopened Bloody Sunday trials: 'Look at Derry, she said. Them ones only have to ask and they get it' (TW 91). Blaming the ineffectiveness and partiality of the official authorities, the mother attempts to justify the revengeful righteousness asserted by loyalist paramilitaries: 'So it's all right, is it, for them ones to bomb and shoot us for thirty years, but not for anyone to do a thing back?' (TW 92). Her anxious defensiveness

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<sup>10</sup> For an account of the historical origins and development of the Protestant/unionist 'siege mentality', see Stewart, *The Narrow Ground* (1986); Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland* (1990).

displays here again Edward Said's notion of the 'rhetoric of blame', which divulges a singularising and reductive moralism similar to the one I discussed with regard to Patrick McCabe's two protagonists in *The Dead School*. In *Politics Out of History*, Wendy Brown notes with regard to the 'siege mentality' assumed by postmodern identity politics that their 'defensiveness also tends to preclude their addressing deep sources of injustice and to incite instead a politics that acts at the largely symbolic and gestural level, the level at which moralism runs rampant' (2001: 39). This seems to apply to both Unionism and Irish Nationalism.

The novel, yet, refrains from such vacuous moralising, and thereby resists a reading that would yield to its Presbyterian milieu and Old Testament title. It is noteworthy that the novel's title derives from the authoritative ethics archive per se; the epigraph from the *Book of Judges* reads as follows: 'In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes'. Associating Israel's historical lack of an autonomous government with the political situation in the North, this passage refers in the Bible to the subsequent outbreak of chaos. But Patterson's novel sets it against such a destructive anarchy to affirm through Larry as well as Avery the necessary effort of each individual to act in accordance with his or her ethical conviction and moral judgement, thereby taking on the responsibility that is, according to Levinas, the necessary starting point (that is, of *arkhe* as commencement) for justice to take place. This is qualified by Avery's favourite quote from the Bible: 'Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind' (TW 5). Significantly, it was also this line which prised open 'a crack' in the *arkhe*-taintment of Larry's story (TW 236). The question of justice assumes in the novel a simple, quite Levinasian formula that is phrased by the Dalai Lama, whose talk Avery attends: 'Justice, he said, is all individuals looking after others' rights' (TW 119). Asserting justice as a social relationship based on equality and reciprocity but without a ruler, the novel evokes a utopian *anarchy* – an *an-arkhe*, an *arkhe* unbound – that stands as an ethical counter-principle to the strategies of *arkhe*-taintment. In this respect, it situates justice not only as a responsibility for the other in Levinas sense, but also with Derrida, as specifically advocated in *Spectres of Marx*, on the side of memory. In *Archive Fever*, Derrida quotes Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's

question at the end of his postscript to *Zakhor*: ‘Is it possible that the antonym of “forgetting” is not “remembering” but *justice*?’ (1995: 50).<sup>11</sup>

## II. INDELIBLE TRACES: Eoin McNamee’s *The Ultras*

In *The Ultras*, Agnew also feels that Nairac’s activities ‘confer responsibility upon him’ (U 130). But for McNamee this does not mean that he ‘is looking at noble ends of justice, or reconciliation, or anything else so civic-sounding and unattainable’, as he states in his article ‘Hand-held narrative’ (2003: n.p). Perhaps as a Catholic writer he is more suspicious. The novel repeatedly confronts the ethical dilemma of trying to reconstruct history through the archive. For the silences inherent in the documents also invite the opportunity to fill them with lies. In a similar fashion to his creator, especially in *The Blue Tango* (2001),<sup>12</sup> Agnew fabricates personal histories about the photographs he took during house raids: ‘He gave them histories, devised small, poignant events occurring in childhood’ (U 65). This tactic is also used by the intelligence agencies at Thiepval who are pursuing information that can be (mis)used for blackmail or internment purposes. David Erskine, who works for the army’s intelligence, recognises that ‘much of the information was unreliable. They all knew that was not important. They were looking for narrative qualities. The veracity of the story was a secondary consideration’ (U 84). This abstruse relation between fact and fiction pervades the whole novel. Yet, through the manipulative exploitation of narrative possibilities, unreliable data is made suspiciously trustworthy. David ‘learned that it was more reliable to invent a history for the target’ that they want to be interned; by adding details of crimes not committed, ‘the more it seemed that guilt accrued’ (U 111). Yet, albeit the assurance of his official that such an intervention ‘leaves no physical trace’, as with the fingerprints wiped away from the crime scene that Levinas discusses in the above quotation, they do leave indelible traces: ‘David thought that the profiles he created transcended the actual detail of the target’s life.

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<sup>11</sup> Cited from Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (New York: Schocken, 1989), p. 117.

<sup>12</sup> In *The Blue Tango*, McNamee constructs his story about the mysterious murder of Patricia Curran, the Judge’s daughter, around photographs of the people involved in her suspiciously manipulated case.

... The troubled histories he had created, the brooding, overshadowed lives, the terrible symmetry of things preordained coming to pass' (U 112). Such transgressions signify what Derrida calls 'the violence of the archive itself' (1995: 12): they mark an irreversible violation of justice; as Levinas notes, 'it is a disturbance imprinting itself (we are tempted to say *engraving* itself) with an unexceptionable gravity' (1986: 359).

Through the noir undertone of his work, McNamee traces the irreparability of the crime done onto the other; in this case to those who as subaltern targets are rendered voiceless, whose own traces and histories are erased and whose fate is already decided upon, whereby their innocence as well as their guilt become 'a difficult, allusive thing' (U 111). In *The Noir Thriller*, Lee Horsley contends that '[it] is in the nature of noir that guilt never disappears', and it is always 'both individual and social' (2001: 12). Similarly to Patterson's novel, in the *The Ultras* everybody is equally implicated in this guilt. But the novel conveys a more complex matrix of ethics by investigating what Spivak, following Michel Foucault, terms the 'epistemic violence' perpetrated by and through the institutionalised manipulation of justice (1994: 76). So despite his own complicity in legal malpractice, David makes out the only morally conscientious voice at Thiepval. When expressing 'ethical' concern about the effects of Robert's obscure involvements with the paramilitaries (U 191), he is, however, soon discarded and incarcerated. Now he is himself powerlessly exposed to the falsified accusation of having committed the murder of his partner Joyce. The police report is filled with 'psycho-sexual overtones ... with intimations of society's justified contempt for the perverse nature of the crime and its determination to apprehend the culprit' (U 220-1). Herein, McNamee exposes the powerful effect that archival manipulations have over the common sense of justice.

### **Mapping the Moral Void**

It is noteworthy that Robert Nairac himself is linked to those fabricated subaltern histories whose predestined trajectories parallel his own – marked for death, by his own intuition and the text's structure, from the outset: 'David thought that Robert was taking on the characteristics of one of those targets. There was the accumulation

of detail which led you away from the centre, from the facts of a life' (U 112). Indeed, Robert's mythic presence in the novel divulges the deliberate obfuscation with which his gruesome activities are concealed. This is explicated by his capacity for 'dissimulation', and, significantly, he reaches his end under the fake identity of 'a PIRA operative called Danny McErlean' (U 218, 1).<sup>13</sup> Nairac seems the ultimate mimic man whose bragging conviction of his ability to imitate the locals apparently affords him connections in both paramilitary camps. Yet McNamee exposes the ironic ineptitude and artificiality of his mimicry. For example, when David asks him to imitate Belfast accents, he refuses to do it (U 45). Agnew also recognises that 'there was something awkward in the way he swore, stilted ... That he would sometimes insert the swearwords into the wrong part of the sentence' (U 173). This is exemplified when Robert tells Agnew: 'Just come with fucking me' (U 171). As the prefix to 'me', the misplaced expletive creates a subversive self-parody. The novel also dismantles his feigned solidarity of 'having affinity with young men from working-class backgrounds' as a deceiving mask to conceal his amorality and 'ruthless disregard for human life' (U 164, 177).

Frequently in the novel, Robert is associated with deception and moral vacuity, as for instance when Agnew imagines his existence on the border: 'He had conspired and killed and felt his life folding back in on itself in layers of falsehood, dark canards, and now a border emptiness had enwrapped him, the deep soul vexation, the tugging empty void' (U 227). This parallels the impression that McNamee himself attained when conducting his archival research about Nairac, as he states in an interview:

One interesting thing here is that you would expect to acquire some intimacy with your subject, but Nairac resisted enquiry and intimacy. At the end of the book I adapted Nietzsche's dictum that when you look long into the abyss, the abyss also looks into you. Substitute void for abyss and you have the way I felt about Robert Nairac. (Wild 2004: n.p.)

This 'sense of moral void' (U 150) is furthermore signified by the title-giving name of the uncanny pseudo-gang, the Ultras, with Nairac as the dark centre recruiting,

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<sup>13</sup> It is interesting that McNamee here deliberately alters the known information that Nairac pretended to be a 'sticky', as in the accounts by Martin Dillon, *The Dirty War* (1991) and John Parker, *Death of a Hero* (1999).

controlling and ‘discarding them’ according to General Sir Frank Kitson’s work on counter-insurgency. As the omniscient narrative voice intones: ‘Ultra meaning beyond. Ultra meaning extreme. The word itself had a rustling cabbalistic tone to it’ (U 216). Like Robert, their ghostly presence eludes archival containment or consignment; their activities are covered in silence, and all forensic evidence is removed from their crimes: ‘The emphasis was on the unattributable, the deniable’ (U 172). The Ultras seem to arise from the dark unconscious, like ‘something you dreamed about’ (U 86); the only proof of their existence relies on the necessity ‘to believe in them. That in the middle of chaotic events, bombing, sudden and inexplicable death, there was a calm, a dark, ordering artifice’ (U 87). Exploiting this need for order and control, for pattern and meaning, affords them remarkable power, and it is signified by Robert’s obsession with maps.

Like Victor Kelly in *Resurrection Man*, Robert’s compulsive tracing of ‘patterns, edgy formulae of the peripheral’ soon turns into the imposition of his own patterns onto them (U 4): ‘The original map had been almost obscured by his markings. There seemed to be a reinvention of the idioms of the terrain’ (U 206-7). Just as he claims absolute knowledge over the local other in his ability for mimicry, so too he asserts complete expertise and thus control over the territory: ‘He seemed to have extensive local knowledge ... He seemed to be able to trace lines on the maps that no one else could see’ (U 88-9). Notably, Robert’s cartography is particularly obsessed with the border, which, in view of his conspiratorial activities there, can be read as a strategy of containment: the stoking of tribal sectarianism aims not only to disavow the historical complexity of the conflict itself, but also to detain deeper questions about justice from arising. Yet, as with Victor Kelly, Robert, the ‘committed and lethal archivist’ of the border (U 191) – ‘Hunting for the sake of the hunt’ (U 223) – becomes himself haunted by it as he starts losing control over his reinvented map:

He drew lines on it, put small Xs beside isolated farmhouses. At first [Tony] Ball thought that he was targeting known PIRA individuals, but as the snow persisted the marking became less clear. Question marks were added, lines looped around geographical features for no discernible reasons ... Robert returned to it again and again. Lines were added in different-coloured pen. Many of the lines petered out.

‘I can’t get bearings on this bloody border,’ Robert said. (U 165)

This notion of the unmappable, uncontainable border conveys the text's political unconscious; it divulges a conflict, or rather war, as McNamee prefers to call it, that has become out of control. Robert himself represents a threatening force that cannot be contained. He defies any determinate knowledge about his shadowy involvements in the border counties: 'He's working between the agencies. Nobody really knows who's running him or what's going on' (U 177). His indeterminate in-between status is symbolised by his fondness for the ambiguous song 'Danny Boy' that he sings on numerous occasions.<sup>14</sup> It concerns both his class, national and religious affiliation as an English Catholic SAS captain, son of a wealthy eye surgeon who likes to mingle with the working classes, and his transgressive sexuality: on the one hand, Nairac embodies hyper-masculine attributes; on the other hand, he is repeatedly the victim of homosexual assaults (e.g. U 82, 205). Lorna, who is attracted to the allusive secrecy that surrounds Robert's life, ponders: 'If he was homo it would be against the law in those days. That he did wilfully. That he did feloniously. It had to be secret' (U 214). Reinventing himself as he reinvents the border map, Robert's deceptions exemplify the sinister transgressions of his vicious pseudo-gang: 'Pseudo meaning sham, false, spurious' (U 150).

One of the remarkable ironies that the novel divulges is that the army's resort to colonial methods of control has led to disastrous and uncontrollable results in Northern Ireland. Robert's own mysterious role in the SAS, celebrated as a national hero and posthumously adorned with the George Cross, poses an actual threat to the army and security forces, and therein to the state itself. Thus, not only Agnew but also some shadowy authority is very much interested in archiving Robert's case; yet rather than being engrossed in the conspiracy theories it triggers, Agnew recognises that what they want is its *arkhe*-taintment: 'They wanted to put an end to the Nairac story. They wanted to stop it intruding into their sphere. They were the keepers of the mystery. They could have controlled Nairac if he was alive. They could have practised policies of containment' (U 250-1). But, similarly to Larry, Nairac's history remains an un-*arkhe*-taintable excess: neither certainly dead nor alive, as a quasi-Derridean *revenant*, he refuses burial in the archive and continues to assert his unmasterable presence: 'Agnew thought of him as existing in maverick dreamtime

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<sup>14</sup> See Malachy McCourt, *Danny Boy* (2002).

... He was a source of persistent rumour. That he led death squads. ... That he was still alive somewhere, in deep cover, awaiting an unknowable outcome. That he knew who they were and what they dreamed about' (U 251). In face of the official denial and disavowed responsibility that is exemplarily articulated by David's superior, Clyde Knox – 'Ultras? No such thing. A product of the fevered left-wing imagination. A nonsense of post-colonial theorists' (U 244) – the ethical force that drives McNamee's work is an 'exhortation to remember' that which would be much rather forgotten or erased (U 253). As with his other two novels, *The Ultras* reminds of the crime of trying to erase a still haunting past that brings an irreparable disturbance to the momentum of the Northern Peace Process. In McNamee's noir vision, Northern Ireland becomes like the meat factory, which holds mystery of Robert's never found body, a 'tainted place', 'where the dreaming still lingered' (U 251). It is tainted not only from an uncontrollable violence but also from of the threatening force of an unruly *arkhe* that is generated by the silences that pervade Northern Irish history. David states about the Ultras: 'They created secrets and forced everybody to live in them. That was what scared him. The knowledge of clandestine governance, the dark polity' (U 216). They refuse archival containment, as Derrida notes: 'But of the secret itself, there can be no archive, by definition' (1995: 62). In persisting as a conspiratorial rumour 'in all its covert multiples' (U 216), the dark secret of Robert's conspiracies continues to haunt the indiscernible archons with their own means.

### **Destructive Anarchy: *En Mal d'Archive***

While I proposed that *That Which Was* offers a sense of redemptive anarchy, this unbound *arkhe* produces in McNamee's text devastating effects. Nairac embodies such a destructive *arkhe* in both orders: beyond control and commandment of the archons or authorities, he persists as an uncontrollable generator of myths and mysteries. David imagines him: 'The fomenter of havoc. The plotter. The hatcher of villainy, of murderous schemes, alone in the prowled-through locale of his own mythology' (U 224). The self-destructive behaviour that afflicts all characters involved with archiving secrets is astounding: Robert's self-initiates his own murder,

Agnew's deteriorating liver and incessant drinking will soon see to him, and his daughter Lorna commits suicide. This seems expressive of the 'death drive' that Derrida locates at the root of archive fever:

[The death drive] always operates in silence, it never leaves any archives of its own. It destroys in advance its own archive, as if that were in truth the very motivation of its proper movement. It works *to destroy the archive: on the condition of effacing but also with a view to effacing* its own 'proper' traces ... This drive ... seems anarchic, anarchonic ... It not only incites forgetfulness, amnesia, the annihilation of memory ... but also commands the radical effacement ... of that which can never be reduced to *mnēmē* or to *anamnēsis*, that is, the archive, consignment, the documentary...

The death drive ... threatens every principality, every archontic primacy, every archival desire. It is what we will call, later on, *le mal d'archive*, *archive fever*. (1995: 14)

It is in face of such an anarchic destruction of memory as also a 'troubled and troubling' archive, whose 'trouble of secrets, of plots, of clandestineness', as Derrida notes, 'troubles and muddles our vision', that McNamee's characters are compelled to be '*en mal d'archive*: in need of archives', as Derrida describes it:

It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive, even if there's too much of it, right where something in it archives itself. It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return of the most archaic place of absolute commencement. (57)

This burning passion stands in its striving for self-annihilation, then, as a radical ethical attitude: a desire for the other, for the infinite and absolute alterity of utopia that, in Adorno's sense as a negation of existence (1997: 41) or, for Levinas, as 'the possibility of impossibility' (1987: 70 N43), would also mean that the traumatic past and its memories are wiped away without a trace.

At the same time, it signifies the ultimate counterpart to the 'archontic principle of the archive', that is, as Derrida emphasises, 'paternal and patriarchic' (1995: 59). Given the male domination and control over the archive, it is significant that the last part of the novel is given over to Lorna's last diary entry, which Agnew finally releases from its grave silence: 'It had the feel of a document that had lain unopened in an archive for decades' (U 253). The unmediated female voice of Lorna's 'last

will and testament' reveals her fatal fascination with secrets and divulges the unbearable weight of the past as the reason for her death wish: 'They think the problem is weight food not eating but I know that is not true 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' (U 254).

Trying to take account of the full weight of memory, both works confront the damaging effects incurred by archive fever. In *That Which Was*, shortly before the planned disclosure of his story, Larry too triggers his own death. But while acknowledging the pain that encumbers the process of remembrance, they both also recognise what Derrida calls 'the violence of forgetting' (1995: 51): the crime of wiping away the traces of a past that would be much rather forgotten or erased, but still has many questions to ask of that which is to come. In contrast to Tony Blair's hope that through the Peace Process 'the burden of history can at long last be lifted from our shoulders', both novels emphasise the importance of accounting for this burdensome past which the official *arkhe*-taintment attempts to lighten (cited in Ruane 1999: 169 FN1). In Patterson's and McNamee's vision, the histories of Larry and Nairac remain as indelible traces to remind us in the momentum of the Peace Process' promise of a 'new start' of our ethical responsibility for a more equitable future – which should certainly also include the equality between the sexes, for a start. The subsequent parts of this thesis will be specifically concerned with investigating issues of gender and sexuality, in particular the silencing and marginalisation of women's concerns by and within the patriarchal order of the family, the state and the nation, in order to enable a release of female voices that the ending of McNamee's text tentatively initiated.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ‘DANGEROUS LIAISONS’<sup>1</sup>:

#### THE POLITICS OF IMAGINATION & GENDER RELATIONS

Glenn Patterson’s *Fat Lad*, Edna O’Brien’s *Down By the River* and  
Mary Costello’s *Titanic Town*

*‘All nationalisms are gendered; all are invented; and all are dangerous – dangerous ... in the sense that they represent relations to political power and to technologies of violence. As such, nations are not simply phantasmagoria of the mind; as systems of cultural representation ... they are historical practices through which social difference is both invented and performed.’*

Anne McClintock, ‘Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family’

**Reality 2** *Irish women are twice dispossessed.  
Dismembered. Unremembered.  
Nobody, so to speak.  
No past to speak of.  
Unremembering our history  
of absence, sign of our existence.  
(Never possessed of our history,  
Never possessed of our selves.)*  
Ailbhe Smyth, ‘The Floozie in the Jacuzzi’

After addressing in ‘**Reality 1**’ the postcolonial predicament of the Irish being ‘chained to an endless’ need of ‘remembering loss’, as inherent in Joep Leerssen’s traumatic paradigm, Ailbhe Smyth turns in her tellingly entitled ‘**Reality 2**’ to the position of women in Irish history (1989/1991: 25-26). For Smyth, the historical presence of Irish women is paradoxically only constituted by their discursive absence; she quotes Julia Kristeva: ‘**As everyone knows every negation is a definition**’ (Ibid.). Furthermore, Gayatri Spivak’s interrogation of the silence of the

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<sup>1</sup> I have borrowed this title from the exemplary collection of essays on gender, nation and postcolonialism, edited by McClintock *et al.* (1997).

gendered subaltern is evoked when Smyth asks, ‘from what place can I speak? ... can I speak myself at all?’ (14). This eclipsed space of the feminine has already become apparent in the male-authored texts discussed in the previous chapters: either relegated to silence (as in Kelman’s, McCabe’s and McNamee’s novels) and/or contained in the domestic sphere (as in Patterson’s as well as McCabe’s work), female voice and agency are here notably limited. But as this chapter hopes to further elaborate, women have not only been silenced and marginalised by and within a masculine discourse but also the national tradition. This is suggested in A.L. Kennedy’s short story ‘The Role of Notable Silences in Scottish History’, in which her female narrator, a historian, criticises national historiographies for perpetuating the silences of ‘small people’, who accordingly ‘disappeared’ as they have been erased from the historical records. Nevertheless, as what David Lloyd terms a ‘subalternity effect’ (1999: 77), they continue to subsist on the margins by invading the space dominated by official history. As Kennedy’s story describes it: ‘It is the sound of nothingness. It is the huge, invisible, silent roar of all the people who are too small to record’ (1990: 64). If Kennedy’s roaring silences prove largely gender neutral whilst pointing to a distinct subalternity, Esther Breitenbach affirms their gendered specificity when she notes that ‘women in Scotland have been rendered almost invisible in the production of historical narratives. This process is accomplished by a variety of means – denial, dismissal, incorporation and containment – all of which serve to deny women’s agency in history’ (1997: 89). This resonates with Gerardine Meaney’s contention that within Ireland’s literary tradition ‘the Irish woman reading Irish writing finds in it only a profound silence, her own silence ... The exclusion of women was constitutive of Irish literature as it was constitutive of the Irish Republic’ (1993: 239). So just as in de Valera’s Ireland, women were reduced to the speechless ‘laughter of comely maidens’ (1980: 466), so too within Irish Studies, both the nationalistic project of *The Field Day Anthology* and the revisionist histories of Roy Foster and Joseph Lee furthermore attest to the unremembrance of women’s voices that Smyth exposes and that will be a major concern of the following chapters.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Margaret Ward’s critique in *The Missing Sex* (1991) with regard to Seamus Deane (gen. ed.), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (1991); R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland* (1988); and Joseph Lee, *Ireland 1912- 1985* (1989).

As Smyth's *Reality 2* suggests, it is women's social position within the context of a postcolonial national imagination that poses an additional problematic. In her introduction to *Meantime: Looking Forward to the New Millennium*, Scottish writer Janice Galloway, whose work will be discussed in the following chapter, argues: 'Scottish women have their own particular complications with writing and definition, complications which arrive from the general problems of being a colonised nation. Then, that wee touch extra. Their sex' (1991: 5). It is the complications of this often ignored 'wee extra touch' that Marilyn Reizbaum addresses in her precursory cross-archipelagic approach through 'the phenomenon of a "double exclusion" suffered by women writing in marginalised cultures, in this case Scotland and Ireland, where the struggle to assert a nationalist identity obscures or doubly marginalizes the assertion of gender (the women's voice)' (1992: 165). Woman in this condition finds herself caught in what Smyth calls 'a dual complex, defined by two political and cultural realities' that constitute a specifically gendered ('Womanness') and a particular national ('Irishness'/Scottishness) identity (1991: 23). What this suggests is that, for women, the relation between gender and nation is often marked by a potential conflict or juxtaposition of two different, if not opposing, realities. In her experimental reflections on the implications of this, Smyth evokes the need for a '[d]ual struggle ... to extricate ourselves from the simultaneous web that binds us into the pattern of dual non-entity' (24).

In Irish studies there has been an increasing awareness and debates about what I want to designate here as an often rather *dangerous* relationship between nationalism and sexualities, nation and gender, which is due to the particular political and socio-cultural circumstances of the Irish case, concerning on the one hand the institutional enshrining of a repressive sex-gender system after Independence in the South, and the strict policing of traditional gender roles in the context of the political violence in the North on the other. By contrast, the Scottish cultural context seems to have inspired, rather than detained, critics to endorse the 'creative conflation of gender and nation', as Berthold Schoene does, for example, in his recent chapter on 'Alan Warner, Post-feminism and the Emasculated Nation' (2007b: 255). For one thing, this might be partly so as Scottish nationalism is by Scottish commentators often accredited with similar subaltern credentials as those evoked by David Lloyd and

Carol Coulter (who will be discussed at the ending of this chapter); namely, as Christopher Whyte suggests in his 'Not(e) from the Margin' – which was partly written in response to an English woman's statement that 'nationalism is always bad news for women' – that it 'could, conceivably if not actually, be more receptive and more nurturing to women, gay men and other "marginal" groups than larger, more dominant cultures' (1995: 34). For another, there is a tendency in Scottish studies to consider this contentious relationship in purely constructionist terms as, for instance, apparent in Susanne Hagemann's conclusion that 'the only general statement that can be made about women and nation is the paradoxical one that no general statement can be made. Both women and nation are constructs, and any interpretation of the relationship between them depends to a considerable extent on the political interest which motivates it' (1997: 326). It is in face of this apparent aporia that I will exemplify some of the political and material implications that the putatively 'creative' conflation between these two terms has for female citizens in particular. The focus of this chapter will be more exclusively on the Irish context, where the intensity and specificity of women's concerns in relation to those of the nation and nationalism is much more prevalent. I want to suggest that the Irish scenario can provide a lens for Scottish studies magnifying the dangers of a gendered imagiNation when translated from the symbolic to the political realm, as addressed in Anne McClintock's exhortation which forms this chapter's epitaph. The aim here is to attest to the ethical gap that exists between the concrete historical conditions of women and their symbolic position in the patriarchal imagiNation in order to establish the grounds of dissent for wresting gender away from the hegemony of the national that seeks to both overpower and contain it.

## **I. GENDERING THE IMAGINATION: Tropes & Traps**

What function does gender, then, actually have in the national imagination, and what are the implications for the constructions of masculinity and femininity? In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson makes, in passing, a curious comparison when pointing out one of the paradoxes of the otherwise apparently gender-neutral theories

of nationalism:<sup>3</sup> ‘The formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept – in the modern world everyone can, should, will “have” a nationality, as he or she “has” a gender – vs. the irremediable particularity of its concrete manifestations, such that, by definition, “Greek” nationality is *sui generis*’ (1983: 14). The way in which the social category of gender is employed here as a universal analogic category for national definition requires circumspection given that gender – that is, one particular gender – has, in turn, been used as the concrete manifestation of national specificity or perhaps, rather, singularity. From a feminist perspective, it is thus, as Elspeth Probyn remarks, ‘hard not to feel that once again women in the guise of gender are being wheeled in as evidence of a universal materiality while the nation floats off as the abstract’ (1999: 49). Hence, rather than producing a mere constructionist account as Hageman, for one, would have it, Anderson’s equivalence comes to evoke Slavoj Žižek’s contention that the cultural and political act of *imagiNation* is driven by the enjoyment of a specific ‘Thing’, which is here revealed to be displaced onto ‘woman’ as the privileged bearer of *jouissance*, enjoyment-in-sense – an observation that Žižek, rather curiously, fails to make himself (see Žižek 1993). Implicit to this critique is, then, that the national imagination often depends on constructions and regulations of gender that, as Margaret Ward remarks with regard to the Irish context, give rise to the ‘the assumption that nationalism is a predominantly masculine phenomenon; that the struggle for the nation-state is one defined by men, participated in entirely by men, and one in which the potential for the emancipation of women is negligible’ (1996: 8). In *Beaches, Bananas, and Bases*, Cynthia Enloe similarly contends that ‘nationalism has typically sprung from masculine memory, masculinized humiliation and masculine hope’ (1990: 45) – and, we may add here, masculine desire.

The gender specifics of national imaginations are, as Elleke Boehmer argues, ‘clearly illustrated in [their] iconographies’ where ‘it is a male figure who is cast as the author and subject of the nation – as faithful soldier, citizen-hero or statesmen’ (1991: 6). Whereas men are typically incorporated into the national scenario metonymically – as ‘brother and equals, or fathers and sons’ contiguous with each other, which will be expounded in Chapter 6 – women are relegated to a ‘metaphoric

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<sup>3</sup> For a sustained criticism of this gender blindness, see Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (1997).

or symbolic role': emblazoned as emblems of national virtue and elevated as 'mothers of the nation', yet 'officially marginalised and generally ignored' (Boehmer: 6). In this light, 'woman' functions in nationalist discourses perhaps not so much as a *sinthome* (the symptom of man) but as what I wish to call *sinathion* – the coded figuration of a specifically masculine and patriarchal imagiNation.<sup>4</sup> This sense of the female figure as *sinathion* is evoked in Smyth's feminist reading of the monumental figuration of James Joyce's Anna Livia Plurabelle from *Finnegans Wake* (1939) – colloquially named 'The Floozie in the Jacuzzi', as inherent in her essay title – which, she contends, 'exists not in and for herself but in and for something *other* than herself. Essentially vacuous, receptacle without individual identity, mute spectacle, silent cipher, the symbolic female figure is incapable of *conferring* meaning' (1991: 11). However, if unable to generate meaning herself, woman as *sinathion* offers a way of foregrounding both the ideological and material implications of national codifications that often remain, as in the Scottish context, unchallenged. That is, the female *sinathion* becomes often a compensatory fetish for the dominant national subject, which is specifically accentuated in a (post)colonial scenario where hegemonic masculinity finds itself both in construction as well as under threat.

### **Postcolonial Gender Trouble: Colonial-National Paradigms**

Notably, these gendered national tropes are anchored in a colonial iconography where a feminised territory is forcefully possessed and penetrated by the 'imperial/Male' power, as allegorised in Seamus Heaney's tellingly entitled poem, 'Act of Union' (1974/1998: 127). In *The Intimate Enemy* (1983), Ashis Nandy illustrates how this gendered discourse of colonial power relations constitutes an apparently 'natural' framework of gender relations – of an aggressive colonial *masculinity* in contrast to the passive *femininity* of the colonised. In this model, the process of colonial subjugation is read as a strategic emasculation. As David Cairns and Shaun

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<sup>4</sup> The linguistic similarity to Jacques Lacan's coinage should be obvious: if the term *sination* would refer to the status of 'woman' as symptom of the nation or imagiNation, the residual 'h' (for *homme*) is here intended to point to a specifically *masculine* imagiNation.

Richards show in *Writing Ireland*, the Celts have been stereotypically depicted as a 'feminine race', for example by Ernest Renan and, for different purposes, by Matthew Arnold (1988: 43-9). If this sexual metaphoric works to both absorb and deny the concrete historical subalternity of women, there is, as Aaron Kelly points out, furthermore the danger of producing 'a mechanistic account of oppression that actually assumes the gendering of imperial ideology' (2005a: 125). This is, for example, apparent in Ann Owens Weekes's contention that the entire population of Ireland assumes in such conditions the position of women: 'Colonisation, then, makes female both country and people' (1990: 15). Similarly, Aileen Christianson, somewhat surprisingly, considers the usage of the word 'emasculate' in the context of Scottish affairs neither 'a gender specific [n]or biased word but ... a fitting description', putatively for what Tom Nairn notoriously called Scotland's 'political castration' (Christianson 1996: 122; Nairn 1981: 155). This motif of effeminate Scottishness is exemplified in Mark Renton's (in)famous tirade in Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* in which he, however, undercuts the hyper-masculinity of the former colonial power: 'It's nae good blamin it oan the English fir colonising us. Ah don't hate the English. They're just wankers. We are colonised by wankers. We cant even pick a decent, vibrant, healthy culture to be colonised by. No, we're ruled by effete arseholes. What does that make us? The lowest of the fuckin low, the scum of the earth' (1993: 78).

Within Nandy's psychosocial model (and as attested by the character of Frank Begbie in Welsh's novel), this sense of inferiorism is attempted to be offset by emphasising a strongly masculine identity. Nandy asserts:

Only the victims of a culture of hyper-masculinity, adulthood, historicism, objectivism, and hypernormality protect themselves by simultaneously conforming to the stereotype of the rulers, by over-stressing those aspects of the self which they share with the powerful, and by protecting in the corner of their heart a secret defiance which reduces to absurdity the victor's concept of the defeated and his unspoken belief that he is morally and culturally superior to his subjects, caught on the wrong side of history. (1998: 100)

Nandy's account suggests an ambiguity or contradiction underpinning the gendering of (post)colonial masculinity by both colluding with the iniquitous forces of patriarchy through hyperbolic emulation while, at the same time, being subjected to

its strictures due to ‘feminine’ marginality within the patriarchal-colonial state.<sup>5</sup> The result is often a profound masculine anxiety over the construction of a specifically gendered, heterosexual national identity through recourse to this colonial paradigm, which is apparent in both the Irish and the Scottish literary context. If this has produced in both regions – due to their specific political and social conditions – very different outcomes and effects, what is yet common to both is the extent to which these representations demand the ostracism of same-sex relations. As Éibhear Walshe suggests, this fear is especially pertinent to a postcolonial context where the association of homosexuality with ‘enfeebled “feminised” masculinity’ threatens the establishing of a stable identity: ‘For a nation “coming of age”, the lesbian and gay sensibility must be edited out, shut up’ (1996: 161).

### **Scottish Masculinity: Subaltern Victimhood**

In the Scottish case, the ambiguity surrounding Scottish masculinity is exemplified by the iconic figure of the ‘hardman’ of Glaswegian fiction; a product not only of Scotland’s political situation (English hegemony and remote control), but also and particularly of the changing social and ideological landscape of the industrial, urban working-class. In his article on ‘Masculinities in Contemporary Scottish Fiction’, Whyte describes the hardman as ‘the victim of injustice and discrimination on a class basis. His status as victim and loser makes him the focus of a surprising but persistent pathos, a pathos that oddly “feminises” a figure who wants to be so resolutely and absolutely male’ (1998: 274). Women in this scenario either fall into the category of the subservient housewife, or take on more unwomanly and masculine features. Whyte traces such ‘pathological manifestations of masculinity’ through a number of contemporary works by Scottish men writers, such as Iain Banks’ *The Bridge* (1986), Alasdair Gray’s *1982 Janine* (1984), and Welsh’s *Marabou Stork Nightmares* (1995). Their representations of a reclining male hero who is ‘incapable of adopting an upright, “erect” pose’ (Whyte: 280) appear in

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<sup>5</sup> For a similar argument (if not with regard to Nandy), see Eamonn Hughes, ‘How I Achieved this Trick’ (2006: 123-4); Kelly, *The Thriller and Northern Ireland* (2005a: 125); Schoene, ‘The Union and Jack’ (2002: 94).

marked contrast to the traditional depictions of a more phallic, if organic, working-class masculinity in the works of William McIlvanney, for example. In ‘White Men on Their Backs’, Carole Jones compares the ending of McIlvanney’s *Docherty* (1975), which depicts the death of its eponymous protagonist in a pit accident as a ‘glorious defeat’, with the final image of Welsh’s 1995 novel, where a hospitalised Roy Strang is first dismembered and then choked with his own penis by the female victim of the gang rape he initiated (2006: 1). Despite their obvious differences, it is, as Jones points out, significant that the construction of male victimhood is in both novels activated by a discourse of racial difference, namely by associating the white protagonist with a black identity (Jones: 2). Furthermore, Schoene deprecates that ‘rather than exploring and negotiating their own feminine quandary of subnational castration, alterity and specularly, Scottish male writers seem prone to merely appropriate and upstage the marginality of women’ (2002: 96).

It seems here that the harnessing of otherness – in terms of race as well as gender – to stage male victimhood and oppression (whether because of class, nation, or both) provides a means for the dominant national subject not only to compensate for his perceived lack of access to a position of authority, autonomy, and ‘normal’ power but also, crucially, to recentre his discredited masculine hegemony, not least over the nation and its representation. This is evoked in Whyte’s notion of ‘a “representational pact”’ wherein ‘the task of embodying and transmitting Scottishness is, as it were, devolved to the unemployed, the socially underprivileged, in both actual and representational contexts’ (1998: 275). What this correlation between ‘dysfunctional’ masculinity and nationness does is to intimate that the ‘crisis in masculine representation (more specifically, masculine self-representation)’, which Whyte discerns (279), can be laid at the door of Scotland’s political situation. This accordingly works to excuse Scottish patriarchy from any possible accusation of complicity with iniquitous gender relations. The mechanistic outcome of such an account is attested in Whyte’s conclusion that ‘in a context such as Scotland’s, where national self-determination continues to be a burning issue, gender antagonisms may be aggravated rather than resolved’ (284). This indicates, on the one hand, the extent to which gender relations continue in Scotland to be caught up in a British-imperial template from which heterosexual masculinity attempts to detach itself by recourse to

claims of subaltern victimhood. On the other hand, in the light of Scotland's reconstituted parliament, Whyte's fear that straight masculinity may, as Schoene paraphrases it, 'now begin to undergo a hyperbolic reassertion of itself as a monologic master discourse' seems, in this regard, well justified (2002: 96-7) – especially when considering the outcomes of the Irish postcolonial situation, to which the remainder of this chapter will now turn.

### **Irish Masculinity and the Invisible Norm**

What comes to the fore in the Irish scenario is how this gendered colonial model has consolidated a normative framework of hierarchical gender roles that suppresses alternative forms and gender relations. This is perhaps most clearly illustrated by Declan Kiberd's chapter on 'Fathers and Sons'. In a comparable manner to the Scottish model, Kiberd's 'colonial-Oedipal reading of [Irish] masculinity' suggests, as Eamonn Hughes observes, that what Kiberd describes as the 'problem of the inadequate Irish male' can be simply blamed on colonialism for producing 'weak and ineffectual' mimic men (Hughes 2006: 123; Kiberd 1996: 381). For Kiberd, the antidote to such a derogated colonial form is – as Whyte seemingly feared – the assertion of 'a proper manliness' which is somewhat paradoxically, in my view, presented as the reverse to the colonial patriarchal system; according to Kiberd, this is expressed by 'fathers who *can* demonstrate that they are not under the mother's control ... [and assert] due authority over [their] children' (1996: 391). In contrast to the more unregulated forms of gender relations in the Scottish context, in Ireland after Independence an official, state-approved version of masculinity emerged in line with Kiberd's notion, expressive of the apparent need to formulate a stable type that is set against the colonial 'feminisation'. As Hughes argues in his article on Irish masculinities, this hegemonic norm, which he finds 'marked by violence, secrecy and silence', makes a recurrent appearance in contemporary Irish men's fiction, for instance in Dermot Bolger's *The Journey Home* (1990), John McGahern's *Amongst Women* (1990) and Colm Tóibín's *The Heather Blazing* (1992) (2006: 121).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Hughes furthermore discerns a paradigm shift to again more troubled, but also more multifaceted forms of masculinity in recent Irish fiction by men writers such as Roddy Doyle, Patrick McCabe,

Notably, the paradigm for such a normative gender model is, as with Kiberd, what Michel Foucault famously terms the ‘family cell’ (1979: 108). As McClintock points out in ‘Family Feuds’, the family fulfils in nationalist iconography a similar paradoxical function to the gendering of imperial ideology: if the family as *metaphor* of the nation offers an evolutionary narrative of national history from which women are again excluded, the family as *institution* stands, at the same time, as ‘the antithesis of history’, naturalising ‘the social subordination of women and children within the domestic sphere’ (1993: 63-64). The material consequence that the institutional enshrinement of this filiative ideology has for women is exemplified by the 1937 Irish Constitution (*Bunreacht na hÉireann*), which effectively confines women to the family home. This is most clearly expressed in Article 41.2:

(1) In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the state a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.

(2) The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home. (Republic of Ireland 1999: n.p.)<sup>7</sup>

In this notable slippage, whereby ‘woman’ in the singular transmutes into ‘mothers’ in the plural, the symbolism of the ‘Mother Ireland’-trope becomes consolidated in the legislative domain, demonstrating, as Kim McMullen notes, ‘the degree to which the present hegemony depends upon control of such representations’ (1996: 37). While the hegemonic power of masculinity relies, as Hughes argues, on its self-projection as the monolithic, invisible and ‘*undefined norm*’, women must in the masculine imagiNation be constantly inscribed, defined and controlled (2006: 120). This is exemplified in the Irish context, where women, as Geraldine Meaney argues, ‘become the guarantors of their men’s status, bearers of national honour and the scapegoats of national identity. They are not merely transformed into symbols of the nation. They become the territory over which power is exercised’ (1993: 233). I will trace the implications of this contradictory position of women as *sinathions* in the

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Glenn Patterson and Robert McLiam Wilson. This may, he suggests, be attributed to the perceived crisis in Western masculinity, which I will discuss in the last chapter (see Hughes 2006: 129-35).

<sup>7</sup> The full text of the Constitution enrolled on 27 May 1999 is available at: <http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/upload/publications/297.pdf> (accessed 12 December 2006). Subsequent references hereto will appear in parenthesis in the text.

following indicative texts: Glenn Patterson's *Fat Lad* (1992), Edna O'Brien's *Down By the River* (1996), and Mary Costello's *Titanic Town* (1992). The Irish context debates about the relations between gender and colonialism, nationalism, state formation and violence are also, then, instructive for Scottish studies debate.

## II. WOMEN & THE BIOLOGICAL REPRODUCTION OF THE NATION

### **The Breeding Race: The Politics of Part(ur)ition in Patterson's *Fat Lad***

One paradox that marks the function of the *sinathion* is that while women are generally excluded from direct access to national agency, they yet attain a very crucial function in the national scenario, exemplifying Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's contention that 'what is *socially* peripheral is so frequently *symbolically* central' (1986: 5). However, as Meaney saliently emphasises above, women exceed their purely *symbolic* definition by being interpellated into what Nira Yuval-Davies describes as their supposedly 'natural' role of 'biological reproducers of the nation' (1997: 4). As a result, they become vital for the establishment of political hegemony, which proves especially relevant to the context of Northern Ireland where the struggle for political power is, as Kathryn Conrad remarks in *Locked in the Family Cell*, largely a 'numbers game' (2004: 118). In her 1997 article 'The Mother of All Warriors', Lorraine Dowler has commented that if Protestants had at the time a 57 percent majority, it is predicted to turn into a Catholic majority by 2050. 'In Northern Ireland today the primary role of women remains that of the reproduction of the body politic,' she concludes (1997: 78).<sup>8</sup> This is addressed in a scene in Glenn Patterson's *Fat Lad* [FL], wherein Granny Linden (Greta) reflects on the anxious 'breeding race' that underpins the political conflict in the North from a Protestant perspective: 'It was simple arithmetic, they said: if the Catholics kept breeding faster than the Protestants, then sooner or later the Protestants were bound to be outnumbered, and when they were the border would be rubbed out and they'd be lost forever in a

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<sup>8</sup> The extent to which sectarian body politics continue to be reproduced by the state is attested by the previously discussed fact that the Belfast Agreement demands a majority support from the unionist and nationalist designations.

United Ireland' (FL 153). In order to secure the status quo of Protestant hegemony, women's bodies become one of the most important 'weapons' in this gendered war, of which Greta, in marriage, unavoidably becomes a part: 'No sooner had you dropped one brood than you were loaded up again with another. From the day and hour she was married Greta was either getting pregnant, being pregnant, or she was getting over being pregnant' (FL 154). However, the novel ruptures this filiative definition of women as perpetual mothers by evoking the possibility of affiliative relationships in a remarkable display of local female solidarity. In face of the severe 'wearing out' through constant pregnancies, the women of Greta's community decide to gain and pass on knowledge about self-help methods of contraception: 'From then on they looked out for each other. They agreed no woman need to have a child that didn't want to, and any new wives moving into the neighbourhood they made sure and put them wise, the young ones in particular' (FL 154). This struggle for women's reproductive rights lies at the heart of the feminist movement. However, if the choice and control of women over their pregnancy and fertility are widely claimed as basic human rights, Yuval-Davis points out that these issues continue to be largely determined by the national collective and/or state formation in which they reside (1997: 26). This proves a case in point in Ireland, which comes especially to the fore through abortion – one of the most hotly debated issues of Irish body politics.

### **ContamiNation? Abortion and Internment**

Abortion was legalised in the United Kingdom in 1967, but it remains illegal in both parts of the adjacent island. As Meaney remarks: 'Whatever other divisions there are, Ireland, north and south, is united in its denial of women's right to choose' (1993: 236).<sup>9</sup> It is in particular the abortion debates in the Republic, which reached their initial peak in the period leading up to the 1983 'Pro-Life' Amendment, that illustrate the ways in which women's bodies have been used to safeguard a specific Irish imagiNation. In her chapter on 'Fetal Ireland', Conrad notes that the state-sponsored debate 'never focused on population control, despite the nation/state's interest in

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<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of the peculiarities of Northern Irish abortion law, see Richard Kirkland, 'Gender, nation, excess' (1999: 112-3).

reproducing itself. Instead, the nationalist concern has been framed in terms of ... morality' (2004: 73). The Pro-Life Amendment Campaign (PLAC) thereby presented the abortion issue as the crucial means to ward off the encroaching European influences that were – in line with Headmaster Bell in McCabe's *The Dead School* – considered to bring moral decline to Irish values, memorably represented in this novel by the Terry Krash Show and the figure of 'Miz Evans, Batchelor of Abortion'. Passed with 66.45 percent support, the amendment itself is concerned with safeguarding 'the right to life of the unborn', while affirming 'the equal right to life of the mother' (Eighth Amendment, Article 40.3.3). Conrad discusses the rhetorical strategies of anti-abortion propaganda to construct the foetus, in analogue to Ireland, as a discrete and autonomous entity by eliminating its context; namely, the womb of the pregnant woman. As a result, the foetus becomes charged as an ethically pure category of ultimate disempowerment and oppression, and thus much more in need of protection than the mother who is conveniently erased from the scene. This is exemplified by a pamphlet from the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC), which exhorts its audience to 'Value Your Voice – Value your Vote. Make it count for those with no voice and no vote' (cited in Conrad 2004: 75). The way in which the concrete conditions and concerns of actual women are here subjugated to the subalternity of their unborn children divulges the ethical distortions of the whole debate.

That state control over female sexuality can furthermore override women's democratic civil rights was demonstrated through the events surrounding the so-called 'X case' in 1992, which involved a state injunction over a fourteen-year-old suicidal rape victim to restrain her from travelling to England for an abortion. Amid public outcry, the ban was subsequently lifted by the Supreme Court, ruling that abortion is permissible when there is a substantial threat to the life ('as distinct from the health') of the mother (Twelfth Amendment).<sup>10</sup> The X case generated a rupture of national self-definition and state legitimacy by exposing the ways in which the coercive regulation of women's reproduction has become a vehicle to maintain and

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<sup>10</sup> The proposed amendment of Article 40.3.3 was by referendum rejected; however the approval of the Thirteenth and the Fourteenth Amendment guarantee the 'freedom to travel' and the right to obtain information. See Republic of Ireland, *Green Paper on Abortion* (1999: 18-9, 2.15). For important discussions of abortion in Ireland and the X case in particular, see Ailbhe Smyth, *The Abortion Papers* (1992); and Lisa Smyth, *Abortion and Nation* (2005).

perpetuate patriarchal hegemony. In her analysis of Irish abortion debates, Angela Martin argues that ‘anxieties over the nation’s boundaries have been projected onto the bodies of Irish women and have been materially manifested in constitutional attempts to define the limits of women’s bodies’ (2000: 71). It is noteworthy that press coverage compared the constitutional containment of Miss X’s pregnant body with the British policy of internment, introduced in 1971 in Northern Ireland. As a cartoon appearing on the front page of in *The Irish Times* put it: ‘17<sup>th</sup> February 1992: The introduction of internment in Ireland . . . for 14-year-old girls’ (reproduced in Conrad 2006: 108).<sup>11</sup> If abortion has been used in nationalist discourses to emphasise Ireland’s alterity to the British state in particular, this analogy reveals that the postcolonial state is complicit in a similar civil rights abuse that especially affects women. Evoking the Subaltern Studies critique, Smyth sardonically describes how ‘the liberation of the state implies male role-shift from that of Slave to Master, Margin to Centre, Other to Self. Women, powerless under patriarchy, are maintained as Other of the ex-Other, colonized of the post-colonized’ (1991: 11-12).

### **Petrifying Bodies & Time: The *Sinathion* in O’Brien’s *Down by the River***

This mechanistic cycle of oppression is dramatised in Edna O’Brien’s fictionalisation of the X case in *Down by the River* [DBR]. The teenage body of her protagonist, the fourteen-year-old Mary McNamara, is first sexually abused by her father and then confined by the state, while she herself is rendered voiceless. The opening scene of the novel, in which the initial incest takes place, establishes a clear analogy between a sexualised territory and the female body: in the patriarchal right, both are available for male seizure. Measuring his fallow bogland in order to sell it, Mary’s father James becomes intoxicated by its potential for commercial exploitation:

Pounds, shillings and pence danced before his eyes ... and then getting carried away with his estimations he spun the metal tape in a wide and apostolic arc, a wand, pronouncing his claim over the deserted but fabled landscape, over furze and fern, lakewater and bogwater ... his empire. He struck out with it then waved and dandled it to verify both his power and the

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<sup>11</sup> Cartoon by Martyn Turner, *The Irish Times*, 19 February 1992.

riches which had lain so long, prone and concealed, waiting for the thrust of the slane. (DBR 2)

The phallic symbolism of this gesture expresses his putatively natural sense of patriarchal entitlement over the mythologized, wet land as well as over his daughter's body, both serving as a source of empowerment for the male subject. In O'Brien's setting, the violent outcome of such claims is already inscribed in the landscape, an enduring witness to past and future crimes: 'The road silent, somnolent yet with a speech of its own ... speaking of the old mutinies and a fresh crime mounting in the blood' (DBR 1-2). For Mary, the actual rape itself comes, then, as no real surprise: 'In the instance of his doing it, she thought she had always known that it would happen, or that it had to happen, this, a re-enactment of a petrified time' (DBR 4). And such it sadly is: the exploitation of the land is repeated through the sexual violation of Mary's adolescent body, which is, in turn, a repetition of the abuse her mother had to endure from her husband's hands. (This entrapment of women in a traumatic paradigm is further discussed at the ending of this and in the following chapter.)

O'Brien's novel yet emphasises that oppressions are not just perpetrated by men, but exposes the crucial complicity and responsibility of women, including Mary's mother, in assuming and enforcing the subaltern position of women in Irish society. After a female neighbour thwarts her attempt to obtain an abortion in England, Mary is beleaguered by different anti-abortionist groups who, like her father, claim ownership and control over her body. 'It's not your child,' the militant Pro-Life leader tells her (DBR 175). If first contained in the privacy of the family cell, in the ensuing debate, Mary's pregnancy becomes 'the whole country's business', a public means to reinforce the boundaries and definition of Irishness (DBR 152). One of the judges in the case 'Magdalene versus the nation' tellingly describes her as a 'little slut about to pour piss on the nation's breast', while another maintains: 'We're a Christian country . . . We're a model for the whole world' (DBR 190, 285). Where her naming associates her with the unblemished ideal of Irish femininity, for both SPUC and state it is, however, not the incestuous rape but her attempt to attain an abortion that is considered as a moral contamination of what McCabe's novel calls 'The Holy Catholic Irish Republic' (DS 173). By contrast, the real contamiNation

that *Down by the River*, similar to *The Dead School*, exposes is that of a reproachful and dangerous moralism that denies Mary any means of self-definition. Indeed, O'Brien's protagonist appears as the ultimate embodiment of the silenced gendered subaltern that Spivak evokes in her famous essay. In the novel, Mary is always spoken for: on the one hand, by the omniscient narrative voice; on the other, by the assemblage of male doctors, lawyers and Pro-Life women. The extent to which these 'powerful' others define, confine and control her is reflected in the narrative structure of *Down by the River*: from the first of the 74 short and titled chapters, O'Brien parallels and intersects Mary's herstory with the trajectory of the hypocritical 'men of principle', the judges and lawyers who are infested with the power to decide upon her fate (DBR 6).<sup>12</sup> Mary's voicelessness illustrates the silencing of women in the patriarchal-nationalist tradition: 'She would not speak. Nothing would drag a word out of her ... Her tongue was gone' (DBR 31). As a book reviewer in *The New York Times* observes, Mary 'is hardly present in her own story. She is featureless, like some scarred, depopulated battleground' (Mantel 1997: n.p).

This sense of Mary as a *sinathion* is attested by the attempts to 'make a true Irish girl out of [her]' (DBR 283). She notices how her womb becomes an empty signifier for others: 'her stomach seemed like a porthole into which they were looking and prying' (DBR 209). The ways in which Mary's pregnant body is inscribed and reified by nationalist ideology evokes the Benjaminian figure of the Sandwichman, a human billboard, recruited from the low end of the proletariat, advertising bourgeois consumer culture. In *Formations of Violence*, Alan Feldman describes the central contradiction of this figure: 'That the most excluded element of society circulated the central social texts of value exchange was an irony crucial to the aura of the sandwichman as commodity made animate and as a body made into a text' (1991: 7). Given the subaltern position of women and in particular the abject social status of the womb itself, the same paradoxical function underpins the *sinathion* in the patriarchal imagiNation.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the fact that it is here not merely ideological inscription but – as in the actual X case – the state itself that disciplines and penetrates the female body can be related to what Feldman, after Paul Virilio, calls 'the endocolonization of society by the state' (1991: 86). Here, however, specifically the

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<sup>12</sup> See Christine St Peter, 'Petrifying Time' (2000: 138).

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of the womb as abject, see Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* (1982: 116-23).

female part of Irish society is concerned, whose condition Smyth addresses in her provocative speech in the following terms: ‘Women in Ireland are living in a police state ... that [is,] the reproductive abilities of women in Ireland are being subjected to a process of “regulation, discipline and control”, carried out by the police in accordance with state policy and laws’ (1992: 138). Following Foucault, ‘endocolonization’ implies, for Feldman, the violent regulation of social bodies by the state apparatus: ‘*The surface of the body is the stage where the state is made to appear as an effective material force*’ (1991: 85, 115). In ‘Death of a nation’, Martin applies this concept to the X case, noting that state power manifested itself not only on the surface but on the ‘raw ingredients of Miss X’s body’, namely ‘her womb’:

When the state and the nation are paradigmatically aligned, as they have historically been in Ireland, endocolonization also results in the production of specified bodies that are mimetic of or embody the nation ... [In the X case, the] end product was a pregnant female body which corresponded mimetically to the ideal image of the Irish nation. (2000: 81-2).

In *Down by the River*, it is as if in forceful rejection of this coercive interpellation that Mary’s body, when awaiting the final decision of the Supreme Court, suddenly aborts.<sup>14</sup> However, the means of resistance that O’Brien grants her protagonist are rather limited, and if Mary reclaims at the very ending of the novel her voice it is, as Conrad points out, confined to the pre-linguistic realm, namely to song (2004: 105). This signifies the extent to which woman has no place in the symbolic realm of the patriarchal imagiNation other than as the figurative trope of someone else’s subjectivity. It is these questions of female voice and agency within the hegemonic ordering of the national that the last part of this chapter investigates.

### III. TRANSFORMISMS: Gender & Nationalism

#### **The Women’s Peace Movement in Costello’s *Titanic Town***

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<sup>14</sup>As Heather Ingman indicates in *Twentieth-Century Fiction by Irish Women*, this ‘abortion’ might not be all that spontaneous as Mary is previously given a hand mirror (2007: 86 FN8).

That women's concerns are repeatedly subsumed by the interests of the nation was further demonstrated by the ensuing referendum about the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, which includes a specific clause safeguarding Ireland's Eighth Amendment from European law. Despite loud protests from both anti-abortionist and Pro-Choice side (if for very different reasons), the Treaty was ratified, affording Ireland the economic benefits of European integration through the recourse to 'the permanent subordination of women in Irish society', as a leaflet from the Dublin Abortion Information Campaign stated (cited in Conrad 2004: 106). This inclination, if not indeed imperative, of the national to encompass and/or eclipse other issues is from a postcolonial perspective addressed by Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan, who argues in 'Nationalism, Gender, and the Narrative of Identity' that,

the ideology of nationalistic politics in its very specificity acts as the normative mode of *the political as such*, and the 'imagined community' of nationalism is authorized as the most authentic unit and form of collectivity. Consequently, the women's question (... or the subaltern question . . .) is constrained to take on a nationalistic expression as a prerequisite for being considered 'political'. (1992: 78)

If this attests to a widely held contention that there is a fundamental incompatibility between feminism and nationalism, Carol Coulter has called for a reevaluation of this contentious relationship. Following David Lloyd's ideas about nationalism's 'conjunctural relation to other social movements' (1999: 36), Coulter argues in her pamphlet *The Hidden Tradition* that there is a 'tradition of women's involvement in nationalistic struggle [and] that this offered them scope for a wider range of activities in public life than that experienced by their sisters in imperialist countries' (1993: 3).<sup>15</sup>

Interestingly, one of the 'most visible manifestations' of this tradition that Coulter quotes is Mary Robinson, the feminist and human rights lawyer who became the Republic's first female President. Where Robinson's championing of women's rights has often set her in opposition to the nationalist tradition, Coulter's argument (as with Lloyd's) relies on a crucial distinction to 'the newly-formed patriarchal state' that, as she argues, 'closed off' women's political agency – which makes the

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<sup>15</sup> See also Coulter, 'Feminism and Nationalism in Ireland' (1998).

example of Robinson all the more curious (1993: 3). But as Colin Graham points out, nationalism is in Coulter's as well as Lloyd's rhetoric 'prioritised as always subaltern, always insurgent, and thus inherently compatible with the claims of women within the state' (2001: 109). Furthermore, if the nationalist struggle leads, for Coulter, on the one hand, to a blurring of 'the distinction between male and female roles', it is notable that involvement therein is in her analysis, on the other hand, the mechanistic outcome of a gendered discourse of colonial oppression: 'Given the oppressively masculine nature of the colonial state which rules Ireland (as well as Britain itself and other colonies in the British Empire), it was perhaps inevitable that women would play a major role in the struggle to overthrow it, and that the battle of women for the vote and other rights gave strength and depth to the nationalist enterprise' (1993: 11, 18). This account, however, works to obscure the ways in which the hegemonic production of the national is not only liable to reproduce the crude gender binary of the colonial model but also complicit in the subjugation of women's concerns, which is demonstrated in Mary Costello's *Titanic Town* [TT].

Set in West Belfast's Andersonstown in the late 1960s and 1970s, Costello's semi-autobiographical novel retrospectively captures the impact of the political upheavals in Northern Ireland from the perspective of the teenage daughter Annie of the McPhelimy family. However, it is through the main focus on the mother Bernadette ('Bernie') and her activism in the Women's Peace Movement that the novel explores the possibilities for women to enter the political sphere, here in relation to both nationalism and unionism. Ostensibly, the shared experience of subjugation and oppression appears to work in this Catholic community as a gender equaliser in line with Coulter's arguments. It is especially the portrayal of their outspoken neighbour, Mrs French, as what Margaret Ward's exemplary 1983 study would call an 'unmanageable revolutionary' that seems to attest to the political agency granted to women in the nationalist tradition. For example, in face of the random arrests carried out under Operation Motorman, Mrs French performs a powerful entry onto the public stage:

She left the warmth of her living-room window, threw open the front door and sashayed down the garden path, her big hips lumbering from left to right

... Two or three soldiers squatting at her low garden wall looked around in alarm at this assault from the rear. They levelled their rifles at the generous target of Mrs French. She spat at one of them with admirable force ... She advanced unmolested, bosoms swinging, and stood threateningly at the top of the path surveying operations ... 'Do whatever depredations you will,' she invited recklessly, 'and you will have them visited upon yer own heads tenfold. We've been fighting yez for eight hundred years and yez haven't beaten us down ...' (TT 93-4)

However, the radicalism of Mrs French's challenge to masculine colonial hegemony is ultimately undercut by her ridiculous depiction as a monstrous witch who, furthermore, illegitimately usurps the patriarchal power of her own tradition: 'Mrs French liked to talk politics, to sing along with ranting rebel ballads ... But mostly she liked to drink. She also battered her husband' (TT 55). It seems that within the patriarchal discourse of nationalism (as well as colonialism) female agency can only be presented as grotesque and aberrant. Spivak has commented on this with regard to Salman Rushdie, arguing that his 'anxiety to write woman into the narrative of history' results in what she deems 'an honourable failure': 'in *Shame*, women seem powerful only as monsters, of one sort or another' (1993: 223). As Naomi Schor notes, such a 'phantasmatic construct of maternal super-power ... is merely a reversal' which, however, leaves the binary system of sexual classifications intact (1989: 102).

Hence, the representation of the actual physical resistance against the British forces reaffirms the conventional dichotomises of the gendered paradigm. Noticing that the area around the barricades 'was black with men and boys', Annie interrogates her father:

'Are there any women on the barricades?'  
'Of course not. Christ! Wouldn't that be lovely!'  
'Well there should be. I don't see why women can't man the barricades as well.'  
'Would you talk sense, Annie, and get on home.' (TT 76)

The linguistic complicity of military vocabulary ('to man') with masculinity, which Annie questions here, parallels the novel's correlation of mother Bernie with the 'Peace Women'. In her exploration of the gendered dimensions of both militaries and wars in *Gender and Nation*, Yuval-Davis notes that 'while men have been

constructed as naturally linked to warfare, women have been constructed as naturally linked to peace' (1997: 94). This mechanistic equation is notably reproduced in literary representations of the Northern Irish conflict, as Bill Rolston points out: 'If these novels are to be believed, then, the division between men and women in relation to violence is not only biological, but almost metaphysical. Men come to represent violence and women peace with all the force of a Greek myth. The only proper, acceptable, natural role for a woman is that of mother – both in the domestic sense of caring, and in the more mythical sense of peace-loving' (1996: 406).<sup>16</sup> Such an essentialising account is reflected in Sara Ruddick's contention that the ideology and practice of mothering can provide the basis for peacemaking movements. For Ruddick, the principles of what she calls 'maternal thinking', that is, the preservation of life, fostering growth and training of acceptability, constitute a maternal ethics of care that 'is governed by ideals of nonviolence' and, thus, essentially anti-militaristic (1989: 161).<sup>17</sup> This consonance of peace, ethics, and care with maternity proves, however, problematic because it works to naturalise the socio-sexual division of labour by relegating women qua mothers to their traditionally assigned role as caretakers; a position that has made them particularly vulnerable to exploitation and oppression, as we shall see in a moment.

In *Titanic Town*, Bernie herself embodies a rather archetypal construction of a 'Mother' – as she is mainly called in her daughter's narration – whose main concerns are the protection, wellbeing and education of her children. In accord with Ruddick's argument, Bernie's emphatic opposition to life destruction, including the sacrifice for the nationalist cause, derives from her 'maternal thinking', as expressed in her ironic threat that signifies the extent to which her means of protest are contained by her symbolic role: 'If the army ever killed any of mine,' she declares, 'by Christ I'd go over to London and chain myself to the gates of Buckingham palace, naked! ... caesarian scar and all' (TT 102). Bernie's political involvement is itself triggered by

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<sup>16</sup> Such a biological equation also underpins Edna Longley's assertion in 'From Cathleen to Anorexia' that "'Feminism and Physical Force" is self-evidently a contradiction in terms' (1994: 192). Longley refers here to Robin Morgan's study, *The Demon Lover: On the Sexuality of Terrorism*, which equally maintains that 'history is a record of most women *acting peacefully*, and most men *acting belligerently* – to a point where the belligerence is regarded as an essential ingredient of manhood' (1990: 27).

<sup>17</sup> This resonates with Emmanuel Levinas's notion of motherhood as a paradigm for the ethical relation, which will be discussed in Chapter 6.

her concern about the victimisation of Irish motherhood: the accidental killing of Mary Dillon, ‘wife of Jimmy, mother of twelve’, on her way from the shops in a sectarian crossfire (TT 157). This position of women as helpless victims of male violence illustrates Sarah Edge’s contention that ‘in Northern Ireland Irish/Catholic women are situated as a double Other, both the Other to patriarchal male power and the Other to dominant British national identity’ (1998: 215-16). Significantly, it is when Bernie’s husband lies in hospital and she is temporarily released from his authority that Bernie seizes the opportunity to make herself a spokesperson, not only for women but for her whole community; to ‘speak on behalf of the people’ as she declares in a press interview (TT 176). But if we can read Bernie here as a subaltern asserting her voice to represent what Ranajit Guha calls ‘the *politics of the people*’ (1982b: 4), the novel exemplifies the ways in which she is, according to Gramsci’s configuration, pressed into ‘active or passive affiliation’ with the hegemonic formations (1971: 52).

Instead of granting her a meaningful place in the political realm, Bernie’s activities as a ‘Peace Woman’ run the danger of confining her in an essentialised women’s sphere that impairs not only her agency but also the capacity for social mapping. Although Bernie’s group in Andersonstown also includes men, their movement is tellingly devoid of any political analysis,<sup>18</sup> – or critical examination of gender politics for that matter. Rather than being opposed to paramilitary violence per se, their only goal is ‘to improve living conditions’ by changing the IRA shooting schedule: ‘The adjustment of a few timetables and everybody would be happy. The IRA could keep shooting and the women could keep shopping’ (TT 162). This declaration exposes the extent to which the fictionalised peace movement is in Costello’s novel complicit in endorsing and policing gender boundaries. Notably, Bernie herself actively contributes to this gender interpellation. Annie remembers: ‘When I was almost five my mother told me I was a girl and moved me out of my brother’s bed’ (TT 6). In turn, when Bernie’s peace activities threaten a transgression

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<sup>18</sup> In *(de-)constructing the north*, Elmer Kennedy-Andrews points out that this affiliates Bernie’s group with the real Peace People Movement, founded in 1976 by Mairead Corrigan (Catholic) and Betty Williams (Protestant), who were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (2002: 267, 265). However, in contrast to this ecumenical agenda of cross-community reconciliation, the peace group in Costello’s novel is anxious to make a sharp distinction between them and the middle-class Protestants of the Assemble of Women (TT 170).

into the male sphere of politics, she unconsciously redraws the boundaries by performing what Jennifer Jeffers observes in her discussion of the novel as a stereotypical citation of femininity (2002: 98):

‘Just don’t agree to anything,’ [Father] went on, ‘and don’t get anymore involved than you are now. Don’t be making any promises. These boys are serious.’

‘So are we.’ [Mother] sat down, rummaged in her bag and took out a cracked powder case. She quickly powdered her facial extremities: cheekbones, chin, nose and temples. She sprayed a shower of Blue Grass over her upper body, rearranged her handbag, stood up again. ‘And I’ll tell you one thing, Aidan: I don’t know about the IRA, but Deirdre and I are hellish determined.’

Father shook his head. ‘She hasn’t a clue.’ (TT 199)

It is this dichotomisation of congealed gender roles that, in confining women to the domestic sphere and thus ultimately rendering them without a place in politics, enables the male representatives of both unionism and nationalism to co-opt the peace initiative for their own interests.

In the first meeting with the Provisional IRA, Bernie immediately identifies herself as a mother, proud and protective of her children and equally mothering towards their leader Finbarr who, like her husband, has an ulcer. Since she represents in this role no equal political opponent, Finbarr adopts in their talk a clever tactic: aligning himself with her position by mimicking her worries, for him about his boys, he appeals to her motherly instincts in order to manipulate her into going to the British to negotiate their own conditions for peace. When confronting the state authorities, the Peace Women as representatives of ‘the people’ find themselves transmuted into the rather ridiculous heralds of IRA demands, whom the British men treat with an equally patronising attitude. Mr Brandywell, who is described as ‘the British presence incarnate’ (TT 202), explains to them their misappropriation by the IRA in the following words: ‘Ladies, I’m afraid I’m going to have to be very frank with you. It is a difficult and delicate situation you find yourselves in, and I am most concerned that you should come to no harm ... Equally, I am concerned that you should not be used by any group or individual’ (TT 214). Notably similar to his nationalist counterpart, by interpellating the women in regard to their ignorance and innocence of political reality, Brandywell sides with them by constructing himself as

their needed paternal protector only, in turn, to make them susceptible for his own agenda. The British authorities are accordingly quick to seize on the opportunity of the, for them, very ‘useful media coverage’ of the planned petition against ‘all use of force and violence at the present time’ (TT 217, 220). It is only with the performed media event of the official handing over of the signed petition to the government that Bernie realises that they have, again, been merely used, this time to the benefit of the British state:

‘You’ve done very well indeed.’ Mr Brandywell’s nicely modulated English voice sounded in every ear and every heart. The Peace Women had done very well for Mr Brandywell, for the British Government, very well indeed. ... She suddenly understood what they had done, how it would be seen, how useless it all was. At that second her intuition told her that this would be the end, not the start of it. There would be no peace. There could be none. (TT 241)

Both sides of the sectarian divide are in the novel united in absorbing, containing and, ultimately, cancelling female political agency; as Jeffers states, both collude ‘to keep women “in their place” – politically ineffective and bodily inscribed’ (2002: 71). This exemplifies what Antonio Gramsci calls a hegemonic ‘transformism’, whereby the concerns of the Peace Women are first assimilated and then reformulated by the equally patriarchal formations of nationalism and unionism. Thus, if the Peace Women spark hopeful moments of female agency and commitment, their fictive challenge must, ultimately, remain ineffective; that is not only because of the enforced subjugation to nationalist/unionist politics, but also because of the novel’s own submission to a traumatic paradigm of Irish history, where it is ‘always the women that suffer. The ancient pangs of Ulster visited and revisited upon them. No generation escapes’ (TT 339). It is through this stasis that Costello’s novel divulges its own complicity in reproducing the gendered pattern of colonial iconography, which historically functions to congeal and contain women, as epitomised by the figure of Bernie, in the place of the doubly marginalised gendered subaltern. The repeated emphasis on Bernie’s political innocence and naivety could thereby be seen to collude with the aforementioned tendency in postcolonial studies that Graham astutely chastises for assuming ‘the subaltern [as] a theoretical site of disempowered purity’ (2001: 106). But, as Meaney asserts, women ‘are not the

innocent victims of Irish or any other kind of historical circumstances’ but deeply ‘involved in patriarchal culture and ... history’ (1993: 238). So whilst the ending may be susceptible to reading into it an ethics of female oppression (as insinuated by Jeffers), the fact that Bernie is, in line with Gramsci’s arguments, actively affiliated to the dominant formations (again, both in terms of gender as well as nation) effectively refutes any purified notion of an essentialist Irish womanhood as always innocent, detached or removed from the structures of her own oppression.

*Titanic Town*’s insights into the transformist mechanisms of a patriarchal imagiNation emphasises the need to disentangle the concerns of gender and sexuality from those of the hegemonic ordering of the national. This calls for a feminist strategy which investigates the specific gendered paradigms of nationhood upon which masculinity and femininity are conventionally constructed, but which also ruptures the primacy of the nation in structuring such identities. Such a feminist approach necessitates what Gramsci calls an *expansive* hegemony which reclaims and resituates the concerns of gender as an affiliative and collective desire of the text. This analysis encounters gender in nationally specific contexts but refuses to allow itself to be bound thereto. An expansive hegemony implodes the national context in which it takes shape by collapsing the network of hierarchies upon which the patriarchal ImagiNation is established. In the following chapter I want to suggest that such an approach is offered by Smyth’s demand, as expressed in her ‘**Reality 2**’ in the epigraph of this chapter, of ‘Unremembering [women’s] history of absence’.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### 'UN-REMEMBERING HISTORY':

#### TRAUMATIC HERSTORIES IN CONTEMPORARY IRISH & SCOTTISH FICTION<sup>1</sup>

Roddy Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*, Janice Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* and Jennifer Johnston's *The Invisible Worm*

*'The struggle of [wo]man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting'*  
Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*

*'Unremembering our history/ of absence, sign of our existence'*  
Ailbhe Smyth, 'The Floozie in the Jacuzzi'.

Particularly in Ireland but also, if to a lesser extent, in Scotland, the period since the 1980s saw the increasing coming to light of many silenced and unremembered herstories, concerning violations against women, sexual scandals and instances of paedophile abuse, often also committed by or within state institutions.<sup>2</sup> The disruptive effect such exposures had on the patriarchal institutions of the state was exemplarily demonstrated by the Brendan Smyth affair that brought down the Irish government in 1994.<sup>3</sup> It is furthermore the proliferating work of new and established

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<sup>1</sup> A short version of this chapter, focusing only on the Irish context, will be published as "Unremembering History": Traumatic Herstories from Contemporary Ireland', in *New Voices in Irish Studies: Essays on History and Literature*, ed. Brian Griffin (Bath: Bath Spa UP, 2008 forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> In Ireland, some of the most controversial cases included the death of fifteen-year-old Ann Lovett in childbirth in 1984, which inspired, for example, Leland Bardwell's short-story 'The Dove of Peace' (1987); and the ensuing Kerry Babies case involving the false accusations levelled against Joanna Haynes for killing her illegitimate baby. For a detailed discussion, see Kathryn Conrad, *Locked in the Family Cell* (2004: 79ff); Chrystel Hug, *The Politics of Sexual Morality* (1999: 121); and Patricia Coughlan, 'Irish Literature and Feminism' (2004: 175-6).

<sup>3</sup> The crisis concerned the demand for extradition to Northern Ireland of a paedophile Catholic priest, Brendan Smyth. The secrecy surrounding the seven-month delay of processing his case caused the

writers, especially also the growing assertion of many female voices, that has played a crucial part in addressing and exploring the silence and secrets of domestic violence, rape and abuse, as attested by the three novels discussed in this chapter. These fictions perform what Ailbhe Smyth describes as an '[u]nremembering [of women's] history of absence [as the only] sign of [their] existence' (1991: 26). That is, the challenge that they confront is to transform the connotation of the prefix 'un' as a 'negation' into that of a 'reversal' (*OED*). Such an un-remembering, or perhaps rather re-remembering, thus consists in reversing the negation and dispossession of women's personal histories and, instead, affirm their radical existence within, but also, as Colin Graham notes, 'outside and in opposition to the state *and* the nation' (2001: 111).

Given the long silencing of women's experiences, it is noteworthy that in critical assessments of Irish literature, the continuing engagement of authors with such bleak issues as oppression, family dysfunction and emotional crisis, which concern in particular subaltern groups such as working-class women, seems rather decried. In her overview of 'Women and Fiction 1985-1990', Eve Patten discerns 'a sense of stasis in Irish women's fiction', deprecating prose writers who 'tend to stick not only to telling the same story straight, but telling very much the same story: that of the individual struggling against domestic and economic hardship, against sexual repression, against patriarchy. Ireland's constitution remains unchanged; so then does the urgent need experienced by women to put it all down in writing' (1990: 8). Suggesting that '[t]he reality of (most) women's subjection is evident', Patten dismisses the apparent 'necessity' of writing such 'confessional realism', implying that gender politics in Ireland, as elsewhere, are not going to change and especially not by making women's experiences a concern of literature (15). In apparent agreement with Declan Kiberd's opinion as voiced in his Parnell lecture (discussed in Chapter 2), she demands that this recurrent theme should now be finally erased from the national consciousness to enable writers, instead, to embrace postmodern stylistic and formal experiments, which she seems to conceive as generically opposed to and generally incompatible with writing about women's oppression. As indicated in my first chapter, this plea seems on the Irish critical agenda to some

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withdrawal of the Taoiseach, the Tanaiste, the High Court President, and lastly the government. See Ailbhe Smyth, 'States of Change' (1995).

extent answered in the fact that women's writing has in recent Irish anthologies been celebrated as reflective of the positive changes in Irish society and politics. This finds an analogue in Douglas Gifford's opinion that Scottish novels since the 1980s are concerned with 'a theme of emergence from trauma' (2007: 245).

In the light of these assumptions, the purpose of this chapter is to examine the affiliate thematic and stylistic concerns of three contemporary Irish and Scottish novels, published between 1989 and 1996 with a view to investigating the ethical and political disjunctions that confront women within the contemporary social order. The texts in question are Janice Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989), Jennifer Johnston's *The Invisible Worm* (1991), and Roddy Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* (1996). Rather than attesting to the success narrative of a fundamental postmodern transition or to the fact that women's experience of oppression can or should be cast aside, these rather different literary creations share a common concern with the continuous traumatic experiences of women in the Atlantic archipelago: Johnston's protagonist, Laura Quilan, was raped by her father as a teenager; Doyle's Paula Spencer suffered seventeen years of domestic abuse by her husband; and Joy Stone, the narrator of Galloway's novel, experiences a nervous breakdown after the accidental death of her lover. In her introduction to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Cathy Caruth proposes that 'trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures: not as a simple understanding of the pasts of others but rather, within the traumas of contemporary history, as our ability to listen through the departures we have all taken from ourselves' (1995a: 11). Such a listening, which I intend to enable here in this chapter, proves thus disruptive of a contained filiative imagiNation, which would seek to construct such traumas as singular, exceptional cases. In *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, Jenny Edkins argues that the state furthermore conceals the traumatic experiences of wars, genocides and famines 'by rewriting them into a linear narrative of national heroism' (2003: xv). To some extent, this is illustrated in the previously discussed ways in which the work of women writers has been used to construct a narrative of national or, rather, post-national progress, as Colm Tóibín does, for example, in his pioneering anthology, *The Penguin Book of Irish Fiction* (1999: xxxiii).

By contrast, these three novels refute the compromising silences and linearities of progressive history. Their formal structure broadly follows what psychiatrists term Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which, as Caruth notes in *Unclaimed Experience*, ‘describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often uncontrolled, repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena’, indicating the ‘incomprehensibility at the heart of catastrophic experience’ (1996: 57-8).<sup>4</sup> In all three works discussed in this chapter, the insistent return of flashbacks fragments not only the text itself but also the narrative consciousness of the protagonist, thereby confounding any chronological or coherent narration. Hereby, they textually perform the experienced ‘re-enactment of a petrified time’ for their female characters that I discussed with regard to Edna O’Brien’s incest novel earlier. As Judith Herman, one of the most seminal analysts of the processes of trauma and recovery, asserts: ‘It is as if time stops at the moment of trauma’ (2001: 37). What Sigmund Freud identifies in his work on traumatic experiences as ‘repetition compulsion’ – a concept first introduced in his 1920 essay ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’<sup>5</sup> – shapes not only the individual text but also constitutes the affinities between these novels on both a formal and thematic level. On another level, the apparent ‘necessity’ of women writers to ‘[tell] the same story’ that Patten discerns can herewith be understood as what Slavoj Žižek calls ‘the compulsion to *encircle* again and again the site of [their trauma], to *mark* it in its very impossibility’ (2002: 272). That is, to reiterate Theodor Adorno’s comment in the epigraph of chapter 2, until the causes of women’s subjection ‘are no longer active’, the need of writers remains to address and revisit their traumatic sites (1986: 129).

While Freud observes, on the one hand, a truly uncanny if not ‘daemonic character’ about re-enactments (*SE* XVII 1955: 238), he also came to realise that they are part and parcel of the process of healing. As Michelle Massé notes, ‘the reactivation of trauma is an attempt to recognise [and ultimately to proclaim] the incredible and unspeakable that nonetheless happened’ (1990: 681). This

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<sup>4</sup> I wish to acknowledge the inspiration for this idea from Christine St Peter’s article, ‘Petrifying Time’ (2000: 127).

<sup>5</sup> See Volume XVIII in Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (1943-1974). Subsequent references will be abbreviated with *SE* and the volume in Latin numerals in parenthesis in the text.

corresponds to Caruth's contention that the importance of these traumatic symptoms consists in them being 'much more than a pathology': trauma, in her understanding, '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' (1996: 4). She elaborates this in her introduction to *Trauma*:

It is indeed this truth of traumatic experience that forms the centre of its pathology or symptoms; it is not a pathology, that is, of falsehood or displacement of meaning, but of history itself. If PTSD must be understood as a pathological symptom, then it is not so much a symptom of the unconscious, as it is a symptom of history. The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history they cannot entirely possess. (1995a: 5)

I will argue in the following that it is this inability to possess their own herstory that the female protagonists in all three novels must confront; it is allegorised in the gothic motif of spatial and temporal entrapment of the heroine.

## I. DISPOSSESSIONS: Impossible Herstories

### **Unstable Homes: 'Gothic Horror is Domestic Horror'**

It is significant that all three novels are narrated from a confined domestic setting: in *The Invisible Worm* [IW] Laura's past and present are contained in her inherited Big House; in Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* [WW], Paula reflects on her past from the limited space of her marital home in a suburb of Dublin; and Joy narrates in *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* [TKB] from the house she used to share with her lover Michael in Glasgow. This focus on the domestic recalls the recent outrage about the controversial claim of the editors of the prestigious anthology *New Writing 13*, Toby Litt and Ali Smith, that 'the submissions from women were disappointingly domestic, the opposite of risk-taking – as if too many women writers have been injected with a special drug that keeps them dulled, good, saying the right thing, aping the right shape, and melancholy at doing it, depressed as hell' (cited in

Laville 2005: n.p).<sup>6</sup> But, far from confirming this rather crude reprobation, Galloway and Johnston (and by extension Doyle<sup>7</sup>) confront the domestic to expose the horror that is often conveniently hidden in the privacy of the family cell, thereby challenging the separation between the private and the public spheres. In these novels, the home becomes unhomely, precipitating what Homi Bhabha describes as a ‘shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world’ (1997: 445). As Bhabha explains, ‘[t]he unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence’ (448). This indicates how the domestic is a socially-mediated rather than a private sphere.

The sense of spatial enclosure or entrapment that is conveyed in the texts under discussion here is a common trope in gothic literature. In *The Contested Castle*, Kate Ferguson Ellis discusses the recurrent appearance of the ‘failed home’ in early gothic fiction: ‘The strand of popular culture we call the Gothic novel can be distinguished by the presence of houses in which people are locked in and locked out. They are concerned with violence done to familiar bonds that is frequently directed against women’ (1989: 3). Susanne Becker confirms: ‘gothic horror is domestic horror, family horror, and addresses precisely these obviously “gendered” problems of everyday life’ (1999: 4). In what they call home, all three female protagonists are exposed to male violation and abuse. This ruptures the filiative inscription of the nation as a safe and stable place of home and belonging. If the threat of naked exposure to patriarchal violence is most prominent in incest narratives, such as O’Brien’s *Down by the River*, Lia Mill’s *Another Alice* (1995), Dorothy Nelson’s *In Night’s City* (1982) as well as Johnston’s *The Invisible Worm*, it is also a major concern of Doyle’s *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*. Both Laura and Paula are entrapped in what Massé calls the ‘marital Gothic’: in Doyle’s as well as Johnston’s novel the female protagonists are shown to enter marriage to escape their abusive fathers only to be confronted with the renewed denial of their identity and agency by

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<sup>6</sup> For an astute critique of their contentions, see A.L. Kennedy’s ‘Belittled women’ (2005).

<sup>7</sup> As indicated in my introduction, this thesis generally resists reading fiction according to a dichotomy between women and men writers. While it has been unquestionably important for the category of women’s writing to exist in order to bring female voices and experiences forcefully back on the literary and critical agenda (as my last chapter emphasised), my work refuses to accede to the apparent fact that any generic statement can be made about either of those categories. Accordingly, the work of Doyle is here read alongside that of two women writers, not in terms of his ability as a male writer to realistically portray a female consciousness but in terms of the perceptivity and responsiveness his novel in question offers for female concerns.

their husbands. Massé explains: ‘The husband who was originally defined by his opposition to the unjust father figure slowly merges with that figure. The heroine again finds herself mute, paralyzed, enclosed, and she must harrow the Gothic in an attempt to deal with that reality through repetition’ (1990: 690). However, there are significant class differences between these two characters, which determine their circumstances and conditions.

From a working-class background and thus in a position of neither social, nor economic power, for Paula and her sisters the only means of escape from paternal abuse is through marriage. Her sister Carmel, the preferred victim of his cruelty, says that she would ‘have married anybody to get out of that house’ (WW 47). In the same line, Paula notes both ‘love and my father’ as the crucial factors for her engagement to Charlo: ‘The wedding was my great escape, and best of all, the grumpy old fucker was paying for it’ (WW 129, 134). But the fairy-tale of domestic happiness – ‘We’re going to live happily ever after. He believed it. I believed it’ (WW 134) – turns soon into a nightmarish repetition of the ‘marital Gothic’. In Doyle’s novel, Paula struggles not only with being a housewife and mother to her three children as well as working in a part-time job as a cleaner, whilst Charlo is largely unemployed, but she is furthermore subjected to ceaseless battering and beatings by him. Rather than finding a safe haven that should be nurturing, home is marked by the constant threat of violence, poverty and devastation. This is furthermore illustrated by the physically unstable, restrictive and disintegrating homes that Paula’s family inhabits; she recounts: ‘(We moved flats four times. Too small. Too damp. Evicted because of the noise we were making)’ (WW 194). When they finally get to see the ‘brand new house’ that they signed up for with their first baby, Paula has the hope that: ‘This was it. Home ... A new start’ (WW 194). But her body, still in pain from the abuse Charlo inflicted on her the night before, reminds her that this is merely a wishful fantasy. For Paula, her trauma is continuous with the marital home; there is no *new* start in a new house as the familiar space will again become witness of familial violations.

These dangers that violate the supposedly safe domestic space also appear in *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*.<sup>8</sup> Here, however, perils lurk mainly from the outside. Joy's homes are constantly prone to be invaded: there is her older, abusive sister Myra usurping her hospitality; the health visitor who is sent by her doctor to 'find [her] out ... Make [her] talk' (TKB 20); and Tony, the boss of the betting office where she works every Saturday, who comes and demands sexual attention and eventually rapes her in her own bedroom. As a single woman and rather poorly paid schoolteacher, Joy is never able to attain a place of stability and comfort. The domestic landscape she inhabits is inscribed by her class and gender position. Her shifting homes – which include her stay in a mental hospital – signify her essential homelessness. Similarly to Paula, Joy escaped her mother's house and especially the abusive relation with her sister by moving in with her first boyfriend Paul in an imitation of bourgeois marriage. However, as with both Doyle's protagonist Paula, and Laura in *The Invisible Worm* who describes marriage as 'this charade we play' (IW 163), Joy's relationship with Paul turns into an empty performance of stereotypical gender roles: mutually betraying each other, Joy tries to play the part of the perfect housewife while Paul transmutes into 'Superman' to whom she feels 'vastly inferior in every respect' (TKB 42). Just as Paula endures Charlo's battering and Laura ignores her husband's affairs, Joy stays with Paul until he makes it point-clear to her that '[h]e didn't need [her] for a thing' – not even to cook (TKB 43). The 'shock' that Joy experiences as a result and which she never really 'came to terms with' is significant; for his statement undermines the definition of her identity that she so hard struggles to embody: 'A good wife', one who despite all her manic baking and cooking is eventually 'going to waste' (TKB 41). For Galloway's protagonist, as for the two other female characters, it is important to conform – on the surface that is – to prevailing social norms and gender expectations. Just like the elaborate beautification routines Joy undergoes, in preparation for the man she awaits, in order to hide her emotional distress and instability, her housecleaning fulfils the same function: 'The cleaning is just a sham ... I shove unidentifiable debris under the rug and hope it stays put. Superficially everything looks fine but underneath is another story ... The trick is not to look' (TKB 92). But this seems

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<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of the threatening domestic environment in Galloway's novel, see Cristie March, *Rewriting Scotland* (2002: 115-6).

exactly the point of Galloway's novel, as arguable also of the other two texts I focus on here: to force us to look at the 'debris' that is hidden under the surface, contained in the domestic; to tell this other 'story' that is silenced and made invisible.

Joy's unstable habitations reflect her emotional and social instability and thus become a metonym for her inability to possess her own herstory. When she moves from Paul into a cottage, it seems at first that she found a sanctuary: although damp and 'tiny but cheap ... it was my own place, my home now' (TKB 63). However, albeit that the moving in of her lover Michael, after his wife discovered their affair, promises domestic happiness, the cottage betrays its symbolic status as a pastoral idyll; Michael discovers mushrooms that slowly devour their home: 'The house was being eaten from the inside by this thing. The spores could pass though [sic] concrete and plaster and multiplied by the thousand as we slept. They could take over the whole structure if they wanted' (TKB 65). As Alexis Logsdon observes in her reading of *The Trick*, the rotting house points not only to the material state of their financial insecurity, but it also signifies the fragility of their legally and socially illegitimate relationship (2004: 149). Furthermore, just as the excessive fungus destroys the stability of their house, so too Laura's status as a mistress is seen by official society to usurp the security and sanctity that the institution of marriage promises. Accordingly, it is her illegitimate status that threatens again her new place of belonging: the council house into which she moved with Michael before he died during their holiday in Spain. Officially, Joy has 'no entitlements to a family-sized box' whose a nameplate symbolically bears 'his name. Not [hers]' (TKB 17, 14). As a result, Joy is repeatedly confronted by the housing authority, represented by evocatively named Mr Dick who reminds her that: 'Strictly speaking, you're breaking and entering every night ... You have no right to the keys, Miss Stone' (TKB 66). Joy's dispossession by the masculine state authority is, however, also a class issue. Although most houses in the estate stand empty, Mr Dick ensures Joy that 'there were difficulties in [her] getting tenancy ... but ... if [she] paid them it might ease the aforementioned difficulties'; however, Joy does not have the financial means to do so (TKB 18). In a comparable way to the new housing estate with no bus connection in the Dublin suburb into which Paula and her family move in Doyle's novel during the booming years of the Celtic Tiger (WW 193), the area

where Joy lives is marked by a similar strategy of ghettoisation and displacement: 'Boot Hill is a new estate well outside the town of which it claims to be part of. There was a rumour when they started building the place that it was meant for undesirables: difficult tenants from other places, shunters, overspill from Glasgow. That's why it's so far away from everything. Like most rumours, it's partly true' (TKB 13). This strategic containment of the working-classes became especially prevalent in the years of Glasgow's City of Culture campaign during which the novel was written. In *Phantom Village: The Myth of the New Glasgow*, Ian Spring notes about the city's postmodern redevelopment: 'The New Glasgow claims to represent the people of the city yet, throughout the campaign, a whole section of the society is elided' (1990: 43). For both Doyle's and Galloway's female protagonists, the inaccessibility and dislocation of the place they call home is symbolic of their dispossessed subaltern position in terms of class and gender.

### **The Dark Secret: Disavowing History**

Both women's inferior social status is to some extent comparable to the culturally, although certainly not economically, marginalised location of the protagonist of Johnston's *The Invisible Worm*. Whilst Laura's class position as an ascendancy heiress assures her financial security, as a Protestant woman, she feels displaced and isolated in the new post-treaty Ireland. Secluded in the solitude of the Big House, Johnston's novel makes clear that her main character has also become excluded by others: 'No one visited her./ She was not presumed to be part of the visiting circuit. Standoffish./ Snobby./ Cold./ Different./ Indifferent./ Protestant' (IW 20). In contrast to the two other novels, Johnston describes the domestic space as something that, for Laura, becomes threatening because it is haunted from within. As the protagonist-narrator of one of Johnston's other Big House novels, *Fool's Sanctuary*, states, this house, too, is 'full of ghosts' (1987: 2). Like a classic gothic heroine, Laura feels continuously 'pestered by an old ghost', which is her dead father, who enchains her to the house as the keeper of its secret that took place on its grounds. Like an uncanny double to the aloof Anglo-Irishness of Laura, her home is a ghostly museum that conveys bourgeois coldness and castle-like detachment. Reminiscent of the

namesake heroine of Tennessee Williams' memory play *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), the fragile Laura is surrounded by precious objects of her ascendancy heritage. She tells her new acquaintance, the defrocked priest Dominic: 'I guard this house, this mad museum. I am the curator of my ancestor's folly' (IW 24). But as with Williams' Laura, Johnston's protagonist is herself considered as a historically precious object, a trinket, by the powerful Catholic men around her. With regard to both her father's and her husband's marriage to Protestant women, Laura notes one of the 'benefits' of 'being a Prod': 'The glamour of being an endangered species' (IW 121). It is this notion of her value that her husband, Maurice Quinlan, also expresses when defending himself against Laura's dry remarks on his constant affairs with other women: 'I have fun . . . but you are my treasure. Like one of the objects that you love so much, crowding this house out' (IW 146).

Significantly, these historical objects are deprived of their own history. When Dominic asks her about the origins of a 'tiny jade frog', Laura tells him about her great-grandfather's travels around the world; to this Dominic determinedly responds: 'Empire building. That's what Mr Quinlan said' (IW 22). But Laura rejects such a reductive version of her heritage; she explains:

'Oh no. He was just a traveller. He was lucky, my great-grandmother was able to keep things going here . . . He had this man . . . well, servant I suppose, called Markey, who had the same notions in *his* head and they both spent all their time travelling. They came home from time to time and their wives had babies nine months later. Both of them . . . Weren't women amazing, that they could cope with all that? Such strength . . . It would have been easy enough for my grandmother, but I often used to wonder if Mrs Markey hated my grandfather for taking her husband away like that.' (IW 22-23)

Laura's account offers a counter-narrative to the masculine colonial adventure-tale that is sustained and supported by both Maurice and Dominic. Reassessing these men's motivations for their travelling, Laura foregrounds the historical position of women in this scenario. Importantly, she aligns the similar circumstances of both the Protestant and the Catholic woman whilst acknowledging the significance of their different class positions. Yet, like her own silenced herstory, such alternative narratives are constantly threatened with being overwritten, silenced or remaining unremembered. When Dominic anxiously repeats the hegemonic opinion of Laura's

husband – ‘Mr Quinlan said empire building’ – Laura dryly remarks: ‘Maurice isn’t always right, you know. He has odd notions about my family. My father was the same. Maurice never listens when you tell him things. He shuts his ears to what he doesn’t want to hear’ (IW 23). As her remark about the parallelism between her husband and father indicates, Maurice, a successful Catholic businessman and aspiring politician, functions, in a sense, as what Massé calls a ‘Gothic repetition’ of her powerful Senator father, Mr O’Meara, whom he much admires. In *The Gothic Family Romance*, Margot Gayle Backus suggests that the male insistence on ‘empire building’ indicates the strategic replication of unequal relations of economical, political and gender power in the emerging twenty-six-county state, in which both father and husband are complicit: ‘In constructing Laura’s ancestors as empire builders, Maurice configures himself as their successor, for in truth, Maurice’s own activities are explicitly oriented toward empire building in the new world of capital’ (1999: 230). In such a progressivist historical model there is certainly no place for alternative histories.

However, what problematizes the aspired succession of patriarchal power in this novel is that the property in question is ‘descended through the female line’ (IW 4). In contrast to Doyle’s Paula, this allows both Laura and her mother to retain some remarkable power within their marriage. Significantly, as Rachael Sealy Lynch points out, neither of them adopts the Catholic faith (2000: 261).<sup>9</sup> Laura recollects her mother’s cynical counter to her father’s attempts to convert her: “‘Divil a bit of it,” she said. “Haven’t you got my house and my land and my beautiful body? What makes you think you should have my soul as well?’” (IW 6). Foremost, however, the mother’s biting comments seems intended to undermine her husband’s male potency that is symbolically aligned to the new Irish state; she denigrates, for example, his image as a freedom fighter ‘full of the glory of his own heroism’ by telling her daughter: ‘Don’t you believe it ... Daddy fought for Daddy’ (IW 31). Given this emasculation at the hands of his Protestant wife, the incestuous rape can be read as a reassertion of his paternal and patriarchal authority – not only over her sex but also, as Lynch remarks, over ‘her religion and class’, which excluded and disempowered

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<sup>9</sup> In ‘Public Spaces, Private Lives’, Lynch remarks upon the significance of this refusal with regard to the *ne temere* decree of the Roman Catholic Church, ‘ruling that the children of a “mixed” marriage be brought up Catholic’ (Ibid.).

him, as a male Catholic, in the first place and even in his own family (2000: 262). On her ancestral property, Laura – like the protagonists of Doyle’s and Galloway’s novel – experiences the traumatic negation of her subjectivity by being violently reduced to nothing more than her sexuality, in a manner that, Backus astutely notes, ‘mimics both the Catholic Church’s and the Irish Constitution’s reduction of women’ – but also, she seems to forget, the colonial-national iconography (1999: 226). Consequently, arguing that by sexually ‘possessing’ his Protestant daughter, ‘Laura’s father re-enacts the dispossession by which Anglo-Irish society originally came into being’, Laura becomes, for Backus, ‘a figure for Ireland’ (1999: 228).

Laura seems indeed detained in the muted and powerless place of the national trope that Smyth evokes in her *‘Reality 2’* (discussed in Chapter 4); however, in my view, Johnston’s novel resists such a reductive reading by critically examining the ethical and political implications of gender power relations that underpin such masculinist constructions. Laura’s rape by her father is immediately followed by his complete disavowal of responsibility. In her book on *Father-Daughter Incest*, Herman notes: ‘Denial has always been the incestuous father’s first line of defence’ (2000: 22). While the relation between father and daughter represents, in Herman’s words, ‘one of the most unequal relationships imaginable’ (4), Mr O’Meara maliciously misrepresents the power constellation by constructing Laura as the seductress and himself as the innocent victim:

‘Why did you do this to me?’

His words startled her. He looked up at her. His eyes were full of tears and cunning.

‘Think of your mother.’

She walked across the room and opened the door.

‘This will have to be our secret.’ (IW 157)

When the disturbed Laura nonetheless manages to breach the enforced silence by telling her mother what has happened, she is confronted with another rejection of parental responsibility: her mother responds at first by accusing her of ‘telling lies’, next to instruct her ‘to carry on as if nothing had ever happened’ and finally to purposefully drown herself (IW 176, 178). Laura is left alone with the allocation of blame for her death through her father’s cruel accusation: ‘You killed your mother. I warned you. Warned you, warned you’ (IW 38). The ghostly resonance that his

words produce in her memory indicates their traumatic effect on Laura's narrative present.

This authoritative imposture of secrecy covers the 'dark secret' that, like the invisible worm of William Blake's poem 'The Sick Rose' (1794), which forms the epigraph for Johnston's novel, has destroyed her life. It is represented by the symbolically overgrown summerhouse in which the rape happened, which becomes a metonymic emblem for the inaccessibility of her trauma. Father, mother and husband all contribute to its damaging concealment; as Laura notes: 'All of us carrying that secret, not able to speak or cry' (IW 179). In vain, Laura has attempted to follow both her parents' command: 'I have tried to forget ... I tried so hard to pretend that certain things never happened' (IW 158). But it seems exactly through the enforced silence that the past retains its uncanny presence on her present; she explains: 'I live with voices, touches, the violations of the past ... there seems to be no escape' (IW 57). Johnston's protagonist is persistently afflicted by her father's ghost who threatens her with the containment of her injury that, according to Caruth, 'cries out to be heard' (1996: 4): 'My head is so full of pain. I would like to scream, but he puts his hand over my mouth' (IW 128). This coercive prohibition of disclosure is not only designed to deny the existence of the terrible events themselves, but it is a denial of Laura's own existence. Laura experiences this dispossession through dissociation: she becomes 'an empty skin', 'drained of hope, love, confidence, even the ability to feel pain' (IW 125), and is haunted by the figure of the running woman: 'I stand by the window and I watch the woman running./ Is it Laura?/ I wonder that, as I watch her flickering like brown leaves through the trees./ I am Laura' (IW 1). While the events that led to the death of her mother remain as yet inaccessible to Laura's consciousness, her trauma is embodied in the image of this fleeing woman; according to Caruth, she is 'the other within the self that retains the memory of the "unwitting" traumatic event' (1996: 8). It is she who carries Laura's impossible history within her; a herstory that she is not allowed to acknowledge and cannot possess. It is noteworthy that this dissociative split is also repeated in the narrative structure of the novel itself: Johnston employs an omniscient third-person perspective to narrate Laura's present, which is constantly invaded by first-person stream-of-consciousness memories. This dissociation strategy, indicating the

inability to integrate the traumatic experience into what Pierre Janet calls ‘narrative memory’, is also apparent in the two other novels discussed here.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Unspeakable: Pain, Blame and Shame**

In Doyle’s *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*, Paula’s first-person account is marked by a similar struggle of how to recount having suffered seventeen years of ceaseless domestic abuse by her husband Charlo. As with Laura in *The Invisible Worm* who notes that ‘memory is like a kaleidoscope, repatterning, retriicking the past in your head’ (IW 31), Paula recognises that no factual or chronological account of her past is possible. When scenes of her abuse once again intrude into her episodic narration, Paula wonders: ‘Do I actually remember that? Is that exactly how it happened? ... How can I remember one time from the lot and describe it? I want to be honest. How can I be sure?’ (WW 184). At one point Paula recalls that ‘someone once told [her] that we never remember pain. Once it’s gone it’s gone’ (WW 164). But this proves certainly not to be true: although she tried to forget what happened, like Laura, Paula is ceaselessly haunted by traumatic flashbacks of her suffering: ‘That’s the thing about memories. I can’t pick and choose them. I can’t pretend. There were no good times. I can never settle into a nice memory, lie back and smile. They’re all polluted, all ruined. Nothing to look back that isn’t painful or sick’ (WW 197). One of the dilemmas with the attempt to recount the experience of pain is its actual inexpressibility. In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry notes that ‘[p]hysical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it’, which severely complicates its political representation (1985: 4). The voicelessness of pain is thereby often enlisted ‘to push it into further invisibility’ which, rather than eliminating, actually assists its infliction (Scarry: 13). There is, nonetheless, as Scarry observes, ‘an at least fragmentary means of verbalisation’ possible which consists in allocating the pain to an agent, imagined either within or without the respective body in pain (Ibid.). Yet in Doyle’s novel, Paula is shown to adopt a different strategy; one that is

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<sup>10</sup> In *Psychological Healing* (1919), Janet, distinguishes between ‘narrative memory’, which describes ‘the action of telling a story’, and the repetitious, static and ultimately wordless quality of ‘traumatic memory’ (1925: 661-63).

notably similar to Laura's dissociation. When Paula, with several attempts, endeavours to voice her experience of pain, she linguistically performs a split: 'I'm everywhere. I'm nothing ... Someone's in pain. Someone is crying. It isn't me yet. I'm under everything. I'm in black air. Someone is crying. Someone is vomiting. It will be me but not yet' (WW 184). After reflecting on the inability to recover her experience, this passage is nearly exactly reproduced on the following page (WW 186). Like Laura and Joy, by dissociating her own self from an 'other' that suffers the pain, Paula manages to prevent her total disintegration. The insinuated prospect of a becoming in this passage is significant: on the one hand, it suggests a path of recovery, the gradual attempt of accepting this other, this 'someone' as part of the self. On the other hand, it indicates that Paula is, one year after Charlo's death and two years since she threw him out, still not able to fully possess her own herstory (WW 86).

Like Laura's father, Charlo denies all responsibility for his crimes, which the novel refuses to attribute to feeble excuses like alcoholism or unemployment but instead presents, alongside the fiction of Galloway, Johnston and O'Brien, as wilful and intentional.<sup>11</sup> There is a specifically malicious note in Charlo's almost always immediate pretension of having had no agency in her injuries: 'Pretending he didn't remember. Pretending he'd never seen black and red around and in that eye before. Pretending he cared' (WW 181). At first, Paula gladly embraces his disavowal; she notes: 'I couldn't have coped with it then, the fact that he'd hit me, plain and simple ... It wouldn't happen again ... It had been a mistake' (WW 163). It is significant that Paula adopts the same strategic denial for her own family history. Although she does clearly remember the physical abuse that her older sister Carmel had to endure from their father, Paula cannot publicly acknowledge it and insists, instead, on maintaining the image of him as 'a nice man' (WW 59). Carmel takes severe issue with this:

- I know what you're up to, she said.
- What? ...
- Rewriting history, she said.

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<sup>11</sup> In *On Our Backs: Sexual Attitudes in a Changing Ireland*, Rosita Sweetman points out that it has become common to blame factors such as drink and socio-economic circumstances for the violence happening against women (1979: 134-5).

- I don't even know what you're talkin' about, I said. – I don't even know what you mean.
- I'm sure you have your reasons, said Carmel. (WW 56-57)

As Jennifer Jeffers notes, 'what is at stake for Paula is her entire sense of self' (2002: 58). Paula needs a '[p]roof', she tells us, that she 'could trust [her] memory', that her 'past was real' (W 59). But Paula's historical revisionism is an ideological fantasy that aims to repress the traumatic experience of male violence – not only her husband's but also her father's – that threatens her own identity as wife and daughter, and, therein, also the institutions of marriage and the family, the sanctities of the Irish Constitution.

Hence, in order to sustain this ideological belief system and cover her shame, like most trauma victims, Paula tries to circumvent the bitter truth that Charlo is simply cruel by blaming herself for his deeds: 'He felt guilty, dreadful. He loved me again. What happened? I provoked him. I was to blame. I should have made his dinner. It was my own fault; there was a pair of us in it' (WW 175). Trying to anticipate and avert his violence, Paula comes to recognise that '[p]redicting it doesn't matter. Nothing I can do; he has complete control' (WW 183). This seems, indeed, the crux of the matter; for Charlo, it is about asserting his masculine potency. Paula remembers the peacock-show he performed when she first got pregnant: 'Only just married and his mot was already pregnant. What a man. (We didn't know about sperm counts back then, or else Charlo would have had a magnifying glass out, counting his.) What an absolute man' (W 164). Such 'proper manliness' implies to keep the wife in her assigned role. Hence, Doyle's protagonist eventually realises that her husband's repeated claims for ignorance are merely a trial of her submissiveness to him and his version of reality. After having severely injured her again, Charlo innocently asks:

- Where'd you get that?
- What?
- The eye.
- It was a test. I was thumping inside. He was playing with me. There was only one right answer.
- I walked into the door.
- Is that right?
- Yeah.

- Looks sore.
- It's not too bad.
- Good.

He was messing with me, playing. Like a cat with an injured bird. With his black armband [that he wore in solidarity with the hunger strikers], the fucker. Keeping me on my toes, keeping me in my place. (WW 181)

Paula is trapped in this subaltern position of utter powerlessness that robs her of all agency: 'He had me; I could say nothing. I could never fight back. When he wasn't hitting me he was reminding me that he could' (WW 181-2). The allusion to his identification with the imprisoned Republican strikers attains a remarkable irony here. In her chapter on trauma and captivity, Herman notes that hunger strike functions as the ultimate expression of active resistance against coercive mechanisms of control by affirming a 'sense of integrity and self-control' (2001: 79). In actively contributing to Paula's internment, Charlo's nationalistic support becomes an empty mimicry that actually replicates colonial methods of control.

In addition to inducing terror, fear and helplessness, Charlo's strategic psychological domination produces for Paula an emotional dependency which threatens to destroy her sense of autonomy, reducing her to less than her sexuality: 'For years I thought that I needed him, that I could never recover without him ... I needed him to show me the way; I needed him to punish me. I was hopeless and stupid, good only for sex, and I wasn't even very good at that. He said. That was why he went to other women' (WW 177). It is noteworthy that Paula already experienced this reduction of her value and validity in her childhood. Paula remembers how her emerging sexuality made her an object of sexual harassment for teachers and schoolboys, even her little brother insisting to 'feel' her (WW 47). If it initially afforded her some power, ultimately, however, Paula is interpellated into a patriarchal, heterosexual matrix that congeals her female identity as a 'slut': 'There was no escape; that was you. Before I was a proper teenager, before I knew anything about sex, before I'd even left primary school – I was a slut. My daddy said it, fellas said it, other girls said it, men in vans and lorries said it' (WW 47). A similar interpellation of female identity is evoked in *The Invisible Worm*: whilst Laura is for her husband merely his 'dote' (IW 96), her father's rape brings a brutal awakening to the meaning behind his definition of her as his 'little pet' (IW 32). In *In the Name of*

*Love*, Massé argues that ““normal” feminine development [must be understood as] a form of culturally induced trauma and the gothic novel is its repetition [...] The originating trauma that prompts such repetition is the prohibition of female autonomy’ (1992: 7, 12). All three novels discussed in this chapter address such questions of reduced or denied subjectivity.

As with the rape by Laura’s father, Charlo’s coercive implementation of a misogynistic and patriarchal ideology is designed for Paula to accept the fact that, ‘[h]e was everything and [she] was nothing’ (WW 177). Significantly, this erasure is replicated by the state institutions that Paula confronts. On her frequent visits to the hospital, Paula notices: ‘The doctor never looked at me. He studied parts of me but he never looked at my eyes. He never looked at me when he spoke. He never saw me. Drink, he said to himself’ (WW 186). Like Laura, Doyle’s narrator is prohibited from publicly voicing the real cause of her injuries. ‘None of them wanted answers,’ Paula observes. ‘They were all the same; they didn’t want to know. They’d never ask’ (WW 189, 190). In the shame that her marriage brings to the sanctity of Irish society,<sup>12</sup> Paula is forced to recognise that people deliberately close their eyes, reinforcing what Charlo and the authorities began; in public, Paula confronts her final erasure, becoming like Laura a spectre: ‘I didn’t exist. I was a ghost. I walked around in emptiness. People looked away; I wasn’t there. They stared at the bruises for a split second, then away, off my shoulder and away ... they couldn’t see me. The woman who wasn’t there [...] The invisible woman’ (WW 186-7, 189).

### **Abjections: Anorexia and Female Guilt**

In Galloway’s *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*,<sup>13</sup> Joy Stone undergoes a very similar traumatic annihilation of her existence to the ones discussed with regard to the protagonists of Doyle’s as well as Johnston’s novels. At the school’s memorial

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<sup>12</sup> In an interview, Doyle discusses the severe criticism landed against him for the writing of a BBC television series called ‘Family’, which inspired *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*: ‘I seemed to be undermining the sanctity of marriage. Which of course was exactly what I was doing!’ (Taylor 1999: n.p.).

<sup>13</sup> I will henceforth shorten the title of Galloway’s novel to *The Trick*.

service for her lover Michael, Joy is aware ‘that something terrible was about to happen’:

1. The Rev Dogsbody had chosen this service to perform a miracle.
  2. He’d run time backwards, cleansed, absolved and got rid of the ground-in stain.
  3. And the stain was me.
- I didn’t exist. The miracle had wiped me out. (TKB 79, not-paginated<sup>14</sup>)

In order to eradicate the contamination that her existence as his mistress leaves on the immaculate institution, Michael’s marriage with his estranged wife is posthumously reclaimed, while Joy, similar to Laura and Paula, is dispossessed of her personal herstory and emotions. This exclusion from public mourning amplifies the traumatic effect Michael’s death has on Joy’s already fragile constitution, which is indicated by the missing page number. In *Trauma and Recovery*, Herman stresses the importance of mourning for the recovery and integration of traumatic events: ‘Failure to complete the normal process of grieving perpetuates the traumatic reaction’ (2001: 69). This is reflected in Galloway’s novel: Joy’s narrative consciousness is haunted by indelible images of her lover’s drowning whilst on holiday in Spain, which spontaneously erupt in the form of sixteen italicised passages. As Herman explains, these kinds of uncanny intrusions, which occur in *The Trick*, cause a sense of powerlessness whereby the afflicted person feels paralysed and emotionally detached ‘as though she is observing herself from outside her body’ (2001: 43). Significantly, Joy begins her account by stating: ‘I watch myself from the corner of the room’ (TKB 7). Similar to the protagonists of the other two texts, Joy experiences her own self disparate from her body. A bathroom scene in *The Trick* evokes Jacques Lacan’s notion of the mirror stage, which is ironically inverted here; instead of presenting an image of a unified body or ideal-I, the mirror reflects Joy’s inner laceration, her ‘*corps morcelé*’ (1977: 20):<sup>15</sup> ‘The mirror behind the tap that shows a kneeling torso, head chopped off sheer at the white plastic rim’ (TKB 10).

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<sup>14</sup> Non paginated pages will be abbreviated in the following with n.p..

<sup>15</sup> As Laplanche and Pontalis explain, the ‘body-in-pieces’ is a retroactive fantasy produced by the imaginary unity of the mirror stage, which marks the constitution of the ego (‘Mirror Phase’, 1988: 251).

Hence, rather than affording an identificatory process, Joy feels ‘like looking through a window at someone else’ (TKB 10).

Joy’s experience of alienation illustrates Luce Irigaray’s contention that ‘the exclusion of a female imaginary undoubtedly places woman in a position where she can experience herself only fragmentarily as waste or as excess in the little structured margins of a dominant ideology, this mirror entrusted by the (masculine) “subject” with the task of reflecting and redoubling himself’ (1981: 104). Galloway’s novel exemplifies this in the typographic marginalisation of her protagonist’s inner thoughts, emotions and fears, but especially also through Joy’s sense of her body as an excessive waste. In face of the traumatic annihilation of her self, Joy, like the female lead characters of both other novels, reacts by othering or abjecting what is intrinsically part of herself yet foreclosed from the symbolic order; where this process is apparent in Paula’s linguistic abjection of the ‘someone in pain’ and takes, for Laura, the form of the running women, Joy constructs her own body as abject, which comes especially to the fore through her anorexia.

In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva explains abjection as the response to a threatened dissolution of the borders between self and other, subject and object. This pertains to the female characters of all three novels discussed here: as a result of being violently reduced to the status of pure objects or others, the protagonists of Doyle’s, Johnston’s and Galloway’s novel resort to a putative abjection of themselves in turn, in order to prevent their radical breakdown. With relevance to these texts, Kristeva names food loathing, violations and rape as forms of abjection. As with the traumatic experiences of these three protagonists, the abject involves that which ‘cannot be assimilated’ because it ‘disturbs identity, system, order’; Kristeva describes it as ‘a burden both repellent and repelled, a deep well of memory that is unapproachable and intimate’ (1982: 1, 4, 6). As ‘a *land of oblivion* that is constantly remembered’, the abject parallels trauma in that one is repeatedly drawn to it. As Kristeva notes: ‘One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it [*on en jouit*]. Violently and painfully’ (8-9). Kristeva explains that as an instance or expression ‘of *primal repression*’, the abject confronts us ‘with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal. Thus, by way of abjection, primitive societies have marked out a precise area of their culture in order to remove it from the threatening world of

animals or animalism, which were imagined as representatives of sex and murder' (12-13). In *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millet shows that female sexuality is often depicted as animalistic and insatiable (1977: 297-306). Kristeva attests to this in her theory of the abject: 'That other sex, the feminine, becomes synonymous with a radical evil that is to be suppressed' (1982: 70). While the protagonists of both Doyle's and Johnston's novel had to experience that, it is notable that when preparing her body for casual sex, Joy herself draws on an animalistic terminology; she describes her obsessive cleaning ritual: 'The water runs down each foreleg while I shave, carrying the shed animal hair away from the black hole under the taps. Fleeced, I turn off the taps and step out to rub my skin hard with the flat loops of the towel till it hurts' (T 47). Given her abject social positioning as mistress, Joy must abject her corporeality, in particular her potentially promiscuous female sexuality, as it poses a threat to the patriarchal order; she must reject the unruly *jouissance* that is inherent in her name. In 'The Body of Signification', Elizabeth Gross argues that '[a]bjection is a reaction to the recognition of the impossible but necessary transcendence of the subject's corporeality, and the impure, defiling elements of its uncontrollable materiality' (1990: 87-88).

But Kristeva also emphasises that, 'abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it – on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger' (1982: 9). For Joy, this ambiguity is expressed in the fact that while her sexuality endangers the integrity of her identity, it, however, also engenders her female selfhood in even this patriarchal order that simultaneously contains and represses it. Thus, as with Johnston's Laura and particularly Doyle's protagonist Paula, Joy has learned that it is essentially her corporeality that validates her existence through male recognition: 'This Sunday night he's coming round. Maybe I will be embraced, entered, made to exist. The physical self is precarious' (TKB 46). As both Paula and Laura had to realise as well, the female body is precarious not only because the heterosexual patriarchal order defines it as open, penetrable, soft and weak, expected to realise selfhood through the act of phallic penetration, but also because of the constant threat of its abjection by even this symbolic order. Hence, when the dreaded yet also somewhat aspired 'entering' happens later in the novel through the rape by her boss

Tony, it leads to the utter dissolution of her fragile sense of self, effectively cancelling its protective mechanisms:

He invited himself into the living room ... I didn't say no ... the kissing was taken for granted. He had paid good money, after all. A meal, dancing, flowers ...

often we  
the warni

... he said Let me see where you sleep ... Something caught in my throat when he spoke. A spark of terrible anger that he should dare say things like this ... I swallowed and said nothing. I made excuses ...

ignore th  
warning

I didn't pull back when he put his tongue in my mouth, stroked the nipples under the cloth. I gave in ... No real substance. But I knew he was real. It was me who had no substance, nothing under the skin ... He couldn't find a way inside my dress. I undid the buttons myself to make it quicker.

warnings  
when the v  
happens

Is that what you want? I said. Will this keep you happy? ... I was too tight ... But he persisted ... He whispered, Tell me you like it when I come.

worst hap  
we can on  
blame

Afterwards, he said he wished I had talked more ... And shouldn't I stop crying now.

blame our

(TKB 174-5)

Just as the typography reflects Joy's *corps morcelé*, the abjection of her warning thoughts into the margins mirrors her abjection as an effect of her marginalisation in the patriarchal bourgeois social order which considers women as commodities; when unmarried, freely available and buyable. Furthermore, the abject text in the margins divulges that Joy blames herself for the rape; when reassembled, the fragmented thoughts read: 'often we ignore the warnings so when the worst happens we can only blame ourselves'. This is confirmed on the next page when Joy notes: 'It's not Tony's fault. It must be me' (TKB 176). Joy's conception of the rape is expressive of a dominant social notion, underpinning patriarchal social relations, that "normal men" do not rape. Therefore if a woman is raped by an "ordinary man" [like Tony]

then she herself must be to blame', which Joy automatically does (Lynne Harvie; quoted in MacSween 1993: 168).

Like the female lead characters of both other novels, Joy is haunted by the feeling of guilt.<sup>16</sup> She subconsciously blames herself for her lover's drowning: '*Did I have any reason to believe he did it on purpose? Any reason at all?*' (TKB 166). Similar to both Laura's sense of guilt for her mother's death and Paula's self-accusations for Charlo's battering, Joy feels burdened by something over which she has no control or agency. It is therefore astounding that when discussing *The Trick*, Gifford reproaches Joy for 'externalis[ing]' guilt that she, in his view, rightly feels, however, wrongly allocates onto others (1997: 608). In a remarkable similar stroke, Linden Peach, speaking of Doyle's novel, argues that 'Paula doesn't realize ... that she projected on to Charlo the consequences of everything she has had to keep hidden: the violence of her home life; the difficulty of being a young woman in the kind of neighbourhood where she was living; and anxieties about her sexual identity' (2004: 176). Both male critics suggest here that it is really the women who are to blame as it is they who falsely project blame onto others. This masculinist verdict evokes a notable passage in *The Invisible Worm*, in which Laura notes her husband's 'curious notion that most men have, that in some inexplicable way women are responsible for the terrible ... violent things like [rape], that happen to them' (IW 163). These kinds of male accusations engender the circular logic of the 'rhetoric of blame' that Edward Said identifies as responsible for the continuing violence in postcolonial societies (1993: 19). As Joy puts it: 'apportion blame that ye have not blame apportioned unto you' (TKB 49). Despite the assertion of A.L. Kennedy's *So I am Glad* that '[g]uilt is of course not an emotion in Celtic countries, it is simply a way of life' (1996: 36), what all three novels identify is that guilt is not merely a national or religious construct, but specifically gendered, produced and abused by men in power. In her introduction to *Meantime*, Galloway writes: 'The need to keep women feeling guilty goes deep, obviously. The fear of losing the unfair system that operates in male favour likewise. It is still something for women to bear in mind, something to consciously resist. As is the guilt it hopes to produce' (1991: 7). In *The Trick*, Joy certainly keeps this in mind; yet fearful of losing a game she can ultimately not win, she is forced into a

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<sup>16</sup> On Joy's feeling of guilt, see also Eve Lazovitz, 'A woman's guilt, a women's violence' (2004).

guilty paradox that consists, as Margery Metzstein notes with regard to Galloway's short-story collection *Blood*, in being 'on the one hand complicit with the ideology which equates woman with guilt, on the other resistant, yet unable to escape its tentacles' (1994: 144).

This dilemma is, for women, entangled in the previously discussed relationship between gender and nation, as Galloway points out:

There is coping with that guilt of taking time off the concerns of national politics to get concerned with the sexual sort: that creeping fear it's somehow self-indulgent to be more concerned for one's womanness instead of one's Scottishness ... Guilt here comes strong from the notion that we're not backing up our menfolk and their 'real' concerns. Female concerns, like meat on the mother's plate, are extras after the man and the weans have been served. (1991: 5-6)

Illustrated in the typographic marginalisation of Joy's feelings, Galloway points out how the subjugation of women's issues by nationalist politics is complicit in producing female guilt. Galloway's use of food metaphors is telling here; as Anne Murcott observes, the privileging of men and offspring in food distribution reflects the hierarchies of patriarchal social relations (1983: 2). This attains a specific relevance in *The Trick* with regard to Joy's anorexia: on the one hand, her refusal of food becomes an act of resistance to be part of this social order; yet, on the other hand, she starves herself to conform to the norms of patriarchal femininity, as advertised and promoted by the magazines she consumes which, Joy tells us, 'are full of thin women ... They make me feel guilty' (T 37). In her article on the 'the control paradox' of anorexia, Marilyn Lawrence argues that in face of women's relative social powerlessness in patriarchal society, anorexia becomes a strategy of control over her body-shape and over her needs and desires (1979: 93-4). Joy's decision to stop eating reflects this attempt at establishing control over her surrounding, promising the idea of an autonomous and independent self: 'I was learning something as I stared at what I was doing; the most obvious thing yet it had never dawned on me ... I didn't need to eat. *I didn't need to eat*' (TKB 38). Significantly, this resolve is triggered by her sensation of food as abject, associated with bodily fluids and, by extension, the symbolism of the 'formlessness' of the female body, which, Mary Ellmann argues in *Thinking About Women*, is furthermore

conceived as 'impressionable' and 'liquid' (1979: 74). Joy's description of immersing her hand into a can of soup evokes the act of sexual penetration: 'Watery stuff like plasma started seeping up the sides of the viscous block. It didn't look like food at all. I slid one finger into it to the depth of a nail ... It was sickening but pleasantly so ... The next thing I knew, I'd pushed my hand right inside the can' (TKB 38).

If abjection involves, for Kristeva, on the one hand a crisis of subjectivity, on the other, it also denotes an important process of subject formation, with the abjection of the mother as its most crucial point. Given the association of the maternal body (via the womb) with the grotesque (Russo 1994: 1), it is noteworthy that all the women associated with motherly or caring functions appearing in the novel are depicted as consumed or consuming monsters: there is Ellen, who acts as Joy's surrogate mother, and her unceasing attempts to feed her; the gluttonous health visitor, munching biscuits with 'her tongue worming out for a dribble of tea' (TKB 22); and her worn-out sister Myra with her 'nose red as a bitten thumb' (TKB 60). The most extreme example of such maternal transgressions is 'THE BEST MUM IN BRITAIN', a foster mother who features in one of Joy's magazines; Joy describes her: 'The picture shows a huge woman with arms like white puddings hanging on butchers' hooks [sic] ... Her arms wrap the children like bacon round sausages' (TKB 163). It is, then, in contrast to these maternal images of grotesque corporeality, insatiable appetite and suffocating love that Joy hopes through food abstinence to transform the social meaning of her female body into its opposite. In *Anorexic Bodies*, MacSween argues:

Anorexia aims at an individualized transformation of the degraded feminine body in the construction of an anorexic body which is owned, inviolable and needless. The anorexic body, as a personally owned object, is intended to be the body of an active subject; the anorexic symptom intends the transformation of the feminine body-object from its status as the environment on which the masculine subject acts. (1993: 248)

Through her anorexia, Joy is able to reclaim her abject body and therewith some power; yet, even the only momentary repossession of what is, in the bourgeois patriarchal social order, by definition not hers necessitates a gender change: 'In bed, I run my hands over the reclaimed ribs, the bony shoulders like wingsprouts. I balance the gin on the edge of the rug and feel the flat bowl of my hips. They're sharp on

either side for the first time I remember. Like a man's. Laughter shakes the mattress. I laugh till the neighbours thumb the wall' (TKB 90). This is a subversive laughter that challenges accepted gender roles – but it is also filled with cynical knowledge that she can never claim an equal place in the current social order. Just as it is in reality her anorexia which is controlling her and not the other way around, so too it is invariably men who continue to be 'in control' over her, as her doctor tells her (TKB 52). In her dealings with her boss Tony and particularly with the medical establishment, she is repeatedly objectified and, as with Paula in Doyle's novel, reminded of her insignificance and powerlessness.

Nonetheless, it is by constructing her body 'as a self-contained object which takes in nothing from the external environment' that Joy gains a provisional means to protect herself from dispossession (MacSween: 195). This allows Joy, for example, to counter the abjection she experiences at Tony's hands through the metaphorical abjection of him, in turn: 'He kissed me again before he went for the car and I came in and threw up like an animal' (TKB 100). MacSween notes that for the anorexic woman food 'represents external intrusion: the aim is to eliminate it completely and create a pure, empty and static inner space free from contamination by intrusion. The anorexic "shell", then, functions in two senses: to prevent intrusion and to contain emptiness' (195). Joy's anorexic body actively resists definitions of femininity and womanhood: while her masculine corporeality challenges her allocated gender-role, her supposedly natural biological role as a mother is similarly undermined by her body's refusal to menstruate. Assuming at first she is pregnant, she undergoes a scan: 'I looked. I was still there. A black hole among the green stars. Empty space. I had nothing inside me' (TKB 146, n.p.). Like in the other two novels considered here, Joy's subjectivity is constituted by that void. It is notable how this nothingness functions for critics as an empty signifier resonant of the *sinathion*, discussed in the previous chapter. Cairns Craig, for example, concludes his otherwise illuminating discussion of Galloway's novel by appropriating the protagonist's body as a symbol for the Scottish nation: 'That "black hole",' he claims, 'that "nothing at all" is the image not only of a woman negated by a patriarchal society but of a society aware of itself only as an absence, a society living, in the 1980s, in the aftermath of its failure to be reborn' (1999: 199). By equating the effective denial of female self-

determination in patriarchy with the nationalist and inherently masculinist crisis over national self-determination following the devolution debacle of 1979, Craig's reading not only erases the gender-specificity of Joy's experiences but actively contributes to the marginalisation and oppression of women's concerns that Galloway addresses in the above quote. His nationalist agenda thus once more repeats the erasure of female experiences that is addressed in all three novels.

The initial powerlessness of all three protagonists to challenge this traumatic dispossession is apparent in the extent to which their herstories seem collapsed in a specifically gendered traumatic paradigm, repeating the same dreary pattern that other women, in particular their mothers, have gone through before them. Whilst I argued earlier that Laura and Paula's marriages constitute to some degree a re-enactment of the 'marital Gothic', Galloway's protagonist becomes similarly convinced of the seeming inevitability of her fate through her maternal heritage. Reflecting on her overwhelming sense of the pointlessness of her life, Joy comes to believe that '[i]t has possibly something to do with families therefore also my mother's fault. Maybe you could have hereditary minding' (TKB 198, n.p.). Consequently, after devising a dire list of all the women in her family who died under rather bizarre suicidal circumstances – amongst them her mother who 'walked into the sea' which, according to Joy, was not 'the first time she tried something like that' – Joy tries to kill herself (TKB 199). This act stands, then, as an attempt to radically implement her personal experience of traumatic annihilation in face of the experience of other women who felt, similarly, hopelessly entrapped and desperate.

## II. UN-REMEMBERING A HISTORY OF ABSENCE

### **Persistence: *'Wo es war soll ich werden'***

Evoking Smyth's seemingly paradoxical observation, the existence of all three female protagonists appears to consist in their absence and negation. Hereby, these novels evoke Lacan's statement that 'woman does not exist'; as Žižek explains: 'Woman does not exist in herself, as a positive entity with full ontological

consistency, but only as a symptom of man' (1992: 426). Read as embodiments of Lacan's punning neologism *sinthome*, Laura's dissociation, Paula's injured and Joy's anorexic body are the unavoidable products of a patriarchal social order that not just condones but actually sanctions violation, rape and abuse in order to perpetuate its hegemony. The Blakean resonance of Johnston's title and the deliberate delusion of Doyle's illustrate that it is through the official silence and denial of those crimes that society at large is not only complicit, but actively contributes to their re-enactment. They furthermore insinuate the disavowed responsibility by the actual perpetrator: for it is neither an invisible worm nor a walk into a door that caused these women's injuries. Accordingly, all three protagonists are burdened with the responsibility for a seemingly 'impossible' history that they cannot possess, whilst simultaneously, as Caruth describes it, becoming the symptom of it. It now becomes clear why women's traumatic herstories must remain unremembered: for what their unclaimed experiences bring to light are Western civilisation's barbaric potentials that must be silenced and denied for the illusion of the safety, stability and 'goodwill' of patriarchal social structures to be maintained, and progressive history to be proclaimed. As Edkins asserts, traumatic events 'question our settled assumptions about who we might be as humans and what we might be capable of' (2003: 5). In face of the violence and cruelty experienced not only by women but also by survivors of wars and genocides, for example, '[t]he modern state cannot be assumed to be a place of safety, any more than the patriarchal family can. Political abuse in one parallels sexual abuse in the other. Both give rise to what we call symptoms of trauma' (Edkins: 7).

Edkins points out that the institutional process of trauma recovery generally intends 'a normalisation or medicalisation of survivors': their symptoms and 'feelings are to be overcome [or forgotten], not expressed' so that they can be smoothly reinserted into given hegemonic power structures (Edkins: 9, 50). By contrast, I want to propose that the strategy that all three protagonists have to pursue in these novels is what I call with regard to Smyth an '[u]nremembering [of their] history of absence'. This consists neither in forgetting an unavoidable reality nor in accepting an unremembered existence, but suggests what Žižek calls 'a radical ethical attitude of uncompromising insistence'; for read as a *sinthome*, 'Woman ...

does *not* exist, she *insists*, which is why she does not come through man only' (1992: 426). In other words, all three women must insist on, in and through their symptoms; as Joy emphasises: 'Persistence is the Only Thing That Works' (TKB 173). Such a reclamation of their repressed experience of oppression, violation and blame adumbrates Walter Benjamin's demand for a radical dissociation – or what I have described as an un-remembering – of their own herstory from the apparent inevitabilities of dominant historical narratives that entail, on the one hand, the notion of progress of the civility of men and, on the other hand, the entrapment of women in a subaltern paradigm.

As a process of healing in psychoanalytic terms, for all three characters this means first of all identifying with their symptoms; that is, to recognise themselves in their dismembered, unremembered traumas. Žižek explicates: 'This is how Freud's *wo es war, soll ich werden* must be read: you, the subject, must identify yourself with the place where your symptom already was; in its pathological particularity you must recognise the element which gives consistency to your being' (1992: 425). In *The Invisible Worm*, Laura recognises her own absent self in the figure of the running woman: 'I am no one. I am weightless, sightless. I only see this woman running ... I see myself running' (IW 52). According to Caruth, it is important that Laura relates her trauma not only 'to the very identity of her own self' and to Dominic as the listener of her story, but that she also reveals it as a reality and truth beyond that of a singular case, thereby establishing 'an *ethical* relation to the real' (1996: 92). The indeterminate age of the running woman makes her a representative for: 'All ages. All women' who have 'nowhere to run' to (IW 66). This recognition of the specific place and position of the subaltern other in relation to one's own self – what I described as ethics as *ethos* – is also enunciated by Paula: as she comes to accept that the 'someone in pain' is her own suffering self, Paula notices in hospital that '[t]here were always other women when I was there, waiting their turn like me, wounded women. I never once thought that I wasn't the only one who'd been put there by her husband' (WW 200). Contemplating her own sense of utter despair, Joy equally wonders about, 'Other people. Other people interest me. How they manage' (TKB 198). Like both other women, Joy has to acknowledge that the 'disembodied glass voice' to which she listens 'out of harm's way', as she puts it, 'from the corner of the

room' is her very own: 'I suddenly remembered what I was saying wasn't a story. It wasn't the furniture breathing it was me. What I was saying was true' (TKB 104). In all three cases, this shock of recognition is of utmost ethical and political importance as it relates the specificities of these women's personal traumatic events to what Bhabha calls 'the wider disjunctions of political existence' (1997: 448).

### **The Ethical Act: 'I'd done something good'**

This recognition, furthermore, precipitates an ethical awakening to the real that expresses an imperative to act. As Žižek notes, 'the act as such, in its most fundamental dimension, is "feminine"' (1992: 426). By reclaiming their agency, all three women are able to challenge their subaltern positioning as passive victims. Accordingly, in *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*, when Paula notices that Charlo attempts to repeat the cycle of male abuse on her daughter Nicola, Paula confronts his terror regime and reclaims the agency that for seventeen years she had not been able to assert:

I saw him looking that way at Nicola, when I saw his eyes. I don't know what happened to me – the Bionic Woman – he was gone. It was so easy. Just bang – gone. The evil in the kitchen; his eyes. Gone. The frying pan had no weight. I'd groaned picking it out of the press just a few minutes before. It was one of those big old-fashioned ones. I hated it; a present from his mother. Maybe there was a secret message in it all along ... Down – gone. *His* blood on the floor. My finest hour. I was there. I was something. I loved. Down on his head. I was killing him. The evil. He'd kill me and now it was Nicola. But no. No fucking way. (WW 213)

This act signifies Paula's ultimate refusal to remain in her constitutionally allocated victim-role and thus helplessly submit to the traumatic perpetuation of male violence against women. Her decisive 'No' is echoed by Joy in *The Trick*, announcing a similar protest against such re-enactments. Furthermore, Paula's use of the frying pan attains a specific meaning in this scene: its heavy 'old-fashioned'-ness symbolises her confinement in the traditional role of the subservient housewife, who, like many women before her, must passively endure the patriarchal terror regimes of father and, then, husband. While her own mother failed to protect her daughter, Paula's sister

Carmel, from paternal abuse, Paula's daring act signifies her rejection of the symbolism that is accorded to her through the pan, which she tellingly received as a wedding present from her mother-in-law. In transforming the object that metaphorically chained her, according to the Irish Constitution, 'to her duties in the house' to a means to assert her subjectivity and agency, and throw the person who enchained her there out, in turn, Paula enacts what Jeffers calls a 'repetition with a difference' (2002: 62).

With regard to gothic conventions, it is also interesting that through this counter-act of violence Paula attempts to eject the 'evil' that resided within to outside the walls that she and her children call home. But the reclaimed safety is still rather precarious; Nicola voices the sense of suspense and uncertainty about the eventual outcome:

- What now? said Nicola.
  - God knows, I said. – But one thing's for certain. He's not coming back in here again.
  - Her face said it: she'd heard it before.
  - He's not, I said ...
  - Okay, said Nicola.
- It was a great feeling ... I'd done something good. (WW 225)

Significantly, this mother-daughter exchange is repeated on the next page, and ends the novel. Between these two repetitions, Paula briefly revisits for a last time the events surrounding Charlo's death, which might have involved the rape but certainly the murder of a woman, with whose announcement her account began. While her whole narration stands as a memorial account of the abuse she suffered in her own past, this brief interlude functions as a reminder of the violations done to other women as well. The exact rendition of the dialogue operates, then, partly to validate and substantiate her own violent action against him, indicating her acknowledgement of her husband's cruelty and the terrible fact that '[i]t happened. Men raped women', and also beat and kill them (WW 159). On the other hand, the repetition manifests her uncompromising ethical attitude: Paula faced the terror of her own death – Charlo might, as she notices, have killed her and, more decisively for Paula, Nicola – to take on full responsibility for the other. In this fundamental act, she shows that she can intervene, both ethically and politically, and do 'something good' for the other.

### **Destruction and Purge: 'Perhaps I may come alive. *Prehaps*'**

In *The Invisible Worm*, it is the ethical encounter with the repudiated ex-priest Dominic that enables Laura not only to revisit her past and reclaim her own unremembered herstory, but in the recognition that he affords her of her own abject position, Dominic also triggers her agency. In their second meeting, Dominic confronts Laura with his own personal tragedy of having been forced or rather, through his naming already, interpellated into becoming a priest. As Backus point out, the frankness of Dominic's anger about being 'the chosen victim' in his family awakens Laura to recognise herself in that sacrificial role (IW 27; Backus: 229): just as Laura's father allocates all responsibility on his daughter, so too Dominic is blamed for killing his dying father when resigning from priesthood, and subsequently denied to visit him. Laura impels him: 'Barge in ... Don't let them stop you ... Knock them down if need be. Fight.' As the narrator points out: 'The word echoed in her head' (IW 86). Reminded of her own father's deathbed wish to forgive him, which she reluctantly assented to but could never actually do, Laura realises the need for open confrontation and acknowledgement of that which is tried to be forgotten as a prerequisite for forgiveness to take place; she explains to Dominic: 'You see, we need to know how to forgive as well as to be forgiven' (IW 86). Backus emphasises that Laura conceives an important maxim here: 'at both the political and the personal levels, Laura recognizes, we cannot forgive those we are still allowing to dominate us' (IW 232).

The resonance that her call to fight provokes underpins Laura's decision to confront her own dispossession by exhuming the overgrown summerhouse, 'stripp[ing it] of its protection' (IW 90). For Laura, the process of uncovering generates a reliving of the events that caused her trauma: stepping inside the place that was the keeper of her secret, she un-remembers her silenced herstory, transforming her 'dissociated trauma to acknowledged memory' (Herman 2001: 155). The support that Dominic offers her in his skill as a listener enables Laura to publicly announce it for the first time: 'I haven't told anyone. I have never spoken these words' (IW 161). Having reclaimed her past that tormented her present, Laura

reasserts her agency in an ultimate act of ‘destruction’, which is also a purge (IW 168): she burns the house in which her secret trauma was buried. Significantly, Laura enforces the fundamentality of her act by locating it beyond the patriarchal symbolic order of language; she instructs Dominic not to speak: ‘Not a word. I am generalissimo. I am in charge’ (IW 167). After the accomplished deed, Laura tells him: ‘Come away. You can talk now. Recriminate, if you wish. You’ve been so good not to try and stop me’ (IW 168). In contrast to all the other men in her life, Dominic allows Laura to repossess her female agency, which noticeably ‘[d]umfounded’ him: ‘I hadn’t realised that you had that sort of energy,’ he tells her (IW 169). Through this act, in a comparable manner to Paula, Laura also reclaims her home as a place of belonging; turning away from the scene of destruction, Laura announces: ‘Home ... I could never leave this house, Dominic’ (IW 169).

At the close of the novel, Laura is again alone in her repossessed house, yet with the hope and determination that her other, the woman, ‘will not run again’ (IW 181). In bringing together her past and present selves, Laura notices a space of futurity emerging: ‘Out of the window I see the night white and empty. Like my future – an empty page on which I will begin to write my life. I will try to embellish the emptiness of living. Perhaps I may come alive./ *Prehaps*’ (IW 181). The final word that Laura employs here stems from Dominic; it is echoed three times over this last section and completes the novel. While its mispronounced prefix points to the past, the word itself expresses her sense about an indeterminate, open future that is still unwritten. That is, if the past is and will always stay with her, in having been able to integrate and acknowledge it as her personal herstory, Laura is able to face what is of utmost importance: what Ernst Bloch famously termed in his 1954 opus ‘the principle hope’; the desire and anticipation of a different future in which she possibly ‘may come alive’.

### **‘It comes with practice’: Re-Embodiment and Becomings**

Towards the ending of *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, Joy also realises the imperative to act: ‘The trick is not to think. Just act dammit./ Act’ (TKB 205). She understands that she must confront her boss Tony in order to clarify that her apparent

consent to the rape had been a ‘mistake’, that is, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, ‘a misconception about the meaning of something; a thing incorrectly done or thought; an error of judgment’ – in other words, something *not* to be repeated: ‘I have to look him in the eye. Look, people make mistakes. They happen to everyone. You should be able to allow for mistakes and know that’s all they are. Just because last week because he/ just because’ (TKB 205). On the one hand, Joy is accepting here that errors of judgement do occur, thereby forgiving both Tony and herself to some extent for letting the rape happen. Yet, the iteration of the conditional ‘because’ also signifies a search for, but also a refusal of, vague excuses and empty justifications for such ‘mistakes’. Accordingly, when Tony continues his sexual harassments by calling her late at night, trying to convince her to re-enact the crime, Joy manages to assert her voice and willpower in a decisive speech-act:

ME        Tony I’m tired. No.  
TONY     [Pause] What did you say?  
ME        [Trying it out again.] No.  
TONY     What do you mean, NO? NO? Don’t play up. Just do it. I’ll be  
            round in less than a minute.  
Me        NO. I mean it ... I mean NO, Tony. (TKB 209, n.p.)

Whilst the playscript format raises awareness to the textual performativity of this scene, Joy recovers the full potential of her voice by transforming its written representation into the act itself:

Screaming would be good. But I never scream. I can write it down but never do it, never actually. Do it ... No-one would know if I were to, if I were just to open my mouth and. Just yell. Lungs working, the singing rising in my throat, the pulse in my temples ...

so I scream dammit.

I scream. (TKB 215, n.p.)

As Craig asserts, with this scream, Joy screams herself into existence: ‘The scream – narrated but not phonetically inscribed – *happens* but does not typographically occur within the text: it consumes the rest of the page in white space, including the page number, and leaves Joy coming back into existence through her absence not *within* the text but *from* the text’ (1999: 196). This attains a specific relevance given the

extent to which Joy has allowed herself to be interpellated and controlled by the written word. In her discussion of *The Trick*, Carolyn Masel suggests that the rape itself happens as a direct result of Joy's adherence to the authoritative advice of a book about '*Courage and Bereavement*', given to her by a doctor in hospital, rather than listening to her own intuitions (2004: 38). Joy's eventual consent to Tony's invitation to take her out – 'I must accept invitations etc etc' (TKB 174) – is a direct echo of her summary of the book's instructions: 'Chapter 6 says to accept invitations and TRY. It says to take up people's offers of assistance and TRY' (TKB 171). Similarly, as argued above, her anorexia is in part also determined by visual and textual discourses about femininity.

Aware of the authority of the textual, Joy makes a significant observation that reflects back not only on her own writing – the whole novel can be understood as her personal diary – but also on Galloway's: 'It's important to write things down. The written word is important. The forms of the letters: significances between the loops and dashes. You scour them looking for the truth' (TKB 195-96). This quasi-Jamesonian insistence upon an ideology of form does, then, not so much demand a general formalistic approach to the sign system of the novel as a whole but turns our attention to the much smaller semantic units of the text, the 'significances between'. If we extrapolate this insight to a reading of the novel as a whole, in this self-reflective statement, Galloway foregrounds the relevance of the specific sectional concerns and circumstances of her protagonist's experiences, which are determined by inexorable historical and political structures. Furthermore, Jameson's notion that 'the aesthetic act is itself ideological ... with the function of inventing imaginary or "formal solutions" to unresolvable social contradictions' (2002: 64) allows us to understand Galloway's formal and, in particular, typographical experiments not just as a means of representing the latent truth-content of Joy's experience of History, but also as an act of resistance. As Craig argues: 'Control over the page numbers becomes the signature of the character's refusal of the discourses by which she is controlled; it is also, however, the refusal of the author, whose control over her text extends not just to the details of typographic layout but also to the details of the marginalia of the text' (1999: 196).

So just as Galloway's text deconstructs the formal conventions of the novel in a technique that Glenda Norquay describes as 'bricolage' – that is, constructing a text from fragments in a way that subverts their original meaning and thus allows for reconstruction (2000: 133) – so too Joy begins to challenge the discourses by which she is contained and, in doing so, to take an active part in her own self-re-creation: 'With a pair of dressmaking scissors I face the mirror and cut my hair short. Spiky. I colour it purple with permanent dye I bought ages ago and never used. While the colour sets I use the scissors to cut short my nails ... Tomorrow I will have my ears pierced, twice on one side. It will scare the hell out of David' (TKB 232 n.p.). With this 'spiky' image, Joy performs an alternative gender identity that visibly rejects stereotypical images of socially acceptable femininity and that is, furthermore, remarkably free from male approval. This denunciation of patriarchal discourses entails, moreover, a rejection of her confinement in and by the symbolic order. It is therefore significant that at the ending of the novel 'the textual is replaced by the oral in a recovery of [Joy's] voice' (Craig 1999: 196). This repossession, furthermore, works, as argued above, as a precondition for forgiving:

The voice is still there.  
I forgive you.  
I hear it quite distinctly, my own voice in the open house.  
I forgive you.

Nobody needs to know I said it. Nobody needs to know. (TKB 235)

As the last sentence indicates, Joy has managed to free herself from the need for official approval and legitimisation of her story. It is specifically by imagining herself as a swimmer in the sea at the close of the novel that Joy is able to forgive not only herself, but also her mother and lover who both left her by drowning. As Carole Jones notes in her reading of the novel, by embracing 'the existential void so vividly evoked by the scan' that which has been all along associated with death is transformed into 'a life-affirming gesture of defiance' (2007: 213). This expresses Joy's ultimate refusal to submit to the traumatic paradigm by which she felt entrapped: defying death or drowning, she notices that 'the trick is to keep breathing, make out it's not unnatural at all' (TKB 235). Through the idea of swimming, Joy is able to repossess her abject body; she experiences this new sense of corporeality as

‘a little light fiction’, whose naturalness ‘comes with practice’: ‘Casting out long arms into the still water. I am naked, hair long as a fin down the pale spine ridge, flexible as a fish, the white profile against black waves, rising for air’ (Ibid.). This image of female embodiment is eerily resonant of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s vision of subjectivity as an embodied process of ‘becoming’ that involves the rejection of the stable fixity of a masculine ‘being’ and, instead, affirms a putatively ‘feminine’ dissolution of identity and gender dichotomies. They propose, for example, the model of a denaturalised, sexually dispersed human body through the construction of a ‘Body without Organs’, whose ‘archetypal model is the sea’ (cited in Jardine 1985: 213).<sup>17</sup> It is these masculine creations of feminine metaphors for rethinking forms of subjectivity that the next chapter will further investigate.

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<sup>17</sup> Cited from Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘Le lisse et le strié’, in *Mille Plateaux* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1980), p. 598.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE FEMININE REDEMPTION OF MASCULINITY?: GENDER TROUBLE<sup>1</sup> IN THE ALLEGORICAL IMAGINATION

Alasdair Gray's 1982 *Janine* and Patrick McCabe's *Breakfast on Pluto*.

*'It is no longer possible to think in our day other than in the void left by man's disappearance. For this void does not create a deficiency; it does not constitute a lacuna that must be filled in. It is nothing more and nothing less than the unfolding of a space in which it is once more possible to think'.*

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*

*'The discourse of man is in the metaphor of woman'.*

Gayatri Spivak, 'Displacement and The Discourse of Woman'

There has been a notable turn towards the feminine in contemporary philosophical discourses, which appears as the seemingly logical consequence of the crisis of the rational subject of modernity; the so-called 'death of man' that, as Michel Foucault comments in the epigraph that forms this chapter, leaves a 'void' which opens up a space for new modes of thought, allowing for what he elsewhere describes as 'an *insurrection of subjugated knowledges*' (1980: 81). For example, for the current holy trinity of French post-structuralism – Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze – the feminine comes to occupy a privileged position from which to destabilise the phallogocentric order, and accordingly becomes the vehicle for an alternative vision of subjectivity, as evoked at the ending Janice Galloway's novel discussed in the last chapter.<sup>2</sup> This process connotes what Alice Jardine terms 'gynesis'; that is, she explains, 'the transformation of woman and the feminine into

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<sup>1</sup> With reference to Judith Butler's groundbreaking 1990 study, *Gender Trouble* (1999).

<sup>2</sup> For a critical discussion of these philosophers in this respect, see Braidotti, 'The Becoming-Woman of Philosophy' in *Patterns of Dissonance* (1992: 98-146); Jardine, 'Gynesis III: Intertexts', chapter 8, 9 and 10 in *Gynesis* (1985: 159-223).

verbs at the interior of those narratives that are today experiencing a crisis in legitimation' (1985: 25). However, for all the emancipatory effects such revisions promise, given the long trajectory of what Gayatri Spivak calls 'the discourse of man ... in the metaphor of woman', namely the *displacement* of woman in philosophical tradition, the context of male *gynesis* requires circumspection (1983: 169). In *Patterns of Dissonance*, Rosi Braidotti saliently points to the rather 'strange' coincidence that this valorisation of one of philosophy's most markedly figures of otherness occurs precisely at a moment in history when the hegemonic rational subject, tacitly assumed to be male, is at a point of inexorable dissolution: 'It is as if the modern subject, the [Cartesian] split subject, discovers the feminine layer of his own thought just as he loses the mastery he used to assume as his own' (1991: 10). This putative transvestism notably concurs with the perceived 'crisis' in Western masculinity, concerning the loss of customary masculine rights and privileges as a result of a changed socio-economic landscape in which traditional areas of masculine authority – such as work and the family, for example – are becoming residual and exposed to feminist critique.<sup>3</sup> As Braidotti remarks, this 'loss' expresses itself in melancholia, which continues to haunt the postmodern proclamation of endings and new beginnings (1991: 2).<sup>4</sup> Hence, what seems, on the one hand, to be a new sex-and-gender order beyond the phallic, sounds, on the other, as Stephen Heath notes with regard to Roland Barthes' vision of a feminine future in *A Lover's Discourse*, merely 'as a derivation from the existing order, a repetition of its image and essentialization and alibi, its perspective of "Woman"' (1983: 105). That is, in eerie resonance with the gendering of colonial discourse, the feminine appears in postmodern discourse, once again, as a privileged space – a *sinthome* – onto which 'man' can transcribe his feeling of impotence, and recuperate from what Braidotti

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<sup>3</sup> See John Beynon, *Masculinities and Culture* (2002: 83). There has been a proliferation of books on the perceived 'crisis' of white heterosexual masculinity occurring since the 1980s; see, for example, Anthony Clare, *On Men: Masculinity in Crisis* (2000); John MacInnes, *The End of Masculinity* (1998); Sally Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (2000). For a contestation of the notion of a 'male crisis', see R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (1995: 84) and Lea and Schoene, 'Masculinity in Transition' (2003: 10).

<sup>4</sup> In *The Gendering of Melancholia*, Juliana Schiesari astutely describes 'post'-discourses as melancholic (1992: 1). She argues that melancholia 'appears as a gendered form of ethos based on or empowered by a sense of lack' of the male subject, which relies on 'the *devaluing* of the historical reality of women's disempowerment ... That is, the ideology of melancholia appropriates from women's subjectivities their "real" sense of loss and, in Lacanian terms, recuperates that loss ... as a privileged form of male expression' (12–13).

describes as the ‘loss of the former universal value that was attributed to the male gender’ (1991: 10).<sup>5</sup>

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, this evocation of a feminine ethos, which in turn robs woman of her *ethos* as I defined it, is also apparent in recent Irish and Scottish studies criticism. Furthermore, if the image of the feminised man has within the imperial-national paradigm rather negative connotations (or has been used to claim, as in Scottish context, subaltern victimhood), in the wake of the postmodern trend, critics have proposed reading these previously derogated manifestations of masculinity as the heralds of post-patriarchal and post-national sex-and-gender relations. Gerry Smyth, for instance, proposes in *The Novel and the Nation* that the male protagonist of Roddy Doyle’s *The Snapper* (1990), Jimmy Rabbitte Sr, offers ‘the seeds of a new Irish manhood and fatherhood, one who has at least begun to acknowledge a feminine dimension to his identity’ (1997: 73). Smyth’s contention is evocative of Eve Patten’s previously referenced observation of a shift to a ‘feminine sensibility’ in what she terms the contemporary Irish ‘post-national novel’ (2002: 262, 259). In a notably similar spirit, Berthold Schoene draws on Katja Silverman’s seminal study, *Male Subjectivity at The Margins* (1992), to propose for a devolved Scotland ‘a devolutionary kind of masculinity that has embraced its feminine marginality and is saying “no” to power’ as a preliminary for the successful parturition of ‘a post-national state’ (2002: 95, 97). While the question of whether woman can actually afford to say ‘no’ to power or dissolve her identity is here, again, not addressed, with a certain irony, the previous symptom of what Schoene (after Tom Nairn) calls Scotland’s ‘subnational castration’ becomes now a metaphor of its post-national postmodernity (2002: 96).

In the light of the above, it seems significant that Alasdair Gray’s *1982 Janine* (1984) and Patrick McCabe’s *Breakfast on Pluto* (1998) enact the feminisation of their male protagonists who, by virtue of their naming, are at the same time forged as the epitomes of a particular national-(post)colonial model of masculinity, outlined in my fourth chapter. What affiliates these rather different texts, then, furthermore is that both explicitly evoke an allegorical reading of their respective national entities.

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<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, Buci-Glucksmann discerns a very similar function of female figures as allegories of the modern in Walter Benjamin’s writing about the poetry of Charles Baudelaire; see her ‘Catastrophic Utopia’ (1986).

Probably, the best known account of this is afforded in Frederic Jameson's controversial 1986 essay 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism', wherein he claims:

All third-world texts are necessarily ... *national allegories* ... [E]ven those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic – necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*. (1986: 69)

Given Jameson's focus on male-authored texts with male protagonists, his thesis intimates the metonymic linkage between men and nation – what Christopher Whyte calls a 'representational pact' (1998: 275). However, as Aijaz Ahmad crucially points out in his astute critique of Jameson's theory, it is the ideological conditions of class, gender, religious and political affiliation and so on, which ultimately trouble the smooth engendering of this imagined nation; and it is on the discourse of gender that I will particularly focus here (1992: 110, 122).<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, rather than limiting these novels to national allegories, I want to suggest that they allow investigation of the ethical implications of (en)gendering an allegorical imagiNation in relation to the rather suspicious feminisation promoted by much 'post'-theory.

As in Jameson's model, Gray's and McCabe's texts interweave the personal crisis of their protagonists with a specific national crisis: whereas *1982 Janine* [J] investigates the epoch surrounding Scotland's devolution debacle in 1979, *Breakfast on Pluto* [BoP] is set at the outbreak of the Northern Irish political upheavals in both Ireland and London. Tracing a period that is specifically marked by national disillusionment and despair, both novels are written as confessional memoirs, narrated mainly in the first person by their male protagonists who contemplate their past and the traumatic processes of their (en)gendering from a position of loss and, in the case of McCabe's narrator, exile. This nation 'in crisis' is liable to generate a narrative of what Francis Mulhern terms 'postcolonial melancholy' (1998: 161). In 'A Question of Survival', Homi Bhabha argues with regard to Sigmund Freud's

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<sup>6</sup> As Ahmad rightly remarks, Jameson's 'is, among other things, a gendered text' (1992: 122), and although Jameson does mention gender as one of the discourses that are 'susceptible to appropriation by that strategy of otherness which Edward Said ... called "orientalism"' (1986: 77), he neglects to discuss any of the implications this might have with regard to his argument or within the texts of his discussion.

theories that melancholia ‘preserves the icon of the Ideal – Nation – but by virtue of identifying with it from a position of loss and absence’ (1991: 101).<sup>7</sup> As we shall see, the accounts of both protagonists seek to safeguard such an ideal-nation, perhaps unsurprisingly by recourse to ‘the icon’ of the female/maternal body.

As indicated in my second chapter, for Walter Benjamin, the allegorical form of expression arises from a specific melancholic reflection, in which history appears not as teleological progression but is marked by catastrophe and decay, intimating the transitoriness of the current social order. It is the same instability of seemingly congealed concepts that politically informed postmodern theories try to underscore in order to generate their displacement.<sup>8</sup> But whilst allegory acknowledges dissolution, it also relies on a code of meaning of existing conventions. That is, on the one hand, true to its etymological meaning which is ‘speaking otherwise than one seems to speak’ (*OED*), allegory is always already other to itself, capable of expressing other meanings, open to other readings. On the other hand, it relies on a constitutive framework of interpretation that has the tendency to absorb the radical excess and proliferation of signification. The oscillation between these opposing impulses is what Benjamin calls ‘the antinomies of the allegorical’. ‘For allegory is both,’ he explains, ‘convention *and* expression; and both are inherently contradictory’ (2003: 174-5). Benjamin insists that ‘so long as the approach is an aesthetic one’ (as opposed to a religious one), this remains a purely negative dialectic in which ‘paradox must have the last word’ (2003: 216).<sup>9</sup>

I wish to propose that these contradictory tendencies of allegory are played out in a specifically gendered dynamic in the two novels under discussion here: both *1982 Janine* and *Breakfast on Pluto* simultaneously reproduce and subvert, indict and redeem the gendered norms of oppression underpinning the (post)colonial-national model. In resonance with Gramsci’s understanding of the subaltern, both texts are marked by the desire to undermine the hegemonic patriarchal order, yet remain intimately affiliated and complicit with it. In their introduction to *Posting the Male*,

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<sup>7</sup> See Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ (*SE XIV* 1957: 243-258).

<sup>8</sup> This is, for example, evident in Butler’s contention in *Gender Trouble* that, ‘the task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed to repeat, and through a radical proliferation of gender, to displace the very gender norms that enable repetition itself’ (1999: 148).

<sup>9</sup> On Benjamin’s notion of allegory, see also Bainard Cowan, ‘Walter Benjamin’s Theory of Allegory’ (1981); Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire* (1993: 143-44).

Schoene and Daniel Lea propose such a ‘tragic double bind’, as they call it, as paradigmatic of ‘the “crisis” of contemporary masculinity’, deriving ‘from men’s exposure to two antagonistic sets of imperatives and ideals – one patriarchal, the other feminist and post-patriarchal – resulting in a behavioural and self-constitutive quandary that is experienced as stressful because it appears so utterly irresolvable’ (2003: 121). It is the endeavour of this chapter to investigate how both novels negotiate and whether they resolve this apparent aporia.

## I. MASCULINITY IS WHAT HURTS: Alasdair Gray’s *1982 Janine*

### (En)Gendering I: The PornImagiNation

Similar to Gray’s first novel *Lanark* (1981), *1982 Janine* is divided into a fantastical and a realist section, which chronicle the ultimate breakdown and gradual recovery of its protagonist-narrator, Jock McLeish. The first part of the novel is taken over by Jock’s pornographic reveries about a group of women, whose foremost member is the eponymous Janine. These women are forged as allegorical emblems of Scotland’s pre-devolutionary political situation. In his discussion of the novel, S.J. Boyd affirms: ‘It is pretty clear that *1982 Janine* is, among other things, some kind of allegory of the state of Scotland at a particular point in history, but it is a *pornographic* allegory’ (1991: 111). As with Ashis Nandy’s thesis on the profoundly gendered imperial power relations, Gray exploits the political implications of sexual metaphors by comparing the position of the entire Scottish population to that of an abused woman, as typified by Jock’s following statement: ‘But if a country is not just a tract of land but a whole people then clearly Scotland has been fucked. I mean that word in the vulgar sense of *misused to give satisfaction or advantage to another*. Scotland has been fucked and I am one of the fuckers who fucked her and I REFUSE TO FEEL BITTER AND GUILTY ABOUT THIS’ (J 126-7). But if Gray’s protagonist indicts the mechanisms of political oppression, he also confronts his own

complicity in what he considers an iniquitous process of abuse.<sup>10</sup> Working as a supervisor for national security installations, Jock has become the representative of a repressive system of Panopticon regulation and control which, he feels, simultaneously emasculates him: 'I am not a man, I am an instrument,' he tells us with regard to his job (J 95). As in Nandy's model, Jock seeks to offset his sense of emasculation and disempowerment by asserting patriarchal dominance in his pornographic projections.

Accordingly, Jock's imaginary cast of female characters, modelled on the real women of his life, is subjected to the most violent and misogynistic procedures, involving bondage and enslavement. The iterative descriptions of their physical attributes, in particular the style of their clothing, serve to congeal their identity into what Judith Butler calls 'the most reified forms' of patriarchal femininity (1999: 43). As Jock notes about the eponymous Janine: 'With make-up she can look like almost any female stereotype ... Just now she looks like Jane Russell in a forties film, *The Outlaw*' (J 4). Constructed as the allegorical spectacle of the male scopophilic gaze, as Laura Mulvey seminally describes it in her 1975 essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', 'woman' stands in Jock's projections 'as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning' (Mulvey 1992: 23). This is evocative of Benjamin's observation that the allegorical object is under the melancholic gaze 'quite incapable of emanating any meaning or significance of its own; such significance as it has, it acquires from the allegorist' (2003: 184). Interestingly, Benjamin compares this Baroque tendency to absorb the dialectical impulse of allegory with sadism: 'It is indeed characteristic of the sadist that he humiliates his object and then – or thereby – satisfies it. And that is what the allegorist does in this age drunk with acts of cruelty both lived and imagined' (2003: 185). Jock's inebriated allegorical imagiNation is conspicuously marked by this sadistic-melancholia that, according to Benjamin, 'betrays and devalues' its objects, fixing them so that they are 'unconditionally in his power' (Ibid.). The excess of female sexuality is thus only evoked to be immediately pushed back into the

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<sup>10</sup> See Eilidh Whiteford's discussion of 1982 *Janine* in 'Engendered Subjects' for a similar argument (1994: 71).

regulatory frame of masculine control. Mulvey also relates voyeurism to sadism; she writes that ‘pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt ... asserting control and subjecting the guilty person through punishment’ (1992: 29). In Gray’s novel, Janine is appropriately cast into the role of the sexually alluring yet corruptive *femme fatale*, whose sexual blackmail of her agent is used by Jock to justify her subsequent penalisation: ‘she is triumphant, this bad wee girl,’ he notes, ‘who certainly deserves a spanking’ (J 5). Similarly, when the appropriately named Superb – ‘being short for superbitch’ (J 19) – challenges the domestic routine of her life by having an affair, she is immediately chastised for her adulterous transgression: ‘exposed like a slave in a market’, she is rendered ‘so passive that she has nearly vanished as a character’ (J 36, 41). Jock’s pornographic gaze comes to distort here the allegorical into the symbolic precisely by this impulse to transcend the historical specificity of woman, and congeal them into an immemorial femininity of passive victimhood.<sup>11</sup>

The most dramatic staging of this allegorical containment occurs in a scene in which Jock’s ‘four heroines’ are so positioned that ‘each woman stands like an upside down capital of Y’ (J 106). Gray’s front cover shows in allusion to Leonardo da Vinci’s *Vitruvian Man* (ca. 1487) a man in a circle producing a Y shape, reminding us that this letter designates the male sex. The identical positioning of these imaginary female figures as inverted symbols of male supremacy erases any difference between them, reducing them to a single *sinthome*, an empty signifier or fantasy space to bolster McLeish’s ego.<sup>12</sup> This telling conflation of female bodies exposes them as the allegorical products of a patriarchal imagiNation, serving not only for the empowerment of the male subject but also as a means for national gratification. Feeling lonely and displaced from his national community, Jock’s desire for a place of home and belonging is problematically projected through colonial-national tropes of the maternal body. Gray’s protagonist associates the act of penetration with ‘a sweet homecoming’ (J 26). Later on, he explicitly defines the female body as ‘THE LANSCAPE OF HOME’ (J 157), and characterises his mother

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<sup>11</sup> For Benjamin, the crucial difference between symbol and allegory concerns ‘the decisive category of time’: whereas the symbol imparts eternity and sameness, whereby time is experienced as a ‘mystical instant [*Nu*]’, allegory remains grounded in ‘the “now” [*Jetzt*] of contemporary actuality’ (2003: 165-6, 183). In his *Trauerspiel* study, Benjamin thus reclaims the importance of allegory on precisely the grounds on which it has been devalued by the German Academia of his time, namely its refusal to transcend history (2003: 159-167).

<sup>12</sup> For the idea of the ‘single *sinthome*’, see Kelly, *The Thriller and Northern Ireland* (2005: 128).

‘not [as] a person but the climate I grew up in’, reducing her to a naturalised condition that is endemic to his national territory (J 40). This enacts what Spivak describes as a double displacement, whereby woman’s actual body is kept out of the symbolic domain and instead doubly transformed: first into landscape or nature, and then into motherland qua nation (Spivak 1983). The nation ideal is thus preserved by fetishisation of the female/maternal body as *sinathion*.

Whereas women are reduced to their bodies, it is significant that through his alcoholic fantasies Jock leaves, or rather escapes, his physical body – as also his haunting memories and the feeling of failure and loss with which they are charged. As Berthold Schoene argues in his discussion of *1982 Janine*, it seems that ‘only a radical disembodiment ... can safeguard the traditional, phallic iconography of man’ (2000: 132). Seeking to uphold the appearance of invincible control, which is underlined by the fact that he continually postpones ejaculation, McLeish comes to epitomise the soldierly ideal of masculinity that, as George Mosse points out in *The Image of Man*, became synonymous with the modern nation itself (1996: 3-9). In his later article, Schoene argues that one of the ‘tragic implications that such a conscriptive embodiment of the nation’ entails is that ‘the individual male’s private persona is required to perform a vanishing act by allowing itself to be assimilated without trace into a collective masculinist show of communal uniformity’ (2002: 85-6). *1982 Janine* seems, indeed, to perform such an effacement of the individual male, for Jock appears as the unspecific ‘everyman’: ‘I could be hundreds of men just now’, he proclaims in the novel’s opening (J 1).

But the novel also interpellates Jock into a specific national framework: bearing ‘*the Scots forename*’, Boyd furthermore characterises Gray’s protagonist as ‘thoroughgoing Jekyll and Hyde’ (1991: 109). Interestingly, in his essay on ‘Masculinities and the post-nation’, Schoene proposes to read this *doppelgänger* motif ‘as a gender-specific obsession with difference’, concerning ‘the Scottish male’s fear of his own intrinsic self-and-otherness, or “effeminacy”’ (2002: 94). This certainly proves pertinent to Jock, who is split between the antonymic forces of trying to restore patriarchal dominance while bewailing his putatively ‘feminine’ marginalisation. These contradictory allegorical impulses are reflected in the schizophrenic splitting of the text into fantasy and realist parts, invoking the

(in)famous literary paradigm of the Scottish imagination – Gregory Smith’s ‘Caledonian Antisyzygy’ (1919). It is not only this aspect that aligns *1982 Janine* with one of the most canonical texts of the Scottish literary Renaissance; in the ‘Epilogue’, Gray acknowledges that ‘the matter of Scotland refracted through alcoholic reverie is [taken] from [Hugh] MacDiarmid’s *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*’ (J 333). Christopher Whyte notes that in both works there is ‘a similar tendency of the (male) protagonist to stand in for (the men of) his nation’ (1998: 278). Significantly, the transvestite protagonist-narrator of McCabe’s *Breakfast on Pluto* is originally also inscribed as the epitome of Irish masculinity by carrying the stereotypical stage name Patrick, shortened to ‘Paddy’, while personally preferring the gay identity of ‘Pussy’. In particular for the English police, as also in chapter twenty-three, which is narrated by an indeterminate intradiagetic Cockney voice, Patrick Pussy becomes ‘Paddy’, the representative of all ‘bleedin’ Paddies ... [who b]low your fackin’ head off!’ (BoP 86). Hailed by the pejorative terminology of imperial discourse, Jock and Patrick are forged as masculine metonyms of their respective nations in a conspicuously postcolonial paradigm that functions to uphold the strict dichotomisation of gender that both novels, simultaneously, parody and subvert.

### **(En)Gendering II: Fantasies of Fantasies and a Painful Reality**

Rather than restoring the hegemonic invisibility of a naturalised form of masculinity, both novels make visible the ideological conditions of gender construction. What becomes clear in these texts is that neither Jock nor Patrick Pussy do naturally or intuitively act like man, or a woman for that matter, but draw upon different national and gendered stereotypes. As Cairns Craig observes: ‘*1982 Janine* is a novel about types, about characters as types ... and about Jock as someone who constructs – or has constructed for him – his identity as a type’ (1999: 183). This is demonstrated when Jock’s father insists on ordering him ‘seven identical trousers and three identical jackets’ in order to give him ‘a neat, simple, consistent appearance bordering on the miraculous’ (J 191-2). The aim here is to produce an inconspicuous (invisible) and in itself impossible (‘miraculous’) stability of a specific class and

gender identity that makes out the hegemonic norm. Marjorie Garber notes in her landmark study on cross-dressing that ‘dress codes function in the social world and the world of social hierarchy as structures that simultaneously regulate and critique normative categories like ... class and gender’ (1992: 25). As a transvestite, the identity of McCabe’s protagonist is similarly constructed by clothes. At the outset of the novel, Patrick Pussy is dressed exactly like his/her mother on the day of his/her (imaginative) conception in 1955. Interpellated by her local Kilburn community as the famous Irish drag character, ‘Old Mother Riley’ (BoP 1),<sup>13</sup> s/he becomes a parody not only of ‘Mother Ireland’ but – with reference to the Irish revolutionary tradition of female cross-dressing – also of a nationalist freedom-fighter. In Ireland, Natalie Zemon Davis notes, there is ‘the most extensive example of disturbances led by men disguised as women’ (cited in Gibbons 1996: 141).<sup>14</sup>

Where the primary gender identification of McCabe’s protagonist is the mother, the gendering of Gray’s lead character is consciously entangled in the previously mentioned colonial-Oedipal paradigm of masculinity, typified in Declan Kiberd’s ‘Fathers and Sons’ (1996). Jock doubts that he is really the offspring of a ‘socialist timekeeper [who] only felt happy with the nation during the late forties and fifties’. ‘My father had no balls,’ he complains, ‘no wonder I despised him’ (J 128). Instead, as Kiberd proposes, Jock reinvents himself as the son of his schoolteacher, ‘mad Hislop’. However, in Gray’s novel, ‘this repudiation of the biological parent’ does not take on the ‘revolutionary character’ that Kiberd claims but rather the very opposite (1996: 385). As a former soldier of the British army, Hislop is the epitome of the colonial mimic man: his punitive methods are designated to suppress the articulation of an individual voice and eradicate any traces of the emasculated Scottish culture by installing an impenetrable masculine shell, ‘a spark of manhood’, in his entrusted boys whom he ridicules as ‘nothing but a bunch of big lassies’ (J 44). Jock remembers: ‘[Hislop] really believed that teaching small people to take torture from big people ... was a way of improving them’ (J 75).

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<sup>13</sup> The character of the Irish washerwoman, Old Mother Riley, was originally played by its creator, Arthur Lucan.

<sup>14</sup> Cited from Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1991), p. 149.

But whereas McLeish emulates a Hislopian manliness in his fantasies, in real life he seems like a replica of his weak, ineffectual father. For example, in his relationship with Helen, Jock assumes the feminine role: when she lies to him about her pregnancy to trick him into marriage, he wonders how he can explain to her ‘angry father that his daughter had used me like a whore, discarded me and then proposed marriage’ (J 287). Helen’s father, the appositely named Mr Hume, epitomises the traditional Scottish hardman that Andrew Noble famously termed ‘MacChismo’ (1981). The speech he delivers strongly reminds Jock of reading ‘a novel which gave an impression of curt masculine authority by having a single surname for the title. *Gillespie* by Hay? No. *McIlvannie* by Docherty? No. *Docherty* by McIlvannie [sic]’ (J 288). The playful confusion of titles and the typographical alteration of the real author, William McIlvanney, divulge alongside the *mise-en-abyme* structure of Mr Hume’s persona itself the fictive and replicative structure of patriarchal masculinity. The novel hereby confirms Butler’s observation ‘that “imitation” is at the heart of the *heterosexual* [and, one should add here, patriarchal] project and its gender binarisms ... that hegemonic [masculinity]<sup>15</sup> is itself a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealisations’ (1993: 125). As Jock feels compelled to emulate this hegemonic ideal in his fantasies, the gender identity of his “porn stars” is, in Butler’s words, similarly ‘constituted by a fantasy of a fantasy’ (1999: 175).

This is expressive of the restorative-repressive impulse of Jock’s allegorical imagiNation that always falls back on existing codes, types and meanings. Herein, it provides an explicit commentary on the relation of fantasy to reality, foregrounding the political and ethical implications this entails. As his short-time partner Sontag points out, his ‘fantasy has such a convincing political structure’ (J 57). That is, it not only replicates but actively produces the terms and conditions that dominate and oppress human subjects. In the framework of this study, it is interesting that Sontag makes an explicit comparison between the structural coordinates of Jock’s imagiNation and the political situation in Northern Ireland (J 50-1). Later, Jock realises that, ‘nowadays Britain is OF NECESSITY organised like a bad adolescent fantasy’ (J 129). Raising awareness about the ethical inferences of fantasy in the

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<sup>15</sup> The original states ‘heterosexuality’.

structuring of social reality, Sontag confronts Jock with the question of responsibility which he desperately seeks to avoid. 'If she succeeded in connecting them [i.e. his fantasies] to ordinary life,' he notes, 'she would make me feel responsible for every atrocity from Auschwitz to Nagasaki to Vietnam and the war in Ulster and I REFUSE TO FEEL GUILTY ABOUT EVERYTHING' (J 56).

McLeish's disavowal is underwritten by an appeal to the normative moralism of a patriarchal social order that works through the demarcation between personal and public realms. Accordingly, Jock legitimises the private abuse and punishment of his women by his own public adherence to accepted and expected social norms: '**I AM NOT A BAD MAN, I AM A GOOD MAN.** I did what my mother wanted, what my ex-wife wanted, what her father wanted,' he pleads. 'Surely, inside the privacy of this body and the secrecy of this skull I have earned the right to enjoy any woman I want in any way I can? But' (J 47). The incomplete objection expressed here indicates Jock's own circumspection about such a mechanistic justification of oppression. Throughout his account, Gray's character feels increasingly distressed by the suppressed awareness of his own implication in an exploitative regime based on iniquitous class and gender relations. *1982 Janine* makes clear that Jock must negotiate a deep sense of hatred of his masculine self. In analogue to Jameson's tenet of the political unconscious, for Jock, as Schoene suggests, masculinity is what 'hurts' (2000: 131) – what prevents, as a corollary of patriarchal History, the articulation of individual desire and 'sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis' (Jameson 2002: 88).

Jock's ultimate breakdown is triggered by his attempt to live up to the masculine ideal which, in turn, prevents him from living up to a human ideal of 'dignity and decency' (J 163); namely, to act as an ethical human being. This concerns, in particular, his cruel abandonment of his first girlfriend, the poor and unsophisticated yet endearingly loving Denny. Jock is haunted by a vision of her as a homeless, pregnant whore: 'Tonight everything I want to forget is returning. I am cracking apart. Till a moment ago the thought of Denny bearing our child yes, in complete helpless loneliness was what I most feared to remember' (J 117). This possibility of his unknown paternity undercuts the celebratory toast of anxious Scottish patrilineage – 'Here's tae us, wha's like us? Damn few, and they're a'deid' – with

Jock's admission: 'I am shit' (J 119). It is this apprehension of himself as the replicate of a despicable patriarchal order that instigates the need for a radical, quasi-Benjaminian dissociation from its oppressive influence. However, entrapped in the traumatic compulsiveness of his masculine conditioning, for Gray's protagonist the only viable solution seems suicide.

### **'O Yea': Symbolic Death and Ethical Awakening**

Taking an overdose of sleeping pills, Jock drifts into delirium – and it is here that the novel visually deconstructs the constituent parts of his masculine self. In the section entitled 'THE MINISTRY OF VOICES' (J 168-175), the phallogocentric 'I' of his narration decomposes into what Schoene notices as 'the three discrete Freudian components of superego, ego and id – represented by three typographically distinct columns' (2000: 140).<sup>16</sup> In these competing discourses, it is initially the voice of the ego that desperately seeks to reinstall its hegemony. Its influence becomes, however, steadily displaced, culminating on the last two pages in the creation of a typographic design that resembles a XY shape (J 174-75). I want to suggest that this indicates the abjection of his male ego which is replaced by a feminine principle, heralded by the orgasmic 'o yea yea yea yea yea . . .' that punctuates Jock's vomiting (J 175). As Schoene observes, this notably resounds Molly Bloom's assertion of female subjectivity at the ending of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (2000: 142).

Accordingly, after falling into unconscious sleep (represented by three blank pages), Jock dreams that he is rescued by an incommensurable female force who takes him on an unprecedented journey that precipitates what I wish to call his ethical awakening: 'She was driving dangerously but well, I knew I would laugh out loud and still love her if the car crashed. Which happened. Bang! ... and suddenly a voice near my elbow, speaking so distinctly that it woke me up, said, "His room is burning"' (J 181). This voice and its enunciation of a burning that seems located outside the dream evoke Sigmund Freud's account of the dream of the burning

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<sup>16</sup> This corresponds to Gray's own explication in an interview that these columns represent 'the voice of his body', 'his deranged libido fantasies [which alternate] with his deranged conscience', and 'in very small print, the voice of God' (Acker 1986: 89).

child.<sup>17</sup> However, in contrast to the father of the Freudian dream, Jock wakes up to a different reality than to the one transmitted in the dream: ‘It is *not* burning yet these words seemed still very hopeful. I don’t know why’ (J 181). Jock’s lack of an epistemological understanding, while nonetheless trusting his sensual one, suggests that the purpose of these words is not to inform him about an objective reality but, instead, to trigger an ethical response. For, it is not just the sudden confrontation with his own symbolic death in the dream but the voice itself that wakens him. In this respect, while the Jockian dream is evidently different from the one which fascinated both Freud and Lacan so much, the voice which addresses Jock here seems, nonetheless, to have a similar imperative than the one Cathy Caruth discerns in her Lacanian rereading of the Freudian dream in ‘Traumatic Awakenings’: that is, its words transmit an appeal from an inaccessible beyond or otherness (that is here explicitly designated as female) to ‘*wake up ... [and] survive, survive to tell the story*’ (1995b: 101). Jock thus awakens with the question, ‘What story is left for me to tell?’, comprehending it an appellation directed to ‘man ... to tell truthfully how he reached this pointless place in order to say Goodbye to it and go elsewhere. If he wants change’, to which Jock immediately replies: ‘Which I do’ (J 181). The telling of ‘the story of *how I went wrong*’ opens for Jock, then, the possibility of his ethical reincarnation; for becoming ‘a new man [or, at least] not the same man, anyway’ (J 330).

The second part of *1982 Janine* is written as Jock’s confessional memoir, investigating his gendered rite of passage ‘From the Cage to the Trap’ (J 181). In a comparable manner to the female characters in my previous chapter, Jock must re-remember himself through his suppressed memory, rather than his fantasies, in order to re-(en)gender himself. Here again, it is through the process of reclaiming a silenced past that McLeish can escape the traumatic repetitiousness of patriarchal

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<sup>17</sup> Freud discusses this dream in the seventh chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). The dream itself is narrated as follows: ‘A father had been watching beside his child’s sick-bed for days and nights on end. After the child had died, he went into the next room to lie down, but left the door open so that he could see from his bedroom into the room in which the child’s body was laid out, with tall candles standing round it. An old man had been engaged to keep watch over it, and sat beside the body murmuring prayers. After a few hours’ sleep, the father dreamed that *his child was standing beside his bed, caught him by the arm and whispered to him reproachfully: ‘Father, don’t you see I’m burning?’* He woke up, noticed a bright glare of light from the next room, hurried into it and found that the old watchman had dropped off to sleep and that the wrappings and one of the arms of his beloved child’s body had been burned by a lighted candle that had fallen on them.’ (SE V 1953: 509).

history, which is evinced by the Marxian tenet that Jock recalls: ‘Those who forget their own history are condemned to repeat it – as farce’ (J 182). The farcical character is rather obsessively played out in his pornographic imagination, where the entertainment of a putatively all male audience is based on the subjugation and abuse of female bodies. But what Gray’s protagonist seeks to forget through this fantastical displacement is what simultaneously undercuts such an automatic account of oppression – namely, that Jock *is*, in fact, Janine. Reflecting on the origins of his pornographic dreams ‘about a free attractive greedy woman who ... finds she is not free at all but completely at the disposal of others’ who corrupt her ‘into enjoying her bondage’, Jock realises: ‘this was the story of my own life. I avoided doing so by insisting on the *femaleness* of the main character’ (J 183). Recognising himself in the position of the female whose articulation of individual desire is manipulated and rearticulated by those omniscient ‘others’, on the one hand, what Jock is doing here merely recreates the traditional gendered matrix of the colonial-national paradigm: in appropriating the feminine to stage his own sense of oppression, he again reduces ‘woman’ to nothing more than a symbol of his own emasculation and, thus, by implication, of the ‘castrated’ nation. This is typified by Craig’s reading, for whom ‘Jock is symbol of Scotland precisely to the extent that he has translated himself into a feminine’ (1999: 187).

I want to suggest that the novel, at the same time, resists such a straightforward transformism precisely by virtue of its allegorical form. Hence, it not only restores but also undermines and questions the categories that constitute such a gendered account of oppression. For what *1982 Janine* instigates (and what is further expanded in McCabe’s novel) is exactly *not* the unproblematic recovery of Jock’s ‘Scottish masculinity’ that Craig intimates, but rather what I wish – in following Marjorie Garber – to call an allegorical ‘category crisis’, which shatters the gendered distinctions that Craig’s reading seeks to reinstall (Craig: 191). With explicit concern to transvestism, Garber explains this as ‘a failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits border crossing from one (apparently distinct) category to another ... [This is] not just a category crisis of male and female, but the crisis of the category itself’ (1992: 16-17). Such an allegorical ‘crisis’ is generated when Gray’s character realises how to challenge the seemingly

fixed categories that defined both his and Janine's identity. After exposing his identification with Janine, Jock contemplates 'the moment [in his stories] when the trap starts closing and the victim feels the torture of being in two minds: wanting to believe, struggling to believe, that what is happening cannot be happening, can only happen to someone else. And I was right to be excited by that moment,' he explains, 'because it is the moment when, with courage, we change things' (J 183-4). According to Jock, it is by comprehending one's own – or rather someone else's – constructedness and entrapment in a hegemonic fantasy that a leeway for subversion and resistance is afforded. This affirms Butler's insistence that 'the "I" draws what is called its "agency" in part through being implicated in the very relations of power that it seeks to oppose. To be *implicated* in the relations of power, indeed, enabled by the regulations of power that the "I" opposes, is not, as a consequence, to be reducible to their exciting forms' (1993: 123). For Butler, there exists always an opportunity for re-articulation. Since gender is, in Butler's sense, '*a regulated process of repetition*', it is possible to repeat the given forms differently: "'Agency", then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation of that repetition' (1999: 185). Yet, as Gray shows in *1982 Janine*, Jock's formulation also insinuates that opposition to oppressive power structures furthermore derives from an appeal of 'the other', namely when imagining inequities happening 'to someone else' – in this case Janine.

Hence, Jock's and, by extension, Janine's freedom emerges through the fault lines in a hegemonic fantasy of congealed gender norms that are presented as universal and historically unvarying. So when Janine '*realises it is her inescapable fate to be a character in a story by someone who dictates every one of her movements and emotions*', Jock, too, understands that 'for more than twenty-five years ... [he] was a character in a script written by National Security' (J 322-3). It is now that Jock remembers that he can actually refuse to collude with a system that oppresses not only him but also others. Consequently, he resigns from his job, recalling the moment when he stood up against Hislop's tyrannical regime in response to the violence inflicted on one of his classmates. As Jock notes, this ethical intervention made others 'glad [he] existed' (J 327). In turn, in the very last scene of Jock's pornographic imaginings, the eponymous heroine of Gray's novel equally counters

her inscription as the passive spectacle of sexist oppression by defiantly reclaiming her agency: ““Act calm,” thinks Janine. “Pretend this is just an ordinary audition.” And then she thinks, “Hell no! Surprise them. Shock them. Show them more than they’ve ever expected to see”” (J 331).

### **Becoming: Jock’s Feminine Reincarnation**

In these last pages of *1982 Janine*, the destructive-revolutionary impulse of its allegorical imagination gives way to a redemptive mode. When Jock breaks into passionate weeping, his tears materialise in vertical rows of consecutive variations around the word ‘Ach’ (J 327- 330). Schoene reads this as an example of Hélène Cixous’ notion of *écriture féminine*, with Gray ‘consigning the articulation of Jock’s emotionality to a pure writing from the body’ (2000: 143). Such a move away from the melancholic phallogocentric discourse that dominated Jock’s being becomes even more pronounced if we consider his grieving as a process of mourning about what Carole Jones terms ‘the Man that was’ (2007: 211). Jones takes this idea from Braidotti, who argues that ‘we need rituals of burial and mourning for the dead, including and especially the ritual of burial of the Woman that was ... We need to take collectively the time for the mourning of the old socio-symbolic contract and thus mark the need for a change’ (1997: 529). Simultaneously, as Jones suggests, this entails the need to bury the hegemonic ideal of patriarchal masculinity and say farewell to that first sex which prescribed our being-in-the-world far too long. Investigating and evaluating the damaging and destructive mechanisms of the monomania of ‘Man’, *1982 Janine* expresses a sincere demand for a radical extrication from the phallogocentric model of ‘man-as-being’ in order to open the way for a new modality beyond polarised gender relations. This is intimated when Jock, after his weeping, wonders: ‘What is this queer slight bright fluttering sensation as if a thing weighted down for a long time was released and starting, a little, to stir?’ – and immediately decides: ‘Don’t name it. Let it grow’ (J 330). In refusing to employ the same definitional categories that produced and confined both his and Janine’s subject position, Jock opens himself to the idea of becoming.

The notion of ‘becoming’ has specifically reached prominence in critical theory and philosophy through the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, for whom becoming is immanent to both thinking and desire. In her study *Gilles Deleuze*, Claire Colebrook notes that ‘thought *is* becoming ... The task is to think without models, axioms or grounds’ (2002: 126). Furthermore, in *Nomadic Subjects*, Braidotti argues that ‘the intense redefinition of the activity of thought entails [for Deleuze] a vision of subjectivity as a bodily, affective entity’ (1994: 112). At the close of Gray’s novel, Jock, hoping to ‘breed new ideas, revive old ones [and] think’, pictures himself in the future: ‘I will have the poise of an acrobat about to step on a high wire, of an actor about to take stage in a wholly new play. Nobody will guess what I am going to do. I do not know it myself. But I will not do nothing. No, I will not do nothing. *O Janine, my silly soul, come to me now. I will be gentle. I will be kind*’ (J 331; my emphasis). Jock envisages here a newly embodied subjectivity that is performative as well as transformative. In *Patterns of Dissonance*, Braidotti herself evokes ‘the talents of a tightrope-walker, an acrobat’, whose image she takes as her frontispiece, to picture the challenge of needing ‘to establish new balances, to invent new ways of thinking’ without falling into what she calls with regard to the Foucauldian epigraph of this chapter ‘the void’ (1991: 14-15). As discussed in the beginning, the tightrope above this void has been conspicuously stretched by recourse to the feminine.

In this respect, Jock’s embrace of Janine – not just as his other but as part of his self, constituting what Gavin Wallace calls ‘a new-found hermaphrodite identity’ (1994b: 223) – must be regarded with suspicion. Schoene considers Jock’s identification ‘with the potentially subversive position of feminine marginality ... as a way of saying “no” to power’ (2000: 143; with reference to Silverman 1992), foreboding what he proposes in his later article as ‘a devolutionary kind of masculinity’ (2002: 95). But while this may, indeed, prove ‘an irresistible emancipatory principle’ for – to borrow the title of Silverman’s study – a *male* subjectivity at the margins, as Schoene contends (2000: 143), is it necessarily also one for his female counterpart? What are the implications for woman if man transmigrates into his historical ‘other’; becomes ‘woman’, as it were?

Significantly, Deleuze and Guattari’s redefinition of subjectivity, which they outline in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), starts exactly at this point: ‘all becomings

begin with and pass through becoming-woman. It is the key to all the other becomings,' they claim (1988: 277). The reason for this lies precisely in the fact of woman being positioned as the other to man, as Colebrook explains: 'because man has been taken as the universal ground of reason and good thinking, becoming must begin with his opposite' (2000: 2). It is worth stressing here, as Braidotti does, that for Deleuze the reference to 'woman' does not denote empirical females; 'on the contrary, Deleuze corrodes the metaphysical certainty of the polarity between the sexes and aims at undoing the appeal of the authority of experience founded on the regime of fixed and steady identities,' Braidotti argues in 'Nomadism with a difference' (1996: 307). One of the problems with this dissolution of sexed identities is that it neutralises sexual difference and, thereby, the specific historical and epistemological reality and experiences of women. This has raised a number of feminist objections to the Deleuze-Guattarian project. For instance, Luce Irigaray has pointed out that the association of the feminine with non-being, fragmentation, flux and fluidity describes nothing else than woman's 'historical condition' of bodily dispossession, which I discussed in my previous chapter (1985: 140-1). Irigaray and Braidotti as well as Spivak, furthermore, contend that in failing to consider the epistemological standpoint of the white heterosexual male philosopher, a symmetrical relation between the two sexes is presumed (Ibid.; Spivak 1994).

I want to propose that the contradictions of the Deleuze-Guattarian project are reflected in the allegorical imagination of Gray's novel. Just as the notion of a generalised, sex- and gender-free becoming upholds 'woman' in a privileged role, thus intrinsically resting on a profound opposition between the sexes, so too *1982 Janine* bases its pornographic imagiNation on a fundamental sexual asymmetry, while seeking to transcend this difference through Jock's feminisation in the end. It is notable how the material problematic of iniquitous and hierarchical gender relations is here, seemingly miraculously, envisioned to be overcome through the embrace of the feminine. Interestingly, in his *Trauerspiel* study, Benjamin observes a comparable miracle-solution in Baroque allegory, whereby its contradictory meanings are transcended by becoming an allegory of their opposite. Thus, death – the final signified – becomes itself a signifier of transitoriness, 'as the allegory of *resurrection*'. Benjamin argues that,

the immersion of allegory has to clear away the final phantasmagoria of the objective and ... re-discovers itself, not playfully in the earthly world of things, but seriously under the eyes of heaven. And this is the essence of melancholy immersion: that its ultimate objects ... turn into allegories, and that these allegories fill out and deny the void in which they are represented, just as, ultimately, the intention does not faithfully rest in the contemplation of bones, but faithlessly leaps forward to the idea of resurrection. (2003: 232-3)

This theological resolution of the Baroque allegory evokes, in my view, the allegorical transformation of today's postmodern post-mortem discourses, which are redeemed, as it were, through becoming 'woman'. The feminine could, thus, be said to function as the ultimate object and unfaithful end-point to 'fill out and deny the void' left by the so-called death of man in an inherently masculine, melancholic-allegorical reflection that Benjamin criticises for its disregard of material reality. Both the Deleuze-Guattarian as well as the Grayean allegorical imagination neglect to contemplate the 'bones', as it were, of women's 'earthly' existence, preferring instead to rediscover the female as 'the allegory of resurrection' – the resurrection of man that is. Hence, whilst the ending of *1982 Janine* redeems Jock as a 'new man' and envisions for him a re-embodied subjectivity, it, however, offers none for his alter Janine, whose rejection of her pornographic inscription is notably confined to her body. Braidotti, for one, insists that there are considerably different 'masculine and feminine paths' to overcoming the hegemonic inscription in a phallogocentric system: 'Whereas women need to repossess subjectivity by reducing their confinement to the body ... men need to repossess their abstracted bodily self by shedding some of the exclusive rights to transcendental consciousness' (1997: 527-8). It is through the transvestism of McCabe's protagonist that the challenge to negotiate both demands is more fully played out.

## II. BECOMING (M)OTHER: Patrick McCabe's *Breakfast on Pluto*

### Dragging Drag: The Troubles of Becoming Woman

In contrast to a metaphorical as well as to the traditional conception of 'becoming woman', McCabe's protagonist, Patrick Braden, asserts an active and very personal bodily desire to literalise this notion, namely 'to get a vagina' (BoP 40). In particular, it is by renaming himself 'Pussy' (or 'Puss') that genitally male Patrick enacts his feminisation. However, as we shall see, such an unambiguous gendering is in this novel constantly pre-empted.<sup>18</sup> *Breakfast on Pluto* illustrates the struggle of this marginal male-to-female homosexual cross-dresser to construct not only a secure bodily self but also gain access to a stable subject position within the complex matrix of class, gender and nation that inscribe Pussy's being.

While there is nothing inherently subversive or politically enabling in drag performances as such,<sup>19</sup> Butler insists that 'a man in drag as a woman' nonetheless generates 'a destabilisation that is denaturalizing and that calls into question the claims of normativity and originality by which gender and sexual oppression sometimes operate' (1993: 128). Yet, Pussy's material reality continues to be determined by even these norms that underpin the heterosexual power matrix. Orphaned and from a deprived Irish background, when Pussy decides to leave her foster home her survival comes to depend solely on her body, that is, her embodiment of the patriarchally sanctioned feminine role which consists here explicitly in offering sexual services for economic maintenance and protection. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler observes that becoming a 'real' woman constitutes for transvestites often 'the site of the phantasmatic promise of a rescue from poverty, homophobia and racist delegitimation' (1993: 130).<sup>20</sup> As a prostitute in London,

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<sup>18</sup> It is due to this explicit wish to (en)gender himself as female that I will henceforth predominantly use the female pronoun for McCabe's character. When referring to Patrick Pussy's parentage, I will indicate both gender pronouns.

<sup>19</sup> Butler notes how official culture produces homosexual excess in films such as *Tootsie* (1982), or *Some Like It Hot* (1959) only to absorb it back into the heterosexual matrix (1993: 126). In her critique of Jennie Livingston's documentary about drag balls in 'Is Paris Burning?', bell hooks furthermore argues that images of black men in drag often serve to reinstall a specific 'racialized fictional construction of the "feminine" ... that is to say, when the idealized notion of the female/feminine is really a sexist idealization of white womanhood' (1996: 216-7).

<sup>20</sup> Butler makes this observation with regard to Livingston's film *Paris Is Burning* (1990).

Pussy is not only marginalised in terms of class and gender but, moreover, marked as the racial other, in particular with regard to the IRA bombings with which she becomes, by virtue of being Irish, associated. Poverty-stricken and emaciated, Puss becomes the near victim of a perverse sex murder, suffers police harassment and imprisonment, and eventually ends up in a mental institution. For McCabe's protagonist, truly, 'the problem is [not] one of a becoming-minority', to quote Deleuze, since as a transvestite, prostitute, lunatic, and on top of all poor and Irish, s/he is already one (cited in Jardine 1985: 215).<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, gender and, in particular, heterosexual femininity become for Puss 'the vehicle for the phantasmatic transformation of that nexus of race and class' that marks her subalternity (Butler 1993: 130). However, a total 'transubstantiation of gender' (as Butler calls it) is for Patrick Pussy not possible since her economic substantiation is, in turn, tied to her punter's discernment that she is in fact genitally male.

Caught between the conflicting demands of appearing feminine while being male, the category crisis that Puss's transgenering heralds is, furthermore, far from welcome in her local Irish community: at first only reprimanded to 'stop this anti-social behaviour [and] ... fit in' (BoP 11), her transgressive sexuality is either chastised by '*slapping*' (BoP 13), humiliation, threats and assault, or ostracised by stares that say: 'Who or *what* are you?' (BoP 193). These reactions, which are conspicuously silenced in Pussy's account, attest to her abject status in society. Butler explains that 'the abject' designates those 'bodies' that do not adhere to the heterosexual matrix and, therefore, 'do not enjoy the status of subject, but whose living under the sign of 'unlivable' is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject [...] These excluded sites come to bound the "human" as its constitutive outside, and to haunt those boundaries as the persistent possibility of their disruption and rearticulating' (1993: 3, 8). Hence, as with the allegorical form that I have described above, the abject is, on the one hand, restorative of the social order while threatening to destroy it at the same time. This explains the cultural anxiety that homosexuality and particularly cross-dressing produce. As Jonathan Dollimore argues, the real threat that homoerotic desire poses is not its intrinsic difference but its actual sameness, namely that 'civilisation actually depends upon that which is

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted from Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues* (Paris: Flammarion, 1977), p. 11.

usually thought to be incompatible with it' (1992: 9). Similarly, Éibhear Walshe uses Nandy's model to suggest that if 'the homosexual is assumed to be a transgendered "pretend" woman ... gay identity is acutely threatening and unsettling within any post-colonial culture' (1996: 161).

It is, thus, significant that McCabe uses the figure of a gay transvestite to allegorise the crucial years of the contemporary political upheavals on the island. As mentioned before, Pussy functions, on the one hand, as 'a fictionalization of Mother Ireland', as McCabe confirms in an interview (Freedman 1999: n.p.), but by virtue of his original naming and association with the IRA also as a national soldier. Hence, Pussy becomes the simultaneous embodiment of mother and son of the Irish imagiNation, which Moynagh Sullivan reads with regard to Seamus Heaney's 'construction of himself as the mother of Irish identity' to illustrate the desire to connect both sides of the Irish border. Sullivan bases this on Garber's characterisation of cross-dressing as 'fundamentally related to other kinds of boundary-crossing' (Garber 1997: 165), arguing that the "'unmarked" transvestism' of Heaney's poetry is intended to signal 'how a divided Ireland can be restored to a state of wholeness through fetishisation what in psychoanalytical terms is known as the maternal phallus' (Sullivan 2005: 456). Pussy's double interpellation seems to indicate a similar desire to restore and preserve this ideal of originary unity, which, as we shall see, is similarly fetishised through the maternal phallus. But the novel concomitantly expresses the debilitating and dividing effects of such a melancholic imagiNation.

In maternal attire, McCabe's narrator introduces us in two short preludes to her autobiographical reflections, entitled 'The Life and Times of Patrick Braden', which make out the remainder of the book. This metanarrative superimposition of dissonant gender identities emphasises the performative nature of Pussy's putative memoir, which shifts between first and third person reports. Pussy's gendered double consciousness is reflected by the pronominal confusions that recur, for example in this third-person account: 'when *he* [Patrick] was unceremoniously thrown out of his abode, fag-puffing workmen hammering planks across the door as Puss *she* weepily waved goodbye ... "Oh fuck off, *Mrs* Braden!" bawled one of them and chased *him* with a plank' (BoP 52; my emphasis). This indiscriminate oscillation between gender

designations seems to exemplify Butler's notion 'that drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity' (1999: 174). However, while this suggests fluidity, if not a dissolution of sexed identity, for Pussy, these contradictory claims have not the envisaged emancipatory effect but, rather, indicate the traumatic loss of a stable bodily self and the processes of psychic splitting that Pussy, similarly to Jock, attempts to negotiate through her memoir.

As with Gray's novel, this is indicated in the novel's very form and structure. Like many of McCabe's other novels (particularly *The Dead School*, discussed above), *Breakfast on Pluto* is narrated as a distorted fantasy. Pussy's account of her former life begins in a rather suspicious fairy-tale fashion – 'It was a beautiful crisp Christmas morning' (BoP 7) – and it does not fail to include its typical marker – 'Once upon a time' (BoP 8) – invoking a distanced time and place. Indeed, McCabe describes the novel as 'a fairy story', with a telling double connotation (Freedman 1999: n.p.). Garber notes that 'psychoanalytically, transvestism is a mechanism that functions by *displacement* and *through fantasy* to enact a scenario of desire' (1997: 172), which can certainly be related to Pussy's desire to engender both self and nation through her memoir. But as with *1982 Janine*, this fantastical displacement is brutally disrupted by History, what Jameson calls 'the experience of Necessity', which finds form here in the historical reality of the 1970s and 80s 'Troubles' (2002: 87). Pussy's memoir oscillates between accounts of the past, reflections on fashion and fancies about her parentage, love and revenge, and rather gruesome details of sectarian violence. It is this narrative conflation between the personal and the political, fantasy and reality that critics find so particularly disturbing about this novel. Clare Wallace, for instance, complains: 'The apparently indiscriminate shifts from the trivial or fantastical to accounts of violent sectarian murder are shocking and gratuitous but it remains impossible to determine if any of the events ... can be understood as outside of Pussy's perpetually attention seeking performance' (2004: 152).

The narrator's exaggerated citations of a stereotypical femininity, reflected in the highly stylised mode of narration, make her memoir not merely unreliable, but what Spivak calls a 'scrupulous fake' (1983: 186). For Jennifer Jeffers, such a 'duplicity',

as she calls it, even poses the question of whether Pussy is not ‘directly involved in the IRA’ and, thus, culpable for the recounted atrocities (2002: 170).<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to relate this charge to Spivak’s critique of Friedrich Nietzsche and Derrida’s association of women with dissimulation and masquerade in her ‘Displacement’ essay: Spivak argues that Nietzsche’s characterisation of female orgasm as fake constitutes a displacement of woman, which Derrida doubly repeats by extrapolating it to women’s writing, whereby “its author in fact disappears” (1983: 175).<sup>23</sup> As argued above, in its mode, form and gendering, *Breakfast on Pluto* generates such a displacement, in which its apparent author virtually disappears. At the same time, writing becomes the feminised matter/matrix out of which Pussy – and by analogue the nation – struggles to engender her/himself. For the body of the text is, Sullivan notes with regard to Heaney, also ‘the matter/mater of Ireland’ (2005: 454). As with Jock, this makes Puss, then, as much product as well as producer – matter and mater – of a melancholic imagiNation.

### **(En)Gendering: Self, (Imagi)Nation and Violence**

Accordingly, what all her transgressive transvestism seems to undermine, Pussy’s account faithfully restores: namely, the original gendered power matrix of the national-colonial model. This holds for both the more realistic scenes as well as her more fantastical imaginings. The first description of a sectarian killing concerns the cold murder of a Down syndrome boy, Laurence, and the rape of his mother, which is particularly disturbing as the details of the killing are superimposed onto Laurence’s ‘favourite [TV] programme – *Celebrity Squares*’ (BoP 46). If this functions as a distancing device, it also effects a specific gendering, namely to queer not only the report stylistically but moreover the victim, not merely by virtue of his enthusiasm for a celebrity show but especially by having the men adorn him with rosary beads ‘around his neck like a garland’ (Ibid.). This account thus replicates the gendered binary that produces in both colonial and national discourse a simplistic and quasi-biologically determined account of violence, as discussed in Chapter 4. In

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<sup>22</sup> Jeffers argues, for example, that Pussy’s enacted ‘simulacrum of the heterosexual norm’ can be read as a means ‘to elude detection as a participant in the war in the North’ (2002: 160).

<sup>23</sup> Cited from Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago UP, 1981), p. 228.

fact, violence, in Pussy's reports, is always carried out by men. This is also particularly evident in the story of Patrick Pussy's own conception. Obsessed with the details of a presumably traumatic event whose facts remain inaccessible to McCabe's protagonist, Puss invents, in a way comparable to Gray's narrator, the story of *his* creation, decidedly narrating *herself* into existence. As Jeffers rightly asserts, this can be seen 'as an attempt to *engender* herself' (2002: 162). In the episode 'Breakfast is Served', Pussy composes the story of how his/her teenage mother, Eily Bergin, is raped by the local parish priest, Father Bernard. The brutality of this primal scene is again suspiciously obscured by the stylised account which, nonetheless, divulges a distinct phallic *telos* – the Father's 'one-eyed, one-horned flying purple weenie-poker ... stop[ping] at nothing now until he had [Eily] destroyed with sticky stabs and practically broken' (BoP 28).

With regards to the novel's allegorical form, this act 'brings to light the deeds of violence which,' according to Renan, 'took place at the origin of all political formations' (1994: 11). But as the novel reveals, this is often a specifically gendered violence, carried out on female bodies. If this suggests a critique of the gender politics of the Irish state, it is furthermore worth noticing that Pussy's account intimates that it is a particular masculine imagination that triggered the deed. This is indicated in allusion to the novel's title, which stems from the 1969 Don Partridge chart hit. This song gains here a very different meaning to the one commonly associated with its refrain, cited by Pussy on these pages: 'Go anywhere without leaving your chair/ and let your thoughts run free/ Living within all the dreams you can spin...' (BoP 29). Rather than eulogising the emancipatory nomadism of thoughts and dreams, Pussy's story emphasises the material consequences that such fantasies have on physical bodies, particularly on female ones: for, Puss suggests, it is because 'naughty Papa ... left *his* chair to do his naughty wandering' that the rape took place (BoP 29). Herein, the novel exposes the dangers of a disembodied, apparently liberating imagiNation which uses a maternal matrix/matter to forge its birth into being.

Significantly, Pussy's narration is marked by a similar disembodiment. But unlike Jock's, this is related to the psychological phenomenon of dissociation, what Pussy's therapist, Terence, calls 'an out-of-body experience' (BoP 147). It is noteworthy that

this detachment from reality always appears in association with patriarchal or patriotic violence; namely, with regard to her mother or sectarian atrocities. For example, it is when her lover's landlady, Louise, masquerades as her mother that Puss initially experiences this state (BoP 114). Whilst later imprisoned for her alleged involvement in an IRA bombing, Pussy describes herself floating 'somewhere in the region of 2.5 billion miles from [the earth]' (BoP 144). This bodiless nomadism stands in an ironic contrast to the deterritorialized models of subjectivity proposed by so much 'post'-theory.

Filled with hatred against the father, it is the mother who becomes Puss's primary object of gender identification, and also a means for her re-embodiment. Her analyst tells his patient, whom he tellingly calls 'Patrick', that s/he 'always secretly wanted to *become* her. Eily. After all,' Terence suggests, 'she could hardly walk away then!' (BoP 94). I want to propose that the mother figure represents the lost ideal, the maternal phallus that stands, according to Garber, for 'originary wholeness' (1997: 172). As with Jock's, Patrick Pussy's melancholic imagiNation is inscribed with the desire for such an 'impossible and imagined' state (Garber: 172). For while Puss, in Lacanian terms, appears to both 'have' and 'be' the phallus, it is the actual loss of it that transvestism, as Garber argues, is designed to conceal (167). Hence, in styling herself in her mother's fantasy image – 'sitting here in my old silly coat and headscarf' (BoP 1), as she states at the beginning – Pussy preserves the mother (as the lost object) on the surface of her body. In 'Melancholy Gender', Butler explains this process of 'melancholic *incorporation*': 'Insofar as identification is the psychic preserve of the object, and such identifications come to form the ego, then the lost object continues to haunt and inhabit the ego as one of its constitutive identifications and is, in that sense, made coextensive with the ego itself' (1995: 22-23).

McCabe's narrator proves, indeed, haunted and inhabited by his/her mother – both in her inner and outer psychic space. Repeatedly, Pussy mistakes any 'woman in a housecoat or a headscarf' for her lost mother (BoP 93). After composing, on request of her therapist, an account of his/her father's repressive rite of passage in the seminar, Puss imagines his/her mother's upbringing in a loving family home, in which Eily comes to embody the unblemished ideal of Irish femininity: 'something pure and clean and wholesome. White as driven snow' (BoP 127). The mother

fantasy thus functions, furthermore, to redeem the image of the ideal nation that the story of Puss's conception corrupts; it restores an ideal of wholeness that, as Wendy Brown notes in relation to Benjamin, 'lives in empty time rather than the time of the Now' (2001: 170). The clearest example of this is Pussy's 'little piece about home', which offers a poignant parody of the de Valerian dream:

Here in this one small cottage, there is a feeling of peacefulness. Which is so overwhelming that it appears as if this is how it has been right from the beginning of time. What we see before us is a fine, stone cottage, built by the labouring hands of a gentle, strong man who is husband to the woman who now softly reads to her bright baby boy whose name is known to all as Patrick. (BoP 108)

The temporal standstill created by this image suggests a nostalgic longing for a petrified utopia of congealed binary gender roles – with a 'daddy, hardy brow sweatbeaded' and a 'wonder-mother ... who bakes bread ... and scrubs the floor' (BoP 109).

Butler proposes that 'in drag performances, perhaps it is a loss that is refused and incorporated in the performed identification, one that reiterates a gendered idealization and its radical uninhabitability' (1995: 32). Drag, she writes, thus 'allegorizes some set of melancholic incorporative fantasies that stabilize *gender*' (Butler: 33). This is made apparent in *Breakfast on Pluto*: while Pussy emulates the feminine ideal of her imaginative mother, her preferred love objects conform to the hegemonic masculine ideal that is evoked in the above fantasy. 'I want to be married to a real man,' Puss declares. 'A rock' (BoP 136). Besides the sexually and politically hyper-virile 'Dummy Teat' whose nickname suggests his imitative structure, Pussy falls for his putative 'English version', the strangler-pervert 'Silky String' (BoP 64, 63); Brendan Cleave, 'because he was so big and tall' (BoP 190); and eventually her analyst Dr Harkin – 'Big oaken-armed Terence!' (BoP 115). In particular, it is with Terence that Pussy imagines realising the heterosexual ideal of 'lov[ing] one another like any man and woman should' (BoP 96). If Pussy's aspiration 'to settle down, safe and snug beneath an arm so big and bearlike' (BoP 136) is, as argued above, underwritten by the desire to escape her dire reality, on the other hand, it seeks to enact the national ideal.

But in contrast to the seraphic vision of her mother, Pussy is what has been called a ‘fallen’ woman. As the corrupted version of the celestial ideal of femininity and deprived of the ‘maternal-body’, the body of the prostitute illustrates, as Christine Buci-Glucksmann argues in ‘Catastrophic Utopia’, ‘the destructive impulse of allegory – with its loss of aura, veils, immortality. But this destructive utopia is also critical,’ Buci-Glucksmann writes with reference to Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*, ‘it admits of a positive aspect – “the dissipation [*Austreibung*] of appearances,” the demystification of all reality that presents itself as an “order,” a “whole”’ (1986: 226). Hence, if Puss’s fantasy mother represents (as the maternal phallus) the myth of wholeness – the ideal nation – Pussy becomes, in turn, the emblem of its failure – the Irish state – with the material reality of the capitalist state inscribed on her prostituted body.<sup>24</sup> For Benjamin, the prostitute is one of the prime dialectical images of capitalist modernity in her ambivalence of being both ‘commodity and seller in one’ (1973: 171). This indicates the paradox that this figure presents: as a commodified object, she seems utterly passive; yet it is her own object-status that functions, at the same time, as the basis of asserting herself as a subject agent. This makes Puss both emblematic of and dangerous to the state; she is one of those unruly abject bodies that need to be policed and contained.

Ironically, it is when incarcerated that McCabe’s protagonist reclaims a recalcitrant ‘feminine’ agency – if only imaginary. As ‘Paddy Pussy’ she becomes in one of her cell hallucinations ‘the undisputed leader of the [bombing] unit’ (BoP 148). It is significant that a pronominal alteration occurs here again: the assumed identity is initially male – ‘slipping into one of *his* many luxurious evening gowns’ – but then shifts into female (BoP 146). While Jeffers takes this scene to indicate the possibility that Pussy actually *is* a terrorist (2002: 173-4), I want to suggest that the terror of the protagonist rather consists in terrorising the strictly policed boundaries of a masculinist imagiNation. In another delusion, Puss imagines herself as ‘*the Lurex Avenger*’ who perfumes her village against ‘the stench’ that is associated with masculine sectarian violence (BoP 156-169). Interestingly, Pussy envisions her explicitly female role as a feminised enlightenment project: ‘She who shall be named Stench-Banisher, Perfume-Bringer, Flower-Scatterer, Ender of Darkness, she who

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<sup>24</sup> This argument is informed by Sullivan’s discussion of Heaney in ‘The Treachery of Wetness’ (2005: 462).

shall wrench this place and people from the shadows into light!’ (BoP 155). But it is in her other imaginary acts of reprisal that Pussy exhibits a more menacing and castrating power, as when she shoots the loyalist gunman ‘Big Vicky’ with his own gun and sets fire to her/his father’s church, the symbolic seat of his phallic power. Destroying the manhood of the primary agents of patriarchal violence, Pussy becomes here what Naomi Schor calls ‘the most fearsome of female monsters: the castrating woman’ (1989: 102). Again, it is worth noting here that if the framework of a distinctly patriarchal imagiNation denies women agency, any expression of the latter can only be asserted within its regulative frame, namely as hysteric and monstrous. This is illustrated when McCabe’s protagonist vengefully sets fire to the hair of another woman who dares to talk to her chosen love object (BoP 194). As this act occurs this time in Pussy’s reality, it re-imbricates her in a heterosexual matrix where ‘female’ agency is ultimately absorbed by men.

### **Becoming Mother: Ethical Redemption and Oedipal Rebirth**

However, I want to suggest that it is Pussy’s identification with the mother that also generates what could be termed a feminine *ethical* agency, which, in a comparable manner to *1982 Janine*, indicates the desire to undercut the patriarchal hegemony of her imagiNation. This is indicated in her reflections surrounding the episode ‘The Incident Behind the Creamery’, which details how Pussy warns a local fifteen-year-old girl to stay away from a married man who sexually uses her only to testify his virility, whereby she might get pregnant. Rather than being involved in sectarian politics, as Jeffers suggests, Pussy’s involvement in the sexual politics of her local community is driven by an appeal for people ‘to understand’, she stresses, the traumatic effects that unwanted teenage pregnancies have not only for the mother but also for the child, as s/he him/herself experienced (BoP 103). These issues came to fore in 1950s Ireland with the controversy over the Mother and Child Health Scheme, put forward by Noel Browne to provide free health care for all mothers and children up to the age of sixteen, which was ferociously opposed by the Catholic

Church and thus never implemented.<sup>25</sup> Puss notes the dire consequences this sanctioning of ‘private’ sexual morality has for mothers and children alike: ‘The estate in Tyreelin is full of them. Barely over fourteen, some of them, already pushing buggies and looking years older than they are. And their children ... staring with those sad old, empty eyes. Eyes that say: “*Who will love me? Why will no one love me?*”’ (BoP 106). Haunted by these ghostly images, Puss decides to revisit the ‘crime scene’ where the alleged sexual abuse of Martina took place. In parody of the detective work involved in a crime, Puss describes herself as ‘crawling around my hands and knees with a flashlight, looking for traces of semen’ (BoP107). Upon finding some, she has a nervous breakdown: ‘I think it was because it seemed so ridiculous,’ she notes, ‘that such a minuscule amount of liquid could cause so much heartache’ (BoP107). For Pussy, this semen – ‘the source of life’– signifies what Emmanuel Levinas calls ‘the trace of the Other’, which faces her with an incommensurable responsibility; she explains: ‘I just genuinely felt that if you bring someone into this world then it is your responsibility to care for and look after them! And if you don’t, then you are wrong and I don’t care who you are!’ (BoP101).

In this, the novel intimates an ethics of care. As discussed in my fourth chapter, compassion, nurture and receptivity towards others are traditionally aligned with the maternal. In fact, at two instances in her memoir, Pussy expresses her explicit desire to become a mother of her own. ‘[M]y fondest wish would be,’ she notes at the very end, ‘to wake up in the hospital with my family all around me, exhausted after my ordeal maybe, but with a bloom like roses in my cheeks, as I stroke his soft tender head, my little baby’ (BoP 199). For Levinas, maternity opens the possibility to disrupt the ontology of being that his ethical program opposes. Notably similar to Deleuze and Guattari, the feminine/woman<sup>26</sup> plays thus an important role in Levinas’ ethics: if in *Totality and Infinity* it is the feminine that is associated with alterity, in *Otherwise Than Being* maternity becomes the privileged trope for an ethical mode of subjectivity – what he elaborates as a ‘substitution of the same for the other’ (1981: 26). The maternal body enables, for Levinas, a ‘gestation of the other in the same’

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<sup>25</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Hug, *The Politics of Sexual Morality* (1999: 84-5); Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985* (1989: 315-21).

<sup>26</sup> As several critics observe, Levinas recurrently conflates sex and gender, which means that the feminine does not necessarily refer to an empirical woman, but at multiple instances throughout his work it actually does.

(1981: 75). In 'Ethics and the Feminine', Catherine Chaliel explains: 'As a subjectivity without substitute, the maternal body has to answer for the Other and is irreplaceable in this task. The maternal body suffers for the Other' (1991: 126). Such an image of maternal devotedness is invoked in the deathbed fantasy that Pussy has in the middle of the novel, in which 'all the children for whom, through thick and thin, you've broken your back' are gathered around her, and she dies 'safe in the knowledge that baby one [to] baby ten had all their lives been given it, and to the very end received it, that wonderful thing called love' (BoP 41). The unconditional being and 'suffering for another' turns here into a 'dying for the Other',<sup>27</sup> transcending the egoism of this most crucial ontological moment of being. To Levinas, maternity is 'an abandon without return' (1981: 79).

But in associating the feminine/woman with death, silence, passivity, mystery and domesticity, Levinas reiterates, as several feminist critics have pointed out, the most traditional and oppressive female stereotypes, particularly in his elevation of maternity. It seems rather problematic that woman only gains subjectivity through substitution – through sacrificing, dedicating and abandoning her *own* self for the other. For what Levinas neglects to mention or consider is that this is, again, merely the historical condition, if not, as Chaliel argues, 'the destiny of women' who have traditionally been consigned to the role of caretakers, mostly underpaid or unpaid and often bitterly exploited (2001: 178). In the Levinasian scenario, it furthermore remains questionable if woman can ever be or become the receiver of charity and of care herself. In 'Levinas Maternal Method', Donna Brody justifiably queries: 'This giving and this subjectivity is given from her, as her, by her, but one hesitates, finally, over whether it is given *to* her' (2001: 74). In *Breakfast on Pluto*, it is certainly never much given to McCabe's protagonist; and the ending returns us to the beginning where we encounter Pussy exiled, destitute, abandoned and demented in Kilburn, London.

However, it is her fantasies of becoming mother that also proclaim a redemptive counter-principle to the violence, violations and divisions that mark Pussy's existence – and by analogue that of the nation-state. Worrying about who will take care of her children once she is gone, Puss realises: 'Everyone would my children

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<sup>27</sup> For the notion of 'dying for the other', see Levinas *Of God Who Comes to Mind* (1998: 163).

love for they themselves knew love and shared it' (BoP 41). Such a utopian vision of universal love and care for the other is at the same time a blueprint for Ireland, recalling Leopold Bloom's messianic proclamation of love against the xenophobic hatred and nationalistic violence of the citizen in *Ulysses* (Joyce 1990: 333). Such a universal address is also advocated in Levinas's notion of maternity as the apex of ethical relations, which, as Stella Sandford notes in 'Masculine Mothers', is 'not intended to designate something exclusively female' and thus – as with Deleuze and Guattari's 'becoming woman' – available for both sexes (2001: 188). But what this non-biological, neutral concept displaces is what makes out the crucial difference between the figural and the literal, as it does between the performance of femininity and woman's actual body: namely, the womb, which is, as Sullivan asserts, 'most powerfully the mark of [woman's] discrimination in everything from legislation governing reproduction to the adequate provision of childcare' (2005: 460). As that which secures the procreation of the nation, it seems not surprising that the womb becomes, for Pussy, not only a metaphorical but also an authenticating means to engender both self and story, as well as nation. In her double role as simultaneous begetter and birth-giver, Pussy's account divulges a profound anxiety about being exposed as a 'fake': 'And who would ever to deny it dare?,' she questions. 'To say: "They are not hers! For she has no vagina!"' (BoP 41).

But just as this need for an authentic womanness would dissolve in such an ideal sexless world – as expressed by Puss' resolve that there would be no objection to her mothering – it is, too, a utopia based on what Sullivan describes as 'the transcendence of the matter/mater so that the textual father/son can be established as the locus of meaning' (2005: 453). With recourse to a specific trajectory divulged in Levinas' work, I want to propose that what the ending of *Breakfast on Pluto*, similar to *1982 Janine*, intimates is the displacement of the feminine/maternal with the restored primacy of the patriarchal/paternal. This is suggested by the fact that what McCabe's narrator is seeking to engender here is *not* a gender-neutral utopia beyond sexual polarities but a specifically sexed being – namely, a boy, joyfully proclaimed by the very words that end the novel: 'He's Ours' (BoP 199). This son, the ultimate *telos* of patriarchal maternity, indicates Pussy's own re-incarnation – as a boy, *not* a girl – through an oedipal rebirth that secures the patrilineage of the nascent nation.

In Levinas' work, the privileged father-son relation (advocated in *Totality and Infinity* and 'Time and the Other') becomes in *Otherwise Than Being* supplanted by the maternal. However, Sandford argues that the ethical proximity of the mother-child relation ultimately poses for Levinas the same problems as the erotic intimacy of the couple (discussed in *Totality and Infinity*); namely, both run 'the same risk of the exclusion of the third party' (2001: 198). As noted in my introduction, 'the third' (*le tiers*) designates for Levinas the communal relationships of the public and political realm, related to the institutions of the state, which are crucial for the realisation of social justice. But, as Sandford observes, when the ending of *Otherwise Than Being* reconsiders the importance of this third party, it is again conceived as 'a masculine community of brothers, that apparently neutral and universal community of human fraternity familiar from *Totality and Infinity*' (2001: 197). Thus, in order for 'ethical universality' to be realised, 'maternity must and does give way to paternity, that is, to the law of the father' (Sandford: 199). This regenerative paternal principle makes out what Brody calls a 'fatherly future', in which the identity of the father is both continued and discontinued in his son; that means, the father is both self and other than himself – a possibility not available for the mother, who must substitute self for the other (2001: 65). The son thus becomes the future for the father; a future Levinas describes from the point of view of the father as '[b]oth my own and non-mine, a possibility of myself but also a possibility of the other' (1979: 267) – that is, the possibility of *his* ethical rebirth. Adriaan Peperzak explains that 'the father desires his child as a renewal of his own desire ... The child is the other in which the father, who is the origin, has his own new beginning' (1993: 196). But this rebirth is really what Sullivan identifies (with regard to Heaney) as an 'oedipal rebirth' (2005: 453), which articulates what Irigaray's reformulation of the oedipal conflict suggests is 'a desire ... to take over the creative power of all worlds, especially the female world' (1991: 41-2).

This usurpation of the feminine and maternal is apparent in both *1982 Janine* and *Breakfast on Pluto*. Despite all their good intentions to transcend the phallogocentric patriarchal order, ultimately, both novels constitute in their ending the unfaithful leap towards the idea of resurrection that Benjamin objected to, in which masculine redemption is enabled by the feminine, whose material reality and specific

positioning and place is, in turn, erased. In his epigraph to the hardcover edition of *1982 Janine* (which disappears on the paperback), Gray quotes Alan Jackson: ‘Truly the remedy’s inside the disease and the meaning of being ill is to bring the eye to the heart.’ If in the previously discussed pathological analyses of man qua nation this disease is within the colonial-national model ascribed to their concomitant emasculation, the remedy, then, truly seems to consist in the embrace of their disavowed femininity. One is tempted to reformulate Spivak’s tenet here: the disease of man and nation consists in the metaphor of woman. And, as Spivak and other feminist critics have seminally pointed out, this leaves woman displaced in a limbo, which is not so much a *no man’s land*, but rather, as Brody astutely remarks, a ‘*no woman’s land*’. With specific regard to the Levinasian ethics, she notes that ‘the feminine, operates as the way. The way away from himself and back to himself. She has no way’ (2001: 74).

## CONCLUSION

The subaltern *aesthetical* approach of this thesis has maintained the importance of considering the *ethos* – the specific material positions and conditions of the subaltern in contemporary Irish, Northern Irish and Scottish literatures. This has been the basis for assessing to what extent and in what form the texts selected for discussion have enabled or foreclosed a space in which to make audible and visible, to explore and to challenge what I have called subaltern issues of disempowerment and oppression, pertaining to the aspects of class and gender in particular. The texts I have chosen differ in important ways but there are also strong affinities and solidarities, which can be traced in renegotiating Irish-Scottish comparative studies in forms which refuse the primacy of nationalism.

All the fictions that have been considered constitute what I have outlined as a subaltern counter-history in that they retain a critical or negative relation to dominant versions of history and reality. The counter-historical thrust of these works has taken rather different forms and shapes. It is apparent in the confrontation with the (ethical) burden of History that the short stories of both James Kelman and Robert McLiam Wilson generate. As I further argued in Chapter 2, a Benjaminian ‘brush’ against progressive history is also configured by Patrick McCabe’s analysis of the period of transition from a ‘traditional’ to a ‘(post)modern’ Ireland as an ethical interregnum in *The Dead School*. And it also underpins Kelman’s summoning of a subaltern hauntology and exhortation to ‘precariousnessosity’ in a multi-cultural America designated as the ‘end of history’ in *You Have to be Careful in the Land of the Free*. Furthermore, it is the exposure of archival silences and disavowed responsibilities that I analysed in my third chapter on the basis of Glenn Patterson’s *That Which Was* and Eoin McNamee’s *The Ultras* that ruptures the attempt to cauterise the wounds of Northern Ireland’s recent history through its Peace Process. As reviewed in my fourth chapter, Patterson’s, Edna O’Brien’s and Mary Costello’s investigations of the restricted place and policed role assigned to women within the nationalist tradition and the patriarchal state refute the notion that nationalism is necessarily an

encompassing movement towards emancipation or self-determination – whether within, outside or in opposition to the state. This disruption of the compromising silences and linearities of national success stories was further constituted by the uncovering of women’s traumatic experiences in contemporary Irish and Scottish society in Roddy Doyle’s, Janice Galloway’s and Jennifer Johnston’s novels, which I examined in Chapter 5. Lastly, Alasdair Gray’s and McCabe’s engagement with the traumatic processes of their protagonists’ (en)gendering through the lens of a specific national crisis evinces not only discontentment with the prevailing modes of ‘being’ but also the desire for alternative historical possibilities.

In many of my selected texts, it was the persistence of the past in the present or its forceful return that has exerted a disruption, whose effect has been comparable to Walter Benjamin’s demand ‘to blast open the continuum of history’ (1999a: 254). I have shown that this has allowed previously silenced subaltern voices to emanate – whether in the form of memories and dreams, ghosts, or traumatic his- or herstories. As indelible and ethically informed traces of the inequalities and inequities perpetuated and committed in the name of colonial, national or global progress, their emergence disturbs, as Emmanuel Levinas would put it, ‘the order in an irreparable way’ (1986: 357). Where this pertains, for Levinas, to the public realm of ‘the third’ in a given *polis*, the radical *political* potential of this disturbance is best understood through Jacques Rancière’s insistence on the anarchic qualities of aesthetics. In bringing to light what has been denied and disavowed, many of these texts challenge what Rancière calls the distribution of the sensible, and thereby contest the boundaries of what is included and excluded, of what is perceivable and permissible to be said in a political order. This indicates the intrinsically democratic quality of the aesthetic as a realm wherein a more equitable redistribution of voice, visibility and, thus, agency is potentially possible. However, that this is not always the case has become obvious in several of the works discussed.

In the endeavour and struggle of these texts to articulate and negotiate experiences of disempowerment, marginalisation, and oppression, the issues of class and gender mark at the same time the inexorable limit to any desire for formal resolution. As much as my selected texts must confront inequalities, they also collapse the prevailing ideologies of the Republic, Northern Ireland and Scotland into

contradiction and remain defiantly unreconciled with the dominant ways of the world. As unavoidable products of a patriarchal capitalist order, inequalities continue to trouble these texts, as they do hegemonic political, historical and theoretical discourses outside their sphere. They make out what Theodor Adorno calls the 'wound that art itself bears' (2007: 2), which rubs against any analgesic attempt at amnesia. This came especially to the fore in the texts discussed in my second, third and fourth chapters, which have been shown to refuse to lighten the burden of History or heal the pains both of present and past inequities. Yet, even in the novels discussed in my chapter on traumatic herstories, whose endings attain in my reading perhaps the most redemptive figuration, there is no utopian reconciliation of the female self with society offered. Where in Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*, the future of his protagonist is still precarious with no amelioration of Paula's class positioning foreseeable, at the close of Johnston's *The Invisible Worm*, her main character remains withdrawn in solitude in her Big House. If the end of Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* enables her central character to refashion an alternative feminine identity, it remains ultimately non-identical with patriarchal modes, expressing her resistance to the current social order. Furthermore, it is this envisioning of a new subjectivity that has, in turn, been problematised in the following chapter. On the one hand, the desire of Gray's *1982 Janine* and McCabe's *Breakfast on Pluto* to overcome the damaging effects of Manichean gender identities has been revealed as repeating the erasure and disempowerment of the female who remains the unaccommodatable excess of such utopian visions. On the other hand, the putatively 'feminine redemption of masculinity', as I have called it, has been for both McCabe's as well as Gray's character only attainable in the imaginary realm; at the close of their stories, both protagonists – even if to a different extent – remain alienated from their social surroundings: whereas McCabe's Pussy Braden, relegated to destitute exile, deteriorates into madness, Gray's Jock McLeish stays isolated in his room in a guest house somewhere in the Scottish borders.

In this my subaltern *aesthetics* is conceived in affiliation with Adorno's insistence that art retains a *negative* dialectical apprehension of social reality. Hence, while literature enables a critique of the conditions out of which it is produced, it offers no escape from the contradictions and degradations of the patriarchal capitalist

system. My Gramscian version of the subaltern reads these literary texts as always in 'passive or active affiliation' with the hegemonic social formation. But I also insist that these works can indict and redeem as much as they remain embedded in the historical and social conditions of their production. In his essay 'Cultural Criticism and Society', Adorno argues: 'In fact, all culture shares the guilt of society. It ekes out its existence only by virtue of injustice already perpetrated in the sphere of production' (1967: 26). For Adorno (as well as for Benjamin), in an unreconciled world that is itself marked by unfreedoms and inequalities, culture is always tainted by its collusion with class society, its forces of domination and social oppression. This complicity of artworks in reproducing damaging divisions has been particularly taken to task in the last chapter. But, as I have pointed out, it is also apparent in several other works discussed: in the entrapment of the individual in a traumatic, predetermined historical paradigm in the fiction by Doyle and Kelman; in the silencing and containment of women within their work as well as Patterson's and McNamee's novels; and in Costello's and O'Brien's reproduction of a gendered power matrix that ultimately denies women political agency and voice. It indicates that the redefinition of prevailing modes of perception in a given society may not always release democratic or emancipatory energies. This is especially evident in the ways in which a new postmodern language of pluralism, heterogeneity and difference apparently grants disenfranchised identity groups equal recognition and the right to speak. However, as argued in my second chapter in particular, this postmodern transformism ultimately works to efface class and gender inequalities. Ultimately all of the texts considered in this thesis refuse to reduce otherness to the terms of the self by insisting on the non-identity of subaltern concerns to the governing consensus by which the national order reconciles difference with identity.

It is this complex engagement of literary texts with social reality that complicates any singular approach (including to the subaltern itself). My formulation of a subaltern *aesthetics* has insisted that neither of the terms compromising my approach should be understood as beyond relations of political and social power. It is in retaining the capacity to map specific instances of disempowerment and oppression onto to the ongoing and overarching systemic continuities which cause them that makes it an enabling tool for an ethical analysis that is responsive to

subaltern concerns – on both an interpersonal and national as well as global level. Herein, a subaltern *aesthetics* can offer a reassessment of the relevance of postcolonial criticism for Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland as a method that is analytic of the nationally specific context of these cultures, but that refuses to allow itself to be limited thereto. Furthermore, due to its experiential rootedness in a materialist dialectic, my approach proves resistant both to a reproachful moralism or a simplistic evaluative ethics as well as to the *anaesthetic* effects of singular purism. A subaltern *aesthetical* reading of contemporary Scottish, Northern Irish and Irish literature insists that today's inequalities and inequities ultimately remain an unreconcilable excess – within both the aesthetic and the social realm. It is this aspect that exerts such a powerful political effect, as evoked in my introduction: in 'facing' us with these issues that are often repudiated or silenced, these texts call upon our ability to respond, namely our critical response-ability.

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## APPENDIX I

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## APPENDIX II

### PUBLICATIONS

- “‘Unremembering History’”: Traumatic Herstories from Contemporary Ireland’. In *New Voices in Irish Studies: Essays on History and Literature*, ed. Brian Griffin. Bath Spa University Press, 2008 (forthcoming).
- ‘Subaltern Counter-Histories in the Scottish-Irish Archipelago: Ethics and the Burden of History in James Kelman, Patrick McCabe and Glenn Patterson’. *A Further Shore: Essays in Irish and Scottish Studies*, eds. E. Agnew, E. Hughes, C. Magennis and C. Morin. Aberdeen: Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies (pending, 2008).
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