Specter and Scrim:

Partition and Postcoloniality in the Literature of Northern Ireland

by

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation concerns the political history of Northern Ireland, its literature and its "Troubles." My project recognizes the paradigmatic weight of partition, the theoretical gap it represents, and the need to fully explicate this key political structure of modernity. It utilizes a cross-disciplinary methodology that allies postcolonial and poststructural theory, Irish and Partition Studies, in developing a theory of the ways Irish cultural production has been disturbed by the partition on which decolonization was predicated and the Northern territory created. The project is structured in two parts: Part I is a theoretical piece outlining, in two chapters, outlining theory of partition in Ireland and the poetics of historical literature from the North. Part II, including three additional chapters, provides illustrations of these ideas through analysis of recent Northern Irish literary work in multiple genres: drama, poetry and fiction.

In Chapter One, "Ontologies of Partition and the Unimaginable Imagined Community," I demonstrate the three key effects of division in Ireland: to undermine the idea of the nation and coherence of national identity; to produce a society in mourning; and to "quarantine" the subject owing to the ontology of waiting and sense of national incompleteness. The plan's aims, to reinvent nation-states and incarnate novel "imagined communities" (Anderson), are untenable. Under pressure of division, experiences of place radically alter and Irish citizens, particularly in the North, find themselves part of an "unimaginable" collectivity. The division has functioned as

a rupturing trauma, confusing self-other relations and locating members between an array of simultaneous Irish "nations"—existing, imagined, remembered and "willed." It is this dissonance in and of the nation, I conclude, that explains why the struggles partition was to end continue.

Chapter Two, "'*Au contraire*': The Troubled Poetics of Northern Irish Literature," identifies this politics of location in imaginative work representing the Northern statelet and history of the Troubles. Literature from the region captures the critical registers of national life through the fusion of a postmodern sensibility with traditional Irish tropes, predominantly a poetics of specter and scrim in the peculiarly ghostly, haunting disposition of image, figure and metaphor and the provocative deployment of world and realm borders. Divined with evident influence of Samuel Beckett—who first articulated the "meaning" of divided Ireland—it is a bordered, spectral postmodernism that brings to light the ontological deathliness of partitioned Irishness. Three literary critical chapters delineate this method in work by contemporary Belfast women writers working in multiple genres: dramatist and fiction writer Anne Devlin, poet Medbh McGuckian, and novelist Anna Burns. Each author's distinct poetics is explicated: Devlin's use of self-contradiction as primary mode, McGuckian's poetics of silence, and Burns' narrative method of infusing the historical novel with specifically historical doubt.

In Chapter Three, "Self-Contradiction in a Small Place: Anne Devlin's 'Other at the Edge of Life,'" I offer a reading of the work's self-contradictoriness as an echo of the break in the national community spurred by geopolitics. The incongruity suffusing her work allegorizes the North as a ruptured, traumatized part-nation, a "no place" with a fully undecidable subject. In developing this politics of location, Devlin deploys a profusion of ancient metaphors: the banshee, the *Shan Van Vocht*, and a variety of world-scrims as bordered, deathly spaces of struggle and compression. Chapter Four, "Partition, Postcoloniality and the Postmodern:

Outlining Silence in the Poetry of Medbh McGuckian," interprets the poems as paradoxical embodiments of silence that disclose the enigma of history, memory and voice haunting the "partitioned" postcolonial author: in the crisis of wordlessness; in the impulse toward and away from silence and speakers betraying a powerlessness to speak; and in poems driven to transcend the cocoon of language and function as a visual art. Whereas McGuckian's literary work relies, paradoxically, on silence, Burns' novel of the Troubles is founded, also contradictorily, on self-questioning. Chapter Five, "Broken Nations, Troubled Histories, Anxious Authors: Specter and Doubt in Anna Burns' *No Bones,*" argues that, through the affective work of a poetics of doubt, the history of the Troubles is refracted and ultimately conveyed. This chapter shows how, by hovering in the epistemological between of doubt, her narrative returns to the "moment of violence" (Pandey) in order to phenomenologically resurrect the past and "revives" the Irish dead as a way of symbolizing both the compound losses of empire and concomitant need for postcolonial reparations.

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...féinig i gcoinne na dí.

~"Carrickfergus," Irish Ballad

~Introduction: Partition, Postcoloniality, Ireland

> *There is much confusion in the study of partition…*
> ~Stanley Waterman, "Partition and Modern Nationalism"

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Ireland is haunted by the partition that divided the nation, north and south, in 1921. Protracted histories of empire and anti-colonial nationalism culminated in separation of the island, the "tearing," in Geographer Brendan O'Leary's language (3), that would eventually lead to the twenty-five year war known as the Troubles. After the recent sweep won by the Sinn Fein party in elections there, Gerry Adams described the Irish partition as "an awful flaw… an awful wound in the psychic of this island and nation."[1] The geopolitical procedure has left an indelible mark on both sides of the border. That mark, what Vazira Zamindar terms "[p]artition effects" (238), is the subject of this dissertation, *Specter and Scrim: Partition and Postcoloniality in the Literature of Northern Ireland.* With a focus on the Northern territory, I outline a theory of partition and explicate representations of it in recent literary work. My aim is to demonstrate how the division of Ireland has affected the "imagined community" of the nation (Anderson) and transformed the meaning of place and experience and condition of postcoloniality.

Events of recent years point to a gulf in postcolonial scholarship with regard to the breakup of decolonizing nations and protracted conflicts that often follow adoption of the new borders. Noam Chomsky delivered the 2009 Edward Said Memorial Lecture at Columbia University, centering in part on the paradigmatic import of the deconstruction of Germany's partition and the nation's reunification, spectacularly dramatized in the dismantling of the wall at Berlin in 1989 (Chomsky). Commemorations of the twentieth anniversary of this event in 2009 came together as a touchstone for nations and people everywhere. Chomsky cites German
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Chancellor Angela Merkel's suggestion that that crisis crystallized the principal concern of the current era: our collective endeavor to "overcome the walls of our time" (Ibid). He also makes note of historian Timothy Ash's proposition that, for the same historical reason, 1989 was "the biggest year in world history since 1945," the year that "changed everything" (Ibid). A View of this event as a key factor shaping the contemporary zeitgeist was reflected, too, in remarks on the recent Egyptian uprising, cast by one commentator as that nation's "Berlin wall."[2]

Joe Cleary described the phenomenon as "the human equivalent of a tectonic shift in the settled political landscape of the late twentieth century" (1). It was in observing the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, he says, that he first realized how "the Irish experience of partition belonged to a much wider twentieth-century history" (2). Indeed, the "spectre of partition and state division" (Ibid) has afflicted the twentieth century well-nigh globally. Perhaps the most extreme example came about through agreements made at the 1885 Berlin-Africa Conference held to strategize the planned conquest of Africa by European nations. From the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries, much of that continent would be colonized and, in the process, remapped. Splitting nations apart, redrawing their borders, even disconnecting some from water supplies and other vital resources, the imposition of imperialist boundaries—carving the "continent into colonial states that largely disregarded precolonial patterns of ethnic and political organisation, [and] requiring local communities to radically adjust their concepts of social space" (Cleary 16) bereft of any meaning for local populations—left an ineradicably destructive mark across the region. The twentieth century witnessed major partitions on nearly every continent, however, often, as with Africa, in connection with empire: the partition of Hungary (1920); the Cold War divisions of Germany (1945), Vietnam (1954) and Korea (1945); and those arising through decolonization in Ireland (1921), Kurdistan (1920 – 23), India (1947), Palestine (1937 and 1948) and Cyprus (1974). Between 1991 and ’92, Ethiopia, Yugoslavia—including “the partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the ethnic conflict in Kosovo” (Cleary 2)—Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union were also geopolitically reorganized in partitionist[3] frameworks. Other divided societies include China and Taiwan and, in South Asia, the former nations of East and West Pakistan and contested state of Kashmir. And, of course, Poland and the island formerly known as Hispañola, now Haiti and the Dominican Republic, had all been earlier divided.

In a strict, “high” political[4] sense, partition refers to the breakup and reorganization of a state or colonial administrative unit, a “simultaneous devolution and division of power” in which territory is “not merely redistributed between great powers but transferred to and divided between indigenous successors” resulting “in the creation of two or more successor states” (Schaeffer 1999 6). Before 1921, Ireland was fully colonized and governed by the British. Afterwards, with implementation of the Government of Ireland Act, and its partition plan, the six-county northeastern area was cordoned off and left within the colonial construct.[5] A small nation inhabiting a single, small island was divided, and thus we had “Irelands north and south” for the first time (Alderson et al 3). This form of political partitioning is distinct from secession or “the downsizing of regimes” (O’Leary 9) and other such structures where, though no official political realignment occurs, a generally recognized *de facto* partition presides, segregating populations or confining them to spatial “emplacement[s]” (Foucault 1986 22) and involving geographical injunctions of the body, location or movement.[6] Here we think of structures like “Jim Crow” in the U.S., apartheid South Africa, or state-enforced containment camps, reservation or plantation systems—as with Native North America and in connection with chattel slavery and the ghettoization of European Jews and Japanese-Americans during World War II.

Brendan O'Leary stresses the importance of remaining aware of distinctions between the various geopolitical actions (8). He defines partition, specifically, as "a fresh border *cut* through at least one community's national homeland, creating… two separate political units" and which is signaled by "*new lines* on the map" (3 - 4, my italics). I share O'Leary's view that not "every change affecting borders" is rightly considered a partition, and that official state divisions "[merit] separate description, evaluation, and explanation" (9). In distinguishing between *de jure* and *de facto* partitions, we recognize how, while all impose spatial limits of different orders, none entail the resonance of nation and nation-ness of an official partition. This particular reverberation has been critical to the aftermaths of empire, in Ireland as elsewhere. However, in arriving at a theory of the life of partition, surmising subjectivity and ascertaining the valences of cultural production, recognizing the presence of multiple forms of political partitioning in a single location is likewise critical. Multiple divisions imbued German political life in the mid-twentieth century, for example, including the incarceration (and mass murder) of marginalized groups, especially German Jews, in death and labor camps and, later, the nation's partitioning, initially as a four-way *de jure* breakup.[7] Similarly, Belfast, the city from which all authors reviewed here hail, is a byzantine landscape organized by a multiplex of *de jure* and *de facto* fault lines. The "militarisation of local territorial boundaries and increased seclusion of its two communities have effectively produced a whole series of internal partitions," which means the division of the island "no longer [stops] at the inter-state border" but proliferates across the landscape, like a trauma returning and recurring (Cleary 99 – 100). Minor, internal variants accompany the major border that cuts the island transversally. Most of all, there is a collection of walls that course through the urban landscape designed to separate "the two traditions" or primary sect-groups, Catholics and Protestants. This "Peace Line," as it is so named, was ostensibly constructed to keep mutually hateful residents at bay and keep the peace. In practice, it is yet another failed partition: far from quelling the violence, this vast reified sect line[8] affects precisely the reverse outcome. Belfast's borderlands, the "interface" or "no-go" areas which detach and adjoin sected neighborhoods, are its most brutally violent, dangerous areas.

Residents of the North live, then, within a palimpsest of breakage: not only is the island partitioned, so is the province of Ulster, three of its historical nine counties split away as part of the Republic; then, within Belfast, as a third division, is the segregating wall snaking across the urban space. I argue that this complex dividedness defines location, nation and subject. Since 1921, the city has evolved as an urban mine field, a particularity of the territory rendered with profundity and force in Anna Burns' fiction and Medbh McGuckian's poetry. Their work unambiguously reveals the multiplex of bifurcations characterizing Belfast life. Although this urban center is by no means a replica of U.S. "Jim Crow" segregation, it has a similar character: pubs are identified by sect, streets have sect identities, as do entire towns. Add to this the simple fact that very few neighborhoods are mixed and, so, the schools remain *de facto* divided, too. This internal brokenness "creates the impression of a balkanized state continuously on the verge of disintegration" (Cleary 99 – 100). A sign affixed to the entrance point of a village just outside the city reads: *"Welcome to Loyalist Larne!"* This marker typifies the character of Belfast in displacing, upon entry, any visitor who does not subscribe to Loyalism or Unionism. Interpellating visual indicators like this one are, literally, everywhere in the birthplace of my authors. It is one of the many thousand visual reminders of the political disposition of the North, its dislocations and internal distances.[9]

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Originally positioned as part of “theories of international dependency” and within the 1980’s paradigm of “Atlantic History” (Flannery 2)—which now sees a modified resurgence as Atlantic Studies—, the study of partition is, in truth, an inquiry into how power has been expressed, gained and maintained in the modern era, how imperialism has a “second coming” through geopolitical sway. To create and impose territorial limits, to break and restructure a nation is, first and foremost, an exercise of power, one that often occurs consecutively with decolonization. Given the paradigmatic weight of partition as a global phenomenon, recognize, in turn, its dearth as a subject of study and theorization in our work on postcoloniality, postmodernism and transnationalism. As T.G. Fraser notes, even in the variety of “studies of Ireland, India, Palestine and their divided societies, remarkably little had been said about the specific issue of partition which did so much to determine their future[s]” (ix). We have only just begun to consider the ways the event “raise[s]… important questions about citizenship, national identity and the making of national… mentalities” (Kaul 9 - 10) and continue to discount it, giving the structure “little attention in the remarkable corpus of writing on nations and nationalism” (Cleary 15) and our efforts to understand postcolonial cultures and histories. Many critics overlook the readjustment of nation borders as a factor in the life of the subject and the ways it impacts “the nature of postcolonial state formation”; instead, newly ratified boundaries are simply “taken for granted” (Ibid). As Suvir Kaul maintains, even in South Asian scholarship, from which most partition theorizing originates, “[w]e still need… a systematic, multi-faceted exploration of… ‘Partition issues,’ for they define not only our past but… our collective future,” he says, and development of “critical and political vocabularies appropriate to the full exploration of the intellectual, human and material problems posed” (4).

Kaul speaks of South Asia here, but these issues are equally applicable to the Irish context. In the time since publication of Fraser's landmark book, *Partition in India, Ireland and Palestine* (1984), much has been written on the subject, mostly by historians, political scientists and geographers, as well as a handful of literary critics. The paucity of partition criticism has been a particular deficiency in the sphere of literature, however. Indeed, one place our critical ruminations on Irish literature take us is to the border; and yet, in arriving there, we find ourselves at something of an impasse. In the scholarship on imaginative work addressing colonial, transnational and indigenous themes—the contexts for partition historically—analysis remains negligible even when a politics of location is central to it and a key reference point for texts under study. As Cleary says, "[t]he issue of partition… provokes a concatenation of issues directly relevant to the recent efflorescence of writings on colonial and postcolonial societies... includ[ing] the nature of the colonial and postcolonial state, the construction of majorities and minorities, and the connections between literature and the nation, culture and… state" (4). Ignoring such concerns means disregarding significant aspects of the postcolonial condition. Yet, other than Cleary's *Literature, Partition and the Nation-State* (2002), the issue is barely registered, despite the intense concentration on postcolonial theory in Irish Studies. Even as "debates about Ireland's postcoloniality regularly focus on its geopolitical disposition" (Brewster 125), this does not mean the problem is being studied as a register of literary texts. Rather, in the long-standing debates over whether the nation is justifiably included within the postcolonial rubric—an excessive debate given the history of British colonialism there—Ireland's dividedness has entered those discussions, with partition proffered as indicator of the already obvious fact.

Although "location" and "traces of… dislocation are evident in the fractured development of Irish Studies" (Alderson et al 1)—and this is, in part, a response to the rupture within the nation—too much silence remains regarding crucial connections between the island's political disposition and its cultural production. Efficacious critique remains tethered to specificities of the local, dwelling close to the ground of place, because what the location means to residents colors and complicates efforts to represent it. And this is especially true when the re-drawing of borders, a geographical *crisis*, is a defining force. Northern Irish authors continue to intrigue and confound literary critics, in part, because their work is too rarely read through the lens of the geopolitical; passing references, yes; sustained analyses, no.[10] Divergences in nation-state structure "change everything," as it were, and critical lapses thereby foreclose a necessary parsing of the vicissitudes of Northern Irishness. The lack of such awarenesses allows for a problematical collapse of the territories, and, effectively, the occlusion of conclusive intra-Irish differences seen in a partitionist "invisibility" whereby the beleaguered Northern enclave becomes "Ireland" and Northern Irish authors "Irish," or, still more objectionably, "British," without any reference to their exiled, northerly locatedness or even to their Irishness.[11]

The North-South distinctions are great, and of great import. Accordingly, while David Lloyd's view of Irish culture as "the site of a profoundly contradictory and intensely political ambivalence" is absolutely correct, with this, we appreciate how, in the North, Irish undecidability has a distinct character and life, a greater intensity and more damning effect (1). As such, postcolonial and Irish Studies' notions of liminality and hybridity are critical to discernments of the North and, at the same time, disjunct. Lloyd notes how dominant Western theory "calls for radical rethinking" when applied to Ireland (1993 2); he highlights the need for reconsideration of Irish identity "in terms of the function of this interminably *unanswerable* question in the assimilation of subjects as citizens for the state" (5). Lloyd further advocates a move away from a strict concern with identity politics in the direction of an understanding of “the complex dynamic of the interaction between subaltern groups and the state formation” (8). Focusing on cultural critique, he cites the scholarly inclination to disregard “subterranean or marginalized practices” deemed “aberrant, pre-modern and residual, or incoherent” through processes of nationalization (7) which trouble assessments of Irish cultural production.

Since publication of *Anomalous States*, much has been written that addresses Lloyd’s concerns, and this dissertation continues that work. Northern Irish literary writing reveals differences in the way state and para-state structures constitute subjects, and much work remains to be done in terms of ascertaining and theorizing these concerns. While standing the terrain in juxtaposition to applicable geographies, we are thus compelled to recognize the Northern “amputee” as a discrete political territory and develop keener critical cognizance of peculiarities thereof. This prerogative is both compulsory and realizable. Bringing Postcolonial and Irish Studies thought into dialogue with work theorizing the North specifically, and partition more generally, we begin to bridge the North-South gap. As Schaeffer says of the island, while “the meanings of *independence* and of *state* have changed” on both sides of the border, “partition remains a central political reality for each” (1999 6). Maria Delgado speaks, for example, of the way drama “[c]ritics have avoided classification based on the North-South divide because so many Northern Irish writers have stated that they perceive themselves as Irish rather than British” (viii). Either way, though, the border remains a key factor, and such classifications are not, in any case, evaded within the literary work. Since the 1970’s there has been a “concerted attempt… to engage with the [partition] debate by presenting multiple consequences of the entry of British troops into Northern Ireland” (Delgado ix). Likewise, before the Troubles exploded, for the gathering of writers called simply “the Group”—organized by Philip Hobsbaum and including Seamus Heaney—it was “urgent that the social and political exacerbations of… place should disrupt the decorums of literature" (Heaney 2002 43 - 44), aims which have been observable all through the work of Field Day, too.[12]

In terms of critical prerogatives, then, analysis of literary work since 1921 benefits from a greater understanding of the political, social and literary meanings of partition. Cleary notes that "[n]ation- and state-building processes are never just political events in the narrow sense; …[but] entail the construction of… national literatures" through which "societies understand themselves and their place in the wider world system" (2). And, in fact, Subaltern Studies theorist Gyan Pandey insists that this political structure finds its fullest and most authentic expression in literary writing (1997 26 - 30). By understanding the political landscape, and how partition has changed it, the character, craft and meanings of much (allegedly) inscrutable Northern Irish literature are all clarified. Analyzing the poetry of Medbh McGuckian, Tom Paulin or Paul Muldoon through this lens brings into sharp focus experiences of alienation from and breakage in the grounding locale. The same is true of dramatic work: plays by Anne Devlin, Christina Reid and Frank McGuinness make considerably more sense when considered as articulators of partitionality. The latter author, we remember, wants to "wash the muck of the world off [him]self" (1996 37), wonders "Did you intend that we should keep seeing ghosts?" (Ibid 97), and peruses the nation, realizing that "Darkness, for eternity, is not survival" (Ibid 98). Likewise, the bizarre depths of Anna Burns' despair in *No Bones*, the wild nihilism and raging grotesquerie of Eoin McNamee's *Resurrection Man* and indigent, starved deathliness of Robert McLiam-Wilson's *Ripley Bogle* are all appreciably illuminated.

Recent years witness a modest surge in partition as a critical apparatus, and even a start toward the institutionalization of Partition Studies. This dissertation augments those evolvements in bringing relevant concerns to bear on Irish and Postcolonial Studies. Continuing efforts to integrate its study in these fields, the analysis advances both by enlarging our understanding of political partition as it intersects imperialism and anti-colonial nationalism, specifically, and by demonstrating the lived implications of broken nation-statehood in Northern Ireland. I aim to clarify current theory on the postcolonial condition in unpacking some of the analytical challenges provoked by state division and opening space for interdisciplinary dialogue between poststructural theory and that of Irish and Postcolonial Studies.[13] The project not only expands literary critical work on geopolitics but provides insights that become perceptible in juxtaposing diverse theoretical terrains and exploring the revisions they call each other to. This reach across scholarly borders is critically important: as Pheng Cheah suggests, there is a need to "cross disciplinary boundaries because unless they are bridged, it is impossible to follow the multiple threads of the global fabrication of the contemporary human being" (12).

Given partition's status as a rupture provoking novel borderlands, it seems to mandate this kind of intersectional methodology. While this dissertation is not comparative, I do maintain that many of the "[p]artition effects" (Zamindar 238) theorized implicate multiple divided geographies. I often speak to the problem in generalized terms which, I am aware, leaves the analysis open to the charge of a problematic reductiveness or apolitical comparativity. I do not aim to equate or universalize distinct national cultures and histories. Obviously, each state division has a unique historicity and plays out as part of the intricacies of the local. However, in the same way that theorizations of the postcolonial condition are (also) appropriately and problematically generalized, as partition theorist Sumantra Bose urges, "specificity does not equal uniqueness. No two situations of conflict are ever identical, but they are often comparable" (215, my italics).[14] Parallel sentiments were expressed by Dipesh Chakrabarty—at a conference on colonialism in India and Ireland—in a memorable keynote in which he spoke of the importance of addressing “shared predicaments,” investigating where disparate postcolonialities overlap and betray a “connectedness distinct from similarities” (2004). He spoke of the need to consider joint challenges across the boundaries of (formerly) colonized nations, thus ascertaining the full work of colonial phenomena in the shared shapes it has taken (Ibid)—including the aftermaths of geopolitical solutions adopted at “the dawn of freedom” (Faiz 87).

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Partition may indeed be our most significant postcolonial sharing, a structure that calls out the comparativity and interdisciplinarity Bose and Chakrabarty advocate. It is only by these means, for instance, that partition’s status as a structural principle impacting territories across the globe, comes clearly into focus, how the partitionist concept of nation-ness (or post-nation-ness) has far-reaching consequences for the contemporary moment. While both approaches are necessary and useful to Postcolonial and Irish Studies, the point here is not, ultimately, to compare partitioned territories and literatures, however. And, while my authors are all women writers living and writing today, and, all from Belfast, the focus here is also not to engage gender as primary or even secondary concern. This is not a “women writers” analysis; it is not a gendered look at the North or at partition. It was important to me to approach women writers as unquestionably valid speakers of the Irish nation; thus their shared gender is not integral to the analysis offered. In this sense, perhaps, paradoxically, I engage the strongest possible feminist methodology in the refusal to mark the authors’ gender.

Rather, the goal here has been to theorize the postcolonial condition in Northern Ireland against a backdrop of partition through scrupulous review of literature of the Troubles. My project, located at the intersection of aesthetics, history and politics, centers on a single divided geography, the life of division in that place and contemporaneous literary tradition. This
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dissertation, utilizing a cross-disciplinary methodology that allies postcolonial and poststructural theory, Irish and Partition Studies, offers a theory of how Irish cultural production has been disturbed by the partition on which decolonization was predicated and the North created. Stanley Waterman insists that "[p]olitical maps, once altered, are readily accepted by the majority of the world's states as *faits accomplis*" (119), but this is only true in the high political sense he points to, or the functional sense whereby an area is literally recognized as having been renamed and re-nationed. Whether those affected concede the novel constructs—imaginatively, in terms of identity and alterity, or ontologically—whether, in other words, partition's interpellating hail succeeds, is another question entirely. In my view, attempts to reconstitute the "subject in partition" (Mufti 211) do not and cannot succeed. Far from engendering intended reconstitutions of self and place, the structure acts against itself and forecloses its own consolidation.

Analyzing texts by writers working in multiple genres. I argue that the partition of Ireland is a "transhistorical… [and] structural trauma" (LaCapra xiv) involving great loss and aggravating endless discord, deconstructing nation and subject and producing a society beset by systemic loss, a despairing existentialism and insurmountable ontological insecurity (Giddens *passim*). Set in an interdisciplinary intersection of the national, the geographical, the historical and the literary, the analysis interrogates how these provocations of partition—the loss of the nation itself and, with that, the ontological status of the (necessarily nationalized) Northern Irish subject—are imaginatively represented, mourned and recuperated by artists. These ideas are outlined in Chapter One, "Ontologies of Partition and the Unimaginable Imagined Community," where I summarize the history of the Troubles, review the scholarship on partition—by historians, political scientists, geographers, public policy and literary scholars—and outline my theory of the plan's effects on the island. In this chapter, I show that its aims, to restructure nation-states and incarnate novel “imagined communities” (Anderson), are untenable; under pressure of division, nation and national identity destabilize and experiences of place alter. The trauma of rupture, the work of postcolonial and national memory and dissatisfaction with the new state arrangements together serve to disrupt residents’ sense of political community.

I demonstrate the three key outcomes of division in Northern Ireland: to undermine the idea of the nation and coherence of national identity; to produce a society in perpetual mourning; and to “quarantine” the subject owing to the ontology of waiting and sense of national incompleteness. Mourning and profound *a priori* inscriptions of (either) anti-colonial nationalism or imperialist loyalism transform the post-partition nation into Samuel Beckett’s “lingering dissolution” (Kiberd 532). The idea of the people is now “fork-tongued” (Heaney 1975 52): a configuration of past, present and future structures overlap and indwell in the imagining of the Irish nation, a compulsory crossing of politically contingent, temporally disjunct, present and hoped-for and fought-for or lost nations that are, now, nostalgically remembered. This partitionist transnational imagining is the only possible basis for a post-partition sense of place and national identity and, at the same time, it *cannot* interpellate the subject or provide a stable grounding for them. Aspects of alterity and ontology come under radical alteration when the dismantling of empire is achieved through political sundering and the nation—key register of place and identity in the modern era—is *re*invented. Ontological confusion, national and political loss and brokenness in the ground of the self leave the subject not quite present though not absent, either, housed inescapably in a spectral “no place” comprised of newly othered citizens and subsisting amid the never-ending flux, slippage and fall between a gathering of past, present and future imagined communities (Anderson *passim*).

These disparities of location, self and nation, I likewise maintain, call for a rethinking of postcoloniality through the lens of the partition that accompanied decolonization. The initiations typically charted in postcolonial theory involve a politics of location where the subject is split between signifieds in a chain of *cultural* meanings, between performances of deconstructively inscribed identities, between the puzzlements of mimicry, hybridity and ambivalence in a a place with clear limits, a margin and a center. In the situation of partition, the politics of location alters substantially and these *a priori* liminalities are shot through by a fundamental “tearing”—as against an “unfastening”—a cutting across and through the nation (O’Leary 2). The territory is no longer conceived of as the singular, bordered, multicultural, unequally structured “place,” as understood. The Northern Irish subject is located amid *pieces* of the unhomely house of the nation (Bhabha 18) and lives out a never-ending crisis of national (non)belonging, the living suicide to which they were conscripted by political history. Rather than being implicated by multiple, conflicting cultural identifications extant of a single political entity, this “partitionality” is experienced as an existentialist tumble across and between a fray of nation-places, some dead and lost, some dreamed, some enforced through high politics, awaiting collapse of the ground of the self. While this kind of travel between worlds may be seen as a figure of cultural translation, in the general postcolonial sense, it is often a symbolic reification of the traumatized condition of the nation—not the unhomeliness of a known place but a home that is multiple places.

The borderlands of the *partitioned* postcolonial, as against the postcolonial, are distinct and therefore come to be metaphorized distinctively. Chapter Two, “‘*Au contraire*’: The Troubled Poetics of Northern Irish Literature,” identifies the post-partition politics of location outlined in imaginative work representing the history of the Troubles. Inspired by Samuel Beckett, who first articulated the “meaning” of divided Ireland, literary work from the region often fuses a postmodern sensibility with traditional Irish tropes. Northern writers convey the ontology and national imaginings of partition through development of a duo of culminating conceits: a postmodern poetics of specter and scrim. That is, the peculiarly ghostly, haunting disposition of metaphor, figure and image and the provocative deployment of world and realm borders. In the literature of a small place interminably in crisis and conflict, we witness a return to the Irish literary border Paul Muldoon termed the "world-scrim" (7), an ancient trope from Irish mythology resurrected by today's authors as a means to represent the space of the subject and existentialism occasioned by partition. The boundary-lines fractured beyond recognition, literatures of the North are characterized by Beckettian despair and mourning and deathly crises that develop less as the romantic, heroic martyrdom of earlier work and more as despondent, postmodern suicides occurring in Foucauldian locations of entrapment and exile. These "scrims" often demarcate the realms of life and death—both literal death, *the* Irish literary concern, and its abstract forms: ontology, self-identity, and so many Beckettian "living" deaths.

These machinations of partitionist subjectivity are symbolized in the metaphors of falling and transmogrification in Medbh McGuckian's poetry, in the dramatic "scrimmed" movements of Anne Devlin's plays, and the spectral finale in Anna Burns' bildungsroman and chronicle of the Troubles. Their work provides an intense critique and reimagining of nation and nation-state, one, I argue, provoked by the perplexing destabilizations of partition. I include three literary critical chapters that explore the questions and assertions posed in the first two chapters through explications of literary work by living writers from Belfast: dramatist and fiction writer Anne Devlin, poet Medbh McGuckian, and novelist Anna Burns. Each chapter takes up an author's work, explicating her representation of nation and subject and distinct poetics: Devlin's self-contradiction, McGuckian's silence, and Burns' doubt. In Chapter Three, "Self-Contradiction in a Small Place: Anne Devlin's 'Other at the Edge of Life,'" I argue that, in her work, we witness one of the most profound manifestations of the unimaginable community provoked by partition through allegorical spaces of contraction and struggle and the multiple "world-scrim(s)" (Muldoon) used to negotiate the compressive, panoptical landscape. In work after work, she points to the deathliness—that is, the deeply contradictory, unbearable instability and spectrality—of being, or *trying* to be, Northern Irish. I read the incongruity suffusing her work as an echo of the ruptured nation: the spectral "no place" this broken nation has become and its fully undecidable subject. She captures, articulates and traces these experiences through crises of death and dying, stultifying confinement and strangulation by means of a return to the "world-scrim" dividing life from death and employment of quintessentially Irish figures—such as the *Shan Van Vocht,* the banshee and the *spéirbhean.* In so doing, Devlin enacts dialogues with the dead as a means of addressing and explaining the machinations and effects of the imperialist partitioning of Ireland. This chapter brings postcolonial and poststructural theory together in arriving at an understanding of Devlin's portrayal of Northern Irishness, particularly through the work of Jacques Derrida.

Chapter Four, "Partition, Postcoloniality and the Postmodern: Outlining Silence in the Poetry of Medbh McGuckian," interprets the poems as paradoxical embodiments of silence that disclose the enigma of history, memory and voice haunting the "partitioned" postcolonial author: in the the crisis of wordlessness; in the impulse toward and away from silence and speakers that betray a powerlessness to speak; and, in poems driven to transcend the cocoon of language and function visually. In so doing, I argue, McGuckian poetically "siphons" that which is most important about war, colonialism and partition. This chapter looks primarily at her meta-poetical work and current scholarship on the oeuvre. I conclude that the poems outline political, traumatic unspeakability in order to perform the meaning of a colonized ontology, of a world at war, and most especially, of partition. I argue that McGuckian uses the English language against itself to create a mimesis of silence and silencing: although a “speaking”—the poem—has occurred, it functions as signal of that which is *not* said. Her work renders visible the existence of unreachable, nonexistent or forbidden words—the *Irish* words stolen from McGuckian through colonialism that, if reachable, can only be reached through the colonial language that is her mother tongue. In response to the “impossibility” of English words to represent the Irish poet’s meanings, McGuckian has devised a decidedly visual poetics through a generalized devolution of language and turn toward visuality. The poet employs multiple “hauntolog[ies]” (Derrida 1994 63) in transforming the language and form of English language poetry; how the poem is made, how it is read, and the “work” it does are all critically reformed.

Just as McGuckian applies a type of “sandpaper” poetics to the English language, sanding it down to a core or origin at which it may “magically” rekindle as Irish, novelist Anna Burns “sands off” the mental corrections of lived time to produce a phenomenological narrative that might miraculously “resurrect” and replay the history of the Troubles. Burns’ narrative aesthetic is unique in the Irish landscape and yet manages to be articulated in the most familiarly Irish voice. Her work is politically vital in its representation of postcolonial reparations through a mimesis of the Irish dead. Chapter Five, “Broken Nations, Troubled Histories, Anxious Authors: Specter and Doubt in Anna Burns’ *No Bones,*” shows how this phenomenological narrative returns to the “moment of violence” (Pandey) and “resurrects” history by hovering in the epistemological between of doubtfulness, mimetically reviving the dead and symbolizing the compound losses of empire and concomitant need for postcolonial reparations. The chapter illustrates the poetics of doubt developed in *No Bones,* through which readers are affectively immersed and history phenomenologically rendered. Rather than recount history through direct relation of story and detail—the traditional narrative mode in the historical novel—Burns has written an episodic narrative that is wholly absurd, highly emotional and abundantly visual, one through which history is *felt* more than *thought*. Hers is a world of trauma, violence, silencing and layered losses and thus the literary endeavor here is to "walk" readers through the past and convey the historicity of history without crossing into the realm of the fantastic. To do this, she attempts bringing the location viscerally to life. Theoretical and literary work by Toni Morrison supports my conclusion that, through this poetics of doubt, Burns achieves her aim of revealing the vicissitudes of suffering and the compound losses associated with colonialism—including partition and its protracted discontents. In the deeply spectral sequence that closes *No Bones*, the novel shapes up as a mimesis of reparations and a narrative designed to point to and underscore political loss and irredeemable imperial debt.

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Chapter One:

Ontologies of Partition and the Unimaginable Imagined Community

> *Everywhere in the mentality of the Irish people are flux and uncertainty. Our national consciousness may be described, in a native phrase, as a quaking sod. It gives no footing. It is not English, nor Irish, nor Anglo-Irish…*
>
> ~Daniel Corkery, 1932

> *Living here, in an English colony, you're not Irish and there's no sense pretending you are… I'm not Irish, I'm probably more English than the English.*
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> ~Medbh McGuckian, 1993

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This dissertation examines the political history of Ireland since independence and partition, its literature and its "Troubles." The Northern territory is "a small place" (Kincaid *passim*) with a fraught colonial past—now, too, a nation divided, borne out of centuries of imperial control into the immediate and bizarre exile of a partly de-colonized, strangely mutilated version of itself. Though partition had been under discussion for a decade, and was "the first choice of *none* of the parties" involved (O'Dowd 50, my italics), this small island off the coasts of Europe and the British mainland was liberated by means of a geopolitical solution in 1921. Though the treaty establishing two successor states—one, a new twenty-six county Free State—was signed at that time, it was neither ratified nor division officially conceded until the next year following the civil war fought over the partition question. The political status of the six Northern counties would not change: newly dubbed Northern Ireland, this tiny territorial amputee remained a colonized, constitutionally distinct region of the U.K. The critical question for this project is, how does partition haunt the island? What are the long-term effects of division on the society housed there, on the peoples' sense of place, nation and self?
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The politics of location developed in literary work by writers from the North offers answers to these questions and usefully completes the picture of post-partition Ireland. Metaphors of place in the literature in fact match Jamaica Kincaid's description of the "small place" where the colonized subject is located in a kind of "prison-home." Kincaid writes: "It is as if, then, the beauty—the beauty of the sea, the land, the air, the trees, the market, the people, the sounds they make—were a prison, and as if everything and everybody inside it were locked in and everything and everybody that is not inside it were locked out. And what might it do to ordinary people to live in this way every day?" (79). In this chapter, I argue that the principal effect of Ireland's partition, including the carving out and exile of the six Northern counties, is the transformation of "place" into "small place," the borders of the newly designated nations functioning less as protective domicile and more as the incarcerating walls of a prison. This has been particularly true in the North where the breakup produced a Catholic (largely Nationalist) minority[15] for the first time in Ireland's history—a small group in "a small place" locked into a situation of not just gross discrimination but a thorny, alienating political existence too. Equally so, the "other" community, mostly Protestant Loyalists to the Crown, were transformed by the division into a sort of last bastion of empire, left to defend and retain this final "scrap" of conquered territory, people and economic interests—a final assertion of the imperial "cause"—and that, in the face of a fully dissatisfied, neighboring Catholic community. What partition has done to the "ordinary people" of Northern Ireland—Kincaid's question—is to locate them, then, in an endless "battle royal,"[16] imprisoned by the walls of a bizarre new enclave they can neither escape nor precisely dwell in or comprehend exactly, but where they are nonetheless left to carry out their prescribed, opposing, antediluvian good fights—"forerver," it would seem, or at least until some new political reality, the "beyond" of partition, were to unfold.

In Part I of the chapter which follows, I review the literature on partition by scholars working on geopolitical issues, processes and histories in diverse fields. I examine partition in this global sense in order to think through its perceived effects in relation to theories of nationalism, national identity and ontologies of modernity. Then, I link these speculations to Irish history and the Northern Irish situation, specifically, looking at the aftermaths and contemporary realities of state and civil society there. In Part II, I draw conclusions about the meaning and impact of partition in Ireland, particularly what it has meant in terms of imagining the nation and national community as well as how it has altered the constitution of subjects. I argue that the three key effects of division have been to undermine the idea of the nation and coherence of national identity; to create a society in perpetual mourning; and to "quarantine" the subject owing to an ontology of waiting and sense of national incompleteness. In devising this theory, which grew first out of literary analysis, I take recourse to ideas of Homi Bhabha, Michel Foucault, Joe Cleary, Gyan Pandey and other theorists working at the interstices of geography and "high" [17] politics. Finally, in Part III, my conclusion, I offer speculations about the global import of partition as paradigm of the contemporary zeitgeist.

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~**Part I:** *Starting Points: Partition, Indivisibility & Territorial Meaning*

> *Ireland has proved too small to be divided…*
> ~David Harkness, Ireland in the Twentieth Century

Most often the outcome of decolonization or Cold War politics, the geopolitical remedy of partition was adopted time and again in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to disastrous effect. In historian Robert Schaeffer's uncompromising words, "the division of countries into separate states has been a singular" and "immediate failure" (1990 3 - 4). The plan's underlying assumptions are continually proved wrong, its damaging consequences seen to be consistent
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across national and even continental boundaries. Though adopted as a “problem-solving device… to meet the claims of conflicting political aspirations,” most fall considerably short of forecasted outcomes (Fraser 2) and may even serve to escalate discord between relevant groups (Ibid, *passim*). Public Policy scholar Monica Duffy Toft reports the shocking fact that state division and population transfer proposals account for “nearly two-thirds of all armed conflicts includ[ing] an ethnic component” (3). Exacerbating old and inciting new political and civil troubles, the three “universal” outcomes of partition, outlined by Schaeffer, are all violence-provoking changes: massive migration, discrimination, and border disputes (1999 3 – 4). We observe such results in areas like Ireland, South Asia and Palestine, where British colonial partitions were proposed or adopted between 1921 and ’47, and where communal or paramilitary hostilities have been unrelenting. Thus, T.G. Fraser concludes: “Where partition has been implemented in the twentieth century, it has never been separable from controversy” (1).

In spite of wide agreement about its destructiveness—from historians, political scientists, public policy and international relations experts, to sociologists, literary critics and geographers—partition continues to be considered viable, however, even now in the twenty-first century. The Sudan was partitioned into a north and a south as recently as July, 2011. And, in the political deliberations on Iraq, “proponents of ‘hard partition,’” those arguing in favor of “forming three new sovereign… states,” have held out, maintaining the viability of such a plan in that context, too (O’Leary 2). Indeed, its perceived relevance continues in part because state division has been “more of a problem than diplomats, scholars, and politicians have been willing to recognize” (Schaeffer 1999 7). Broad-ranging work by scholars in diverse fields offers scant support, however; and so, it seems, the denial of relevant issues is a problem more so in the high political sphere. The continued significance of partition plans may be, more than otherwise, politically motivated. Not only is there the complication that native elites participating in the negotiations are often seen as partisan figures replacing, in form and disposition, posts left by colonials, concerned exclusively with middle-class interests and those of the dominant native culture.[18] Worse still, agents of the exiting colonial state have played pivotal roles in each partition adopted as an outcome of empire and its deconstruction. Given the wound of a failed, “falling” empire and the atrophying profit margin sustained in conferring territorial control back to native groups, the interests of colonials are patently questionable; they have little stake in correcting the damage wrought by historical divide and conquer strategies and risk little in the event of the plan’s failure. As imperializing nations quit colonized places, the “postcolonial burden” of partition (Zamindar 3) was proposed in connection with their interests, without regard for the perspectives of decolonizing groups who would live out the consequences.[19] Geopolitical schemes have functioned to allow the “great power partitioners” (Schaeffer 1999 4) to control the “spheres of emerging influence and secure states for their ideological allies along cold war frontiers” (Ibid 1).[20] Thus, as Irish Studies critic Joe Cleary maintains, in divisions occurring “as a consequence of colonial rule,” communities lose control “over their own political destinies… [become] vulnerable to the wills of superpowers” (Cleary 3), and emerge from occupation “through a wrenching political process over which they have little control” (Schaeffer 1990 6).

What is more, new hostilities materialize after the breakup. Leaving socio-political issues, such as communal violence and internment aside, a partitionist political solution is untenable because of the ways it complicates relations between the new state and new citizen. Self-other arrangements are reestablished and national identity significantly confused as new post-partition antimonies arise (Cleary 2002; Pandey 2001). It is important to recall that the enactment of a partition almost always occurs in a situation where “political power was transferred and divided among *competing* social groups" (Schaeffer 1999 2, my italics). Breaking up a group formerly conceived of as whole "undercut[s] the meaning of sovereignty for newly independent states and sharpen[s] the competition between" those formerly part of a shared community (Schaeffer 1990 3). Polarized, antagonistic cross-border alterities develop in tandem with discourses designed to ensure they thrive: post-partition political climates prove "exceptionally lethal" as newly constituted rivals stand on either side of a new map's illusory line, "estranged" and "mutually distant" (Cleary 4). Cleary and Subaltern Studies historian Gyan Pandey both show how the new states' "attempt[s] to legitimate themselves" is often discursively produced "on the basis that they represent a more felicitous marriage of the traditional and the modern than the rival-state across the border, which is usually deemed to represent the worst elements of both" (Cleary 11). Subjects are defined against the new other in an all-encompassing way through the "constant retailing of tales of sacrifice and war" (Pandey 2002 176), "[t]ales about historic homelands and… generations of ethnic brethren who gave their lives to defend [them] …may seem artificially constructed, but they… resonate… [and] affect the cohesion, unity, and mobilization of ethnic groups" effected by state divisions (Toft 16). And members' belief in them has "real, material consequences" (Ibid), most importantly this toxic cross-border othering and willed invisibility. Being a good subject means regarding the post-partition other as *fully* other: to retain their *de facto* citizenship, national belonging now requires citizens to harbor an intense hatred of those formerly part of the same polity.[21]

Accordingly, these theorists mutually surmise, the protraction of conflict is "not incidental to but constitutive of the new state arrangements" (Cleary 11). Growing out of these "[p]artition effects" (Zamindar 238) is a corollary concern: post-partition hostilities are not limited to cross-border clashes but persist within the new successor states, too. In the end, partition is an “attempt to engineer… nation-states with clear and decisive ethnic majorities in precisely those situations where ethnically intermingled populations were least amenable to such results” (Cleary 21). It represents “a violation of the integrity of the body politic for its opponents. But for its proponents, it is essential crisis-survival management...” (O’Leary 4). One factor underwriting their demise is that citizens cannot form the necessary imagined society because those historically defined as enemies are part of the group, figures whose presence in the space of the prison of daily life is seen as nothing short of criminal. Added to these difficulties are the unequal outcomes of the change. While the plans “help to secure self-determination for some groups, they do so at the expense of the self-determination of others” (Cleary 11). We observe this unevenness as marginalized groups—women and children, the “mad,” the poor classes—are disproportionately implicated in and harmed by ensuing violence and other long-term outcomes. The protraction of discord is attributable to the fact that the “principle of self-determination had been honoured with respect to Southern Catholics and Northern Protestants. It was denied most notably to Northern Catholics who found themselves a substantial minority in a state which had a vested interest in their exclusion and continued disloyalty” (O’Dowd 51). The defining moment in all-Irish twentieth-century history was paradoxically a time of birth and death: a moment of joy and relief because the British Empire had been defeated and one of sadness and loss because that victory was partial. Catholics of Ulster had been left under control of the British Empire and the long, good fight that was to end would, unfortunately, linger.

Benedict Kiely correctly foresaw how, because derived through “disagreement and misunderstanding” (1) and a failure to negotiate the plan in consideration of rights, principles, identities and definitions of the land on all sides of the conflict (x), partition could by no means lead to peace (185).[22] Clearly not curative, the geopolitical strategy is a mere “bandage” and example of "lazy" politics. Partition simply cordons off a territory, as if an arbitrary, invented border will function to keep enemies at bay and wipe away national memory. A tired non-solution with potentially fatal social outcomes, the long-term prospects of virtually any partition plan are dim; as is clear from the history, "easy, first-choice solutions…, [whether] power-sharing or simple majoritarianism, have failed" wherever adopted (Giliomee 3). Worse still, it allows for the circumvention of the compromise essential to reconciliation and peaceable futures. O'Leary summarizes its vagaries well: "Partitions have always caused more violence during and after the partition than occurred before... [and its] apologists are invariably obliged to argue that the pathologies that accompanied their proposed partition were the result of an imperfect design, or of insufficient rigor and resolution" (21 – 22). Hence, Irish statesman Conor Cruise O'Brien famously termed it the "expedient of the tired statesman" (quoted in Schaeffer 1999, 1).

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Monica Duffy Toft, Benedict Anderson and Martin Heidegger offer theories that help explain the "trouble" with partition. First, Toft points to the ontological significance of the geography and the borders of the nation. The tragic flaw of political process, she suggests, has been a consistent failure to take into account the functional, lived meaning of a territorial unit to residents—its status, for example, as homeland of a people—without which "averting potential conflicts is all but impossible" (Toft 3 - 4). Exacerbating the aftermaths of partition, Toft shows, is the fact that implicated groups usually define, remember and "view the same territory in different ways" (1). In Ireland this was a critical issue as, throughout the negotiations, "political and communal perceptions" of the land were indeed "vastly different" (Hennessey xi). This *territorial meaning*—which Paul Diehl calls its "relational" or "intangible" significance (xi) and David Newman its "symbolic" import (3 – 33)—is of utmost importance, Toft says, despite that
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it so often goes ignored. Those affected by or negotiating state divisions underestimate the importance, to native groups, of the meaning of the land, what theorist Benedict Anderson calls the sense of “nation-ness” attached to it—that is, a primary identification, sense of belonging and ontological grounding based on membership in a territorially-based nation-group (1991, *passim*). This entails a sanctification of the space of the nation (Foucault 1986 23) which explains why “[in] the last century…, millions died in wars and…other violence” related to geographical division and the concomitant relocation of populations (Toft 10).

Secondly, Toft maintains that the aspect of territorial meaning contributing most to partition’s abysmal afterlife is that the land is typically understood to be *indivisible*. Geographies in dispute are resistant to the surgical procedure the plan constitutes because, to residents, that terrain is “simultaneously a divisible, quantifiable object and an indivisible and romantic subject” (Toft 127), “both a material resource—an object that can be divided and exchanged—and a nonmaterial value—a subject that can be neither divided nor exchanged” (Toft 10). In situations of putative ethnic conflict, this perceived indivisibility preempts resolution (Toft 2), as seen in the context of Palestine and the lived reality of the “inseparability” of “the Arab and the Jew” (Hochberg 2). This was theorist Edward Said’s eventual position as well; he came to view the “ideology of separation” as a “dying” and unsustainable one, asserting instead a “platform [for] the future” of “learning how to live with, as opposed to despite” the other (2). Undeniably, if a terrain is believed indivisible, any breakup of it will be a failure before the fact. As O’Leary rightly states: “[t]he promise is that partition can separate Siamese twins…” (4).

Add to this the fact that this indissoluble location is the subject’s primary identification—homeland of a people and seat of self-identity—and witness the problematics of partition redouble. Aside from questions of land power and political existence, the paradigm of nation represents the “most universally legitimate value in the political life” of modernity, according to Benedict Anderson (1991 3). The nation is experienced, he says, as a “deep [and] horizontal comradeship” that “commands… profound emotional legitimacy” and emboldens members to make “colossal sacrifices” (1991 4 - 7). The powerful single thrust that gives the paradigm meaning, value and conceptual embodiment is the discursively constructed, abstract collective Anderson calls an “imagined community” (1991 *passim*). Like an organized religion, which hinges on members’ faithfulness, national integrity, he theorizes, depends on the knowledge of, belonging to, and ability to imagine the nation-group. However, regardless of the maps, treaties and place names reifying successor states, the building blocks of the modern nation, as understood, mean that it is not amenable to the changes introduced by partition. First, the structure is understood as “both inherently *limited* and sovereign” (Anderson 1991 7)—possessing an unalienable right to self-rule and haunted by what theorist Pheng Cheah terms “finitude” (*passim*), beginning and end points that frame and distinguish the structure. The nation is likewise structurally sound only in the singular and in juxtaposition to perceptible “others.” Its consolidation depends on awarenesses of both the “finite… elastic boundaries beyond which lie other nations” (Anderson 1991 7) and the “excluded… ‘other’” beyond its walls (Cairns/ Richards 9). Also establish the legitimacy of the modern nation are a “subjective antiquity” and sense of immortality (Anderson 1991 5). The uncanny phenomenon whereby “nationalisms [begin] to figure themselves as ancient” is key to understanding partition aftermaths (Anderson 1998 21): a collective linked back through antiquity *cannot*, by definition, be reinvented.

All of these understandings are brought to crisis by the event. The need to re-imagine implicated nations interferes with their necessary borderedness as well as the selves housed and constituted by them. The destabilizing force of partition is, of course, amplified by the fact that the organizing logic of the nation is also retaining wall for the modern subject. In “divorcing” the nation from itself and attempting to establish it anew, the geopolitical event throws the existence of the subject into disarray. The ineffaceable connection between a territory and the nation and subject housed there accounts for partition’s having earned the label of a “radical surgery” (Horowitz quoted in Waterman, 117) and reputation as “an immediate failure” (Schaeffer 1990 4). Well explicated by Anderson and across postcolonial theory, we know that the modern subject is constituted within the frame of the nation. Considering the literary quintessence of this figure, Shakespeare’s Hamlet, and his inspiration in the archetypal Greek subject, Aeschylus’ Orestes, these figures emerge from respective hiding places into *nationalized* subjectivities. They dramatically declare an existence based on the nation-state or city-state of origin.[23] This subject is interpellated as subject of the state apparatus: Shakespeare’s “It is I, Hamlet, the Dane*”*—Pearse’s “I am Ireland”—and Yeats’ “I am of Ireland.” In *re*-organized nations, however, the imposition and proliferation of novel borders, the question of the people and their sovereign existence, are *problems* that required “fixing.” Thsu, we see, the breakup of that geographical space functions to disarticulate national integrity. Toft shows, for instance, how divided nations stand disjunct and self-alienated; they are “double-faced” and not in accord with themselves (Woolf 26). Zamindar portrays the time-space of national rupture as a “fundamental uncertainty” (3), while Gyan Pandey suggests communities thus impacted become deeply “ambiguous” and inscrutable (Pandey 2001 195). Such a terrain either has its “meaning” *as* a place because of political estrangement; it is one where “social power cannot be conceived without a geographical context” (Brewster 125). Unusually strong “causal relationships between political power and geographical space” evolve (Østerud 192) and the critical link between a sense of being and belonging to a nation is both more intense and more fraught.[24] In “a history marked by annexation" and a location that coheres as a "site of dispute and an index of power" (Ibid), the paradigm of nation overwhelms identity more exhaustively as well as more perplexingly.

Eamonn Hughes characterizes the North, therefore, as "not so much enclosed by its borders as defined by them: it is a border country" (3). Always already called to crisis by the fact of colonization, as the insult of rupture is added to imperial injury, the ontological emergency intensifies. A critical factor in the life of such a nation is the fact that the grounding geography functions not only as home for an imagined community and as seat of the self, but also as homing *ontological* base. Martin Heidegger refers to such a geography as a "locale" which is intelligible because of its borders, which "[gather] in such a way that [they] [allow] for a site" (355). For him, the sense of an existence in the world begins its "essential unfolding" (356) through an *a priori* experience of occupying or dwelling in a boundaried, known space. For this locale to cohere, the subject must be safe "from harm and danger," for to dwell, Heidegger argues, is "to be set at peace, …within the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its essence" (350 - 51). An ontological existence requires a temporality, too: the subject must be able to imagine, recall and occupy "times" (349). And, because the citizen never "really" exists, she cannot experience Heidegger's compulsory "good death." He writes: "[m]ortals dwell in that they initiate their own essential being—their being capable of death as death—into the use and practice of this capacity, so that there may be a good death" (352). This death, and the life that preceded and made it possible, transpires *from* a locale housing the subject. Heidegger's spatial ontology is, we see, not unlike Toft's view of the role a homeland plays in the life of the subject. And, unavoidably, the factors establishing a clear sense of place in the world is upset by the redefinition of that space imposed by the geopolitical plan. Subjects of partition cannot dwell or build or be: flummoxed and in flux, their existence is a "harassed unrest" (Heidegger 353) as they await some other nation structure which can be occupied, understood and stable. Rather than "dwell" in the world, the post-partition subject is ward of a state-in-question, haunting a home that doubles as a place of exile: an undividable state which, nevertheless, stands divided.

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Partition poses insurmountable difficulties in terms of territorial meaning, as homing foundation of a sustainable ontology and with respect to the constitution of citizens as subjects of the state. While I remain deeply skeptical about the universal applicability of these formulations of Anderson, Heidegger and Toft, they most certainly apply in the Irish context, where the imbrication of ontology and nation-ness cannot be overstated, and where there is no more dominant, essential concept than the symbolic meaning of Ireland's "four green fields." To be Irish has always comprised a clear and irrefutable membership in the national collective, that quintessential interpellation represented in the poems cited above—Padraig Pearse's "*Mise Éire*" ("I am Ireland") and Yeats' "I am of Ireland." Post-partition aftermaths have been precisely as described in the scholarship on partition reviewed, particularly so and with greater intensity in Northern Ireland. The island's division was complicated by factors some say doomed it from the start: the partialness of decolonization—that all but six counties were decolonized, and two-thirds of the Ulster province "left behind"; the continuation of the colonial state in the North in conjunction with its demise south of the border; and, the legacy and density of the historical plantation of Ulster—a strategy of the British Empire, mostly before the nineteenth century, not just to administer conquered territories but to "settle," clear and occupy them. Ireland was the first historical object of that plan, and because the northeastern area had grown in fiscal importance, "as Belfast underwent its dramatic nineteenth-century conversion into an outcrop of the British industrial system" (Fraser 9). Under pressure of Anglo-Irish Loyalists, carving up the
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island was, in fact, an attempt by the Crown to disallow full foreclosure of its empire there and maintain the most economically robust terrain, thereby indefinitely protecting its economic interests. What is more, the British guaranteed that economic control by retaining only *six* of Ulster's nine counties, which resulted in a "more than two-thirds" Protestant majority and meant that the possibility of division being overturned was essentially null and void (Bose 209).[25]

Quite predictably, a troublesome political and social quagmire has evolved in Ireland since 1921 and the Civil War. Sectarian tensions thrive and the region has been plagued by civil strife. The area is governed by a "regime systematically repressive and discriminatory toward the Catholic population, who were seen as a disloyal minority and a Trojan horse for the overwhelmingly Catholic Irish Republic south of the border, which regarded Northern Ireland as… temporarily separated" (Bose 209).[26] Now a "minority 'stranded' on the wrong side of the border" (Bose 209), varyingly wracked and protected by paramilitary organizations and inundated by the violence of acute biases in employment, housing and education, these third-class citizens would eventually organize to correct the injustices of everyday life by means of non-violent civil rights movement. Inspired by parallel actions in the U.S., members of both primary communities began holding non-violent protests in defense of Catholic civil rights. By 1968, these efforts had evolved into full-blown, organized movements. In response, waves of sectarian communal violence erupted in Belfast and Derry, that in turn galvanized the Catholic-affiliated, nationalist Irish Republican Army—the (Northern) Provisional IRA[27]—into all-out armed resistance. The Unionist community responded in kind through "severe police repression" (Bose 209) and the call to Protestant-associated, Loyalist paramilitaries[28] to engage a thoroughgoing endeavor to resist both Civil Rights and IRA activity. This Catholic Civil Rights Movement[29] sparked the intra-state war known as the "Troubles," a term signifying both the

Rubik's cube that is all-Irish political history and, more recently, the twenty-five-year war following the rise of the Movement and the entry of British troops in 1969. This era would witness the worst aggression in the island's history, involving paramilitary and (colonial) state violence as well as sectarianist communal fighting. In "three decades… some thirty-five hundred persons were killed in political violence and thirty-six thousand injured (of a population of 1.5 million). Tens of thousands were driven out of their homes, and thousands served prison time for perpetrating violence, including grisly sectarian murders" (Bose 210).[30]

Though the Movement was eventually snuffed out through (colonial) state brutality,[31] the armed para-state struggles continued until 1994, when cease-fires were finally called. Peace talks culminated in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (GFA),[32] ratified by an astonishing 71% majority vote—astonishing because its passing meant the Irish forfeited, once and for all, their right not just to reunification but to national sovereignty. Effectively, the Irish nation met its end as a political ambition here, as Bose explains: this aspect is the "one potentially troublesome plebiscitary provision… It stipulates that British sovereignty over Northern Ireland will not yield to Irish sovereignty… unless and until a majority in Northern Ireland ratify such a change" (177). Because the majority population of the six counties is Protestant and Loyalist, the likelihood of such an outcome is extremely small. The political polarization subsists, as we know, long after adoption of the peace accord. Implementation of the "Belfast Agreement," as it is also termed, was stalled for years and it was not until the IRA's self-decommissioning in July 2005, and further events of March and April 2007, that the power-sharing government—the final step in its realization—became a reality. This would seem to signify the beginning of the end of an eight-hundred-year fight for control of the tiny European island. As of now, we watch and wait: the cooperative state is in a slow process of establishment, a mere fledgling as the political process stumbles and the violence unavoidably spurred erupts in wave after continuous wave.[33] In Northern Ireland, it seems the peace is, as Samuel Beckett described himself, “more interested in failure” (Donoghue 257). Partition is, then, an endless aftermath of empire, a modality through which it is perpetually “reincarnated.” Rather than occurring at a specific point in time, it is a never-ending incident-turned-archetype that comes to define affected societies. Zamindar speaks, in the South Asian context, of the “lingering” nature of division in her theory of the “long Partition.”[34] It is “not…self-contained” (Jain 1) but splintered by means of “re-enactment[s]” (Jain xi) that stretch and “[extend] the spaces of [its] experience” and “produce a refraction of various aspects of national life that seemingly have nothing to do with it” (Sarkar 3).

In Ireland, of course, the continual re-enactment of partition has been manifest, most outstandingly, in the conflict euphemized as the “Troubles.” The protracted nature of the conflict and furious fervor by which residents define themselves in opposition to one another are clear outcomes of the 1921 political bifurcation. As discussed, in a conflict zone comprised of mutually hateful communities bifurcated by walls reifying a shared loathing, the building blocks of nation, self and place all become derailed. Firstly, for the Northern Irish subject, the place called “Northern Ireland” is an interval or pause between past, present and future “Irelands,” and the “time” of Northern Irishness is, first and foremost, that of waiting. Along with the existential crisis of disrupted borders, the subject of this small partitioned enclave waits, *in perpetuum*, for so many “Godots”: for a nation or some other political structure granting sovereignty; for reunification; for de-segregation; for an independent Ulster; for a United Ireland; or simply, for the discord and violence to end and the polity to function as a unified group. Members of the two traditions, thought of in diametrical opposition, both occupy a “between” time and await the political futures they are defined, *a priori*, on the basis of. The Irelands they look forward to, however, are poles apart. Not unlike Beckett's Vladimir and Estragon, Republicans expect reunification, a wholly sovereign United Ireland, whereas Loyalists and Unionists cling to the idea of the legitimacy of the imperial union and historical settlement of Ulster. Kiberd's description of characters in *Waiting for Godot* mirrors this situation precisely: they "are waiting without hope for a deliverance from a being in whom they do not really believe, in the manner of the *aisling* poets" (539). Resident of a limbo waiting to "begin its essential unfolding" (Heidegger 356), consigned not to dwell but to loiter, this ontological waif lives out a non-existence in an enforced, dangerous locale. As specter and trespasser, always under threat of conceptual *and* corporeal death, the subject is never really "alive."

Time does indeed have "a special valency in postcolonial thought," as Meena Alexander suggests (2009 14), the unique temporal vicissitudes likewise implicit in poet Tom Paulin's lines: "I am history now. / I carry time in my mind. / As sharp as an axe" (Ormsby 223). In this postcolonial space, far from future-leaning or dialogic shifts, Northern Irish time is the wait for a political dream to manifest, or for some lost past to resurrect. And even as residents on both sides of the divide are constitutively alienated by it, there is no escape from this historical-political-geographical node—the rupture of 1921—which (likewise) founds whatever sense of Irishness may be claimable in the North. The legacy of division and decolonization in Ireland rendered both the imperial project and the anti-colonial nationalism, so important to Irishness, disjunct and, "beyond sectarian feud, the truncation…[,] spawned a complex web of loyalties and affiliations, transformed existing identities and created new ones, produced a rupture within national history, and set a new course for collective destiny" (Sarkar 10 – 11). In terms of solidarities, the place of birth is *not* the true home for either group. Citizens of the six counties are neither integrated themselves nor united with the historical collectivities they prefer in the extra-state locations where they their true identities originated and have their lived existences. Not even earning the label of Tom Paulin's "cagy friendship" (Ormsby 221), subjects of this small place face in opposite directions and (thus) precisely cannot, and do not, "see" one another. They negotiate national and ontological boundaries not toward but *away* from each other. Refusing and refuting partition, Republicans extend a collective hand across the border southward in the direction of Éire—and in that reach feel themselves forgotten and betrayed. Consolidating and defending partition, Loyalists grasp after the tenuous, fraught filial relation to the colonial motherland; they perceive a parallel sense of abandonment and apathy regarding their plight. Hennessey explains that "[t]he… difference between Irish Unionists and Irish Nationalists was that the former possessed a Britannic identity… [And] [n]either… accepted the legitimacy of each other's definition of national identity" (235).

What is more, this lack of a generalized reach across the internal divide is not insubstantial: these paradoxically estranged identifications function as sociological partitions—invisible but very real—within a single, very small place and community. The material reality of the location is such that the divisions and displacements provoked by partition and colonialism are everywhere reified. The space that ought to function as Heideggerian "locale" is debilitated by fragmentation and negotiating "home" is like navigating a mine field or maze. Note the frantically segregated condition of Belfast, the way Derry is essentially a Catholic ghetto,[35] and understand that the possibility for postcolonial encounters between relevant others, as theorized, are for the most part foreclosed. Indeed, at what intersection do Unionists and Republicans convene and commune? Indeed, as partition theorist and historian Sumantra Bose explains, the North of Ireland is "the site of an extremely bitter, intractable conflict… one of the most divided, polarized societies on earth" (210). Burdening matters further, the antimonies following division are globalized in oppositional terms too: Republicans fly Palestinian flags—Unionists, Israeli. Republican murals identify with the American struggle for racial integration and Civil Rights—Loyalist murals feature leaders of the Confederate Army of the American Civil War. Evidencing a "split and divided society," discourses of the North nationalize a population cohabitating in one small place: they "encapsulate and encode… allegiances" (Santino 2) in categorically opposing terms. Whether affiliated with the Republican or Unionist para-states, an uncreated United Ireland or (similarly nonexistent) independent Northern Ireland—notably, residents are not allied with the existing structure—, these visual histories function as discourses of "mutual distancing" (Cleary 11) deepening and proliferating the territorial fracturing, daily reminders compelling residents to remain entrenched in the sectarian camps colonial history assigns them to and keep up whichever "good fight" they belong to. In these ways, "existences on both sides of the divide are verified by a continuation of the sectarian struggle" (Delgado xiii), they are boxed-in by contradictory obligations that likewise found the meaning of good citizenship.

Gerry Adams reminded us of this recently, casting Northern Irish society as one of the most riven in Western Europe.[36] In the North, as a whole, there was little "beauty" in the terribleness[37] of these events. The people experienced the sundering as a more or less fatal break from the nation-collectives of which they were previously a part: if Nationalist, the native Irish people; if Loyalist to the Crown, the British empire. Unionist Protestants saw the continuation of the colonial state as the maintenance (and also a revision) of their dominant class status. This group "considered its identity to be British, not Irish, and whose leaders were implacably opposed to becoming citizens of any kind of Irish state" (Bose 209).[38] The place of this community in the world was deeply altered, however, in the sense that, save the tiny enclave, the empire had dramatically "quit" Ireland, the impetus for partition being their retreat. For the other community, mostly Catholic and Nationalist, the effects of rupture were especially vigorous. As the first Catholic minority in Ireland's history, they lost their "place" in the world and compulsory nationalist identity through radical alienation from the new Republic. Before that time, this group was in no way estranged from the nation. After the perilous, long-sought dream of independence was realized for those south of the border only, their "identity" became fragmented beyond recognition. According to film scholar Bhaskar Sarkar, rather than the "Catholics of Ulster consider[ing] themselves part and parcel of the Irish nation" (55), in fact they find themselves stranded in an exilic no man's land as a marginalized group, barred not just from the freedom they fought for but the "nation-ness" now lived out south of the border. The split that birthed the Northern enclave constituted a fall through multiple levels of the imperial inferno: from a former level of damnedness, from which sovereignty could be sighted on the immediate horizon, to the drop downward into utter political burying and forfeiture of any hope for the future. After 1921, the plight no longer involved working cooperatively, as a nation, to gain freedom from a brutal colonial landlord but became a simple struggle to survive a moiling darkness in the small corner into which they had been barricaded by partition.

Hence, we find the tiny Irish amputee characterized as "a cultural Siberia" (Ormsby 20) or the "stored statelessness," in a poem by Medbh McGuckian (1995 53). In David Lloyd's *Anomalous States*, he contends that "[c]ontrol of narratives is a crucial function of the state apparatus since its political and legal frameworks can only gain consent and legitimacy if the tale they tell monopolizes the field of probabilities…" (6). In the North, as shown, we find not just competing discourses of the state but rival states *within* the state. We may be tempted to associate Loyalist ideology and its subscribers with the colonial state in an unqualified way, but this is tricky: Loyalism and Unionism have grown into their own bizarrely "de-imperialized" ideologies since 1968, many of their aims existing now in a state of ir-relation and ir-relevancy *vis-á-vis* the (colonial) state apparatus. Indeed, a plethora of discursive practices operate in contest and contradistinction, some of which are not controlled by and actually run counter to both the official state and the colonial structure which originally granted them legitimacy. There is, at the very least, the question of who is subaltern, both in terms of the state formation and of access *to* Northern Irishness, whether there is a legitimate subject at all. In this sense, Lloyd's Ireland-oriented postcolonial methodology is deficient when set against the North. Ultimately, the Northern territory stands as a remarkably atypical enclave within an already "anomalous" island in the sense that the nation-state does not "wither"[6] as Marx speculated but subsists in a state of multiplicity and fragmentation. Here is a systemically unhomed (Bhabha 9 - 18) two-in-one people fissuring in multiple directions at once, with a "webbed," rather than double, consciousness (Dubois 5), an "anti-nation" contradictorily constituted by discursive practices of several competing, and in some cases specifically *imaginary*, imagined communities.[7]

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~**Part II:** *An Náisiún na hÉireann*

> *The division remained. That was the whole problem.*
> ~Benedict Kiely, Counties of Contention

In considering the politics of the Northern Irish state and its para-states, as well as the irreconcilable differences between the principal communities, recognize in turn the "[p]artition effects" (Zamindar 238) outlined: for the nation, the foiled indivisibility and dueling territorial meanings that thwart the plan's aims; for the individual, the crisis of nation-ness and swift overwhelming of whatever ontologies or identities may be intermittently conceivable. Thomas Hennessey is correct to declare that "a conflict of national identity lies at the epicentre of the partition of Ireland" (xi). Whereas historian Benyamin Neuberger maintains that the "triumph of
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Irish nationalism in the South and foundation of the Republic have largely resolved the question of the national identity of the Irish Catholics in both the Irish Republic and in Northern Ireland" (54 – 55), in fact, precisely the opposite scenario prevails. Far from being settled, the territory remains in discordant flux with regard to questions of social and political belonging; and, this is as much a problem today as it was at inception of the statelet. As Hufstader notes, "[o]f the ten words most frequently used by Catholics surveyed in 1977 to describe their group… four were 'long-suffering,' 'insecure,' 'deprived,' and 'unfortunate'" (12 – 13). A partitioned society "continues to be fractured on the basic fault line of national identity and state allegiance" (Bose 177) as "deep lacerations [are] inflicted on one's sense of self and community" (Sarkar 9 - 10).

Northern Ireland has evolved as the small Kincaidian place described earlier: the nation more imprisoned than housed by its borders, the structure incapable of functioning as base for the self or constituting haven of a sustainable ontology. A distinct postcolonial state and civil society, a divergent sense of place and self, altered remembrances of the past and divergent imaginings of the future all arise as the trauma of national rupture is lived out. Prising the nation into a North and a South, concomitantly alienating residents from the ground and grounding force of the nation—in the North uniquely and outstandingly—has inspired an intense crisis. This emergency, I argue, is provoked by the ways partition transforms the idea of the nation, national community and sense of place. What we see, in fact, is that there have been three key effects of the division of Ireland in the North: the fragmentation and deep destabilization of the nation and conversion of it into Samuel Beckett's "lingering dissolution" (Kiberd 532); the societal condition of permanent mourning and grief; and, a corollary cordoning and quarantine of the subject through an ontology of waiting and sense of national incompleteness.

~"fork-tongued on the border bit": National Fragmentation

I am standing on the threshold of another trembling world…
~Bobby Sands, “Diary, 1 March – 17 March, 1981”

The protraction of conflict in states established and arranged through a partition is underwritten by a sense of national collapse, fragmentation and incomprehensibility. The post-partition nation, as Zamindar suggests regarding South Asia’s, is constituted as “aporias of belonging in a cartography of nation-states. Where, indeed, is India? Where is Pakistan? Who is an Indian? Who is a Pakistani?” (2). We see this inscrutability represented all over literary work from the North—these very questions asked in manifold ways: Where is Ireland? Where is the North? Who is Irish? Do the identity, Northern Irishness, and the place, Northern Ireland, have any viable, lived meaning at all? The discourse of partition is“fork-tongued,” to use Seamus Heaney’s hyphenation, “involv[ing] a change or loss of identity or the emergence of dual or confused identity, when two countries carry the same name” (Waterman 120). Along with setting up new nation-states and creating maps to manifest and codify them, the excesses of rupture render the fabricated nature of the nation—its ever-present undecidability, simultaneity, spectrality and supplementarity—glaringly obvious. Despite that the geopolitical solution is nationalist in character, its aim the re-inscription of new nations and ontololgies of nation-ness, in fact, it breaks the nation. The move to reify[39] new nations “uncreates” the very thing the plan attempts inaugurating: shuffling the borders that organize and sift the chaos of history and community disbands them, rendering the structure a “border country” that is fully *frontera* (Hughes, *passim*). Under the weight of breakup, the borders demarcating a homeland understood as (both) indivisible and eternal falter and begin their collapse. Reorganizing a single collective into multiple novel groups cannot merely establish and consolidate them. It will undermine and “un-define” them, too. In the symmetrical remaking that is partition, a raveling inheres, a self-mocking, tensile tremor courses through the discursive integrity of the new, newly divided states.

Partition is a centrifugal force that transforms the nation into “a newness without hold” (Alexander 2009 7), a “thing” that necessarily “fall[s] apart.”[40] Of course, Yeats wrote “The Second Coming” the year the treaty that split Ireland was negotiated,[41] and the partitionist resonance of not only the title—as in, the second coming of the nation, now mutilated multiple *nations*—but also the poem’s best known lines, is unambiguous: “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world” (187). Written at the moment of rupture, it seems prescient here. In spite of a level of popularity rendering this poem almost-cliché, its unmistakable partitionist implications have gone largely unremarked. And this, despite the fact that “world” is almost always symbol of the Irish nation for Yeats, his poem thus inferring that the sundering would fragment its integrity to the extent that, rather than an unhomely postcoloniality (as understood), residents would live out the anarchy of a pronged displacement in a location of irresolvable political blur, a profusion of times and places, overlapping selves and others, of first, “second” and third “thoughts” (Heaney 2002 54).

Unsurprisingly, figures of Yeats’ nation that “fall[s] apart” flourish in the post-partition Irish literary imagination, particularly in representations of the Northern statelet. In *Making History*, playwright Brian Friel offers a spectacular object as figure for an Ireland “fallen apart,” conquered by the British. The historical Hugh O’Donnell, as imagined, illustrates the oppressive force of imperial conquest in the seventeenth century by *dismembering* a sheet of paper:

> “Do you know what the hoors [the English] are at? They’re going to build a line of forts right across the country from Dundalk over to Sligo. That’ll cut us off from the south. *(He illustrates this by tearing a sheet of paper in two.)* The second stage is to build a huge fort at Derry so that you and I will be cut off from each

> other. *(He illustrates this by cutting the half-page into quarters.)* Then when Donegal and Tyrone are isolated, then they plan to move in against us. (1989 9)

As Friel's character theatrically shreds the prop symbolizing Ireland, it metamorphoses into a figure of his contemporary, post-partition "paper" nation. This papered drawing and quartering turns it into a sideways elucidation of the geopolitical vicissitudes defining life in the North. In Friel's play, the Irish nation "explodes" in a way reminiscent of Salman Rushdie's explosion of his partitioned world in *Midnight's Children*. Like Friel, also a "midnight's child" of partition, Rushdie incorporates divided South Asia in the body of his narrator:

> Please believe that I am falling apart. / I am not speaking metaphorically... I have begun to crack all over like an old jug—that my poor body… buffeted by too much history… has started coming apart at the seams. … I shall eventually crumble into (approximately) six hundred and thirty million particles of anonymous, and necessarily oblivious, dust. (1987 37)

Saleem Sinai's fall into "*necessarily* oblivious dust" figures a nation destabilized into oblivion by the partition that occurred concurrent with his birth. I bring it in here because the metaphor bears an uncanny likeness to so many Northern Irish allegories of nation: it lines up neatly with representations of Northern Irishness as an exilic, ungrounded identity, its speaker-subjects having no legitimate place to land or dwell and no capacity to maintain their figural integrity.

The kind of national questioning, dissolution and destabilization suggested by Friel and Rushdie is echoed in Corkery's famous declaration of Ireland as a "quaking sod" (quoted in Kiberd 555) and everywhere evident in post-partition literary work. Seamus Heaney characterizes his homeland as a nation of "second thoughts" (2002 54) and Eoin McNamee offers unmoored characters "without a ground" (McCarthy 144). Medbh McGuckian declares that “getting dark / Is the world’s fault” (1992 14 – 15) and Frank McGuinness that “Darkness, for eternity, is not survival” (98). A nation darkened is one that cannot be seen, known or lived in, one that cannot house, define or place the subject. Heaney asks another dark, desperate question, figured through the “outlaw” art of graffiti: *Is there a life before death*? (1975 54, my italics). Through his more pristine, politically indirect style, he continually addresses the deathliness of life and word in the North. In *Station Island*, his speaker is skulked by ghostly muses and Heaney’s general dirt and digging metaphors resonate with the same predicament McGuckian represents through more grotesque, candid figures. McGuckian’s sense of place also reverberates poet Tom Paulin’s alternate representation of Northern Irish society: “Exiles light a candle / To the gods of place” (Ormsby 220). And all these metaphors line up with McGuckian’s remembrance of how, growing up, she “had no feeling of being ‘Irish’ whatsoever” but lived with a pervasive sense of exile from the all-important collective (1996 186). Being the *partitioned* postcolonial subject is, for her, a “dark” existence without gravitational pull experienced, as she elsewhere writes, as a “floating or stumbling” between “tents” (2002 23). In “English as a Foreign Language” McGuckian writes: “Double darkness of those two minutes / when the girls of the empire service stood / with bowed heads beside their switchboards” (2002 70). The time of the nation is represented similarly through Burns’ memory-work in *No Bones*: “It was a very slippery memory,” her protagonist reflects, “the least inattention and it might slide away forever” (92). The slipperiness of memory and telephonic relation in these passages figure the instability of ontology and identity in these authors’ doubly broken, partial nation, the sense of political incompletion and impossible condition of divided indivisibility, the experience of living with the hope for an examinable, cognizant life and seeing it dashed the instant it coheres.

The breakup and rearrangement of the nation, I argue, produces, in the imagining of community, a spectral parade of past, present and "possible" collectivities. Nations of the past, the present and of willed, disparate political futures muddle and menace the "imaginability" of the Andersonian community and interpellation of the its subject. Temporalities of past, present and future crowd the house of the nation, one that in postcolonial thought is always already liminal and spectral. Whereas before 1921, in Ireland, Northern Catholics had been joined in common cause and united Irish nation-ness with those of the twenty-six counties comprising the Republic of Éire—locked in an antediluvian configuration of colonizer and colonized—afterwards, they would be traumatically disowned, as by brothers, sisters, left to fend for themselves against the group that had been a shared enemy.[42] Now, Northern nationalists gain a new opponent—the *Irish* nationalist in favor of partition—and are, at the same time, forced to go on contending with the ancient foe for the foreseeable, "broken" future: the British colonial state, its allies and subjects. This politics of location inspires a sense of displacement not merely in the margins of a lone place, overshadowed and rendered politically powerless by a dominant other, but additionally in terms of the remembered bond with those who became citizens of the new Éire. Always before six of the nine counties comprising "Ulster," one of four prehistoric provinces, always before the majority population of the island, now, the primordial adversary—the Crown and its loyalists—constitutes the major share of the inhabitants of a bizarre six-county statelet surreally christened, "Northern Ireland." This "place" was never before imagined by its residents and is now fully unimaginable in spite of its ratified, mapped political existence.

Several relevant worlds, each one subtending the others, crystallize as an Irish national "cosmology," the only structure from which the new state arrangements can be *re*-imagined and yet, at the same time, this imagining is cancelled before the fact. After partition, the uncanny, unimaginable Irish "nation" now includes the sovereign Republic of Éire, comprising literally roughly three-quarters of the population of the island, the three former provinces plus (in a partition within the partition) three of Ulster's counties. Next is the Northern territory itself, the remaining six dismembered counties and the segregated, antagonistic worlds it is made up of: the largely Catholic, Nationalist world and the Loyalist, mostly Protestant domain, residents of a *very* small place whose extraordinarily irreconcilable differences (as described) are corporeal, very much present and lived. (In Belfast, these communities, we recall, are structured by yet another partition within the partition of Ulster and the partition of the island: the literal wall that snakes through the city.) With these—because empire brought Ireland to this impasse—stands a fourth world whose relevancy continues: the partially-deposed "Mount Olympus" of this schema, the colonial mainland, Ireland's uninvited, long-standing guest and nearest neighbor.

The ontology of partition is thus "divided against itself" (Mufti 211 – 12) and Zamindar's questions reverberate: Where is Ireland? Where is the North? Who is Irish and what can that mean after 1921 north of the border? Accordingly, Benedict Kiely declared that the Irish would write a tale of not two cities but four (4). However, the post-partition Irish narrative is still more convoluted: additional registers of nation-ness—because they have material political or para-political lives—linger in this palimpsest of nation as it forks and "fork-tongue[s] on the border bit" (Heaney 1975 52). Specters of "the dead and the unborn" (Harrison ix) overlay the four territories Kiely had in mind: that is, cosmologically relevant memories of nations and empires past and the hoped-for structures where unresolved political issues are settled and a livable structure born. This consists of the *immediate* pre-partition state—the whole island as a fully dominated imperial terrain, occupied, administered and ruled by Anglo-Irish settler-ascendants and other subjects of the Crown—and, much older, the pre-colonial "authentic" Irish nation, mythically imagined with such force by Yeats and other Renaissance-era writers.[43] At the other end of this nation-spectrum are apparitions of Irelands "*future*": the nationalist's dream of a fully reunified, fully sovereign Ireland—in which the border, the Northern territory and the colonial presence are all eliminated—or, for example, the Loyalist's hope of a self-governing "Ulster" state where the six counties are neither part of the colonial structure nor subsumed into a "threatening" all-Ireland union. These "willed," wished-for nations are relevant in that they have a place in Irish political life, in whatever ways the communities are now imagined, and are reified in the work of paramilitary organizations, in political parties whose aim is to bring those nations into existence, and in the will to reunify the island or otherwise transform.

Uncannily prised apart, the single, boundaried structure of the nation has indeed fallen apart, is fragmented beyond conceptual recognition in "pieces" that are segregated though proximate, distinct though contingent, dead, living and unborn. These shards make up a scattered intersection of nation-worlds: "an ensemble of relations that makes them appear as juxtaposed, set off against one another, implicated by each other… a sort of configuration" (Foucault 1986 22). The "haunting ghosts" of division subtend the structure (Hochberg 2) as "[t]he claim on lost ground, keeps cropping up" (Alexander 2009 34). Nationalist interpellation thus shifts from a unified, solitary, singular structure toward a Foucauldian complex of proximate, contingent "relations," its subject located at a postmodern crossing rather than housed and framed by the single nation-state structure of modernity. Likewise, for Benedict Kiely, Ireland experienced not just a realignment but a "disunion" of place and people (10). Willy Maley also recalls a 1978 speech by F.S.L. Lyons "outlin[ing] four different cultures in modern Ireland – English, Anglo-Irish, Catholic/Gaelic and Scottish Presbyterian" (16). Diehl alludes to the issue, too, noting how writers often use "geographical contiguity to define a population of 'politically relevant' dyads" (viii). These commentators all recognize how the divided Irish nation is fragmented far beyond the 1921 rupture. They insinuate an all-encompassing political schizophrenia and unfettering through which nation and citizen come undone and are indeed "changed, changed utterly."[44] Daniel Corkery alleges that, after the event, the Irish nation "gives no footing" (quoted in Kiberd 555): the ground beneath citizens' feet is broken and individual existence now Friel's paper nation and Rushdie's spectacular jug, "crack[ed] all over."

~*"Is there a life before death?": National Mourning, National Memory*

> *…identity is not a social but a geographical science.*
> ~Rebecca Solnit, A Book of Migrations

Thus, when Joe Cleary recalls how "watching the debacle in Yugoslavia was to some extent like watching a grisly montage of past or possible versions of one's own national history" (3), it seems there was more to this anecdote than intended. This subject simply has too many immovable feasts of the nation, too many political imaginings, too much confusion around the borders of place and self. The structure is tensile and fully expectant—pregnant with waiting, with memory, with the desire for another form, for reunification of what has been severed, for the re-establishment of British authority or the re-memberment of the Irish people—at any and every minute the expecting the imagined community to "[begin] its essential unfolding" (Heidegger 356). Such a crystallization is irremediably forestalled, however. That multiple nation-structures hover in the corners of individual and collective consciousness, I suggest, renders the post-partition state an ultimately *unimaginable* imagined community.[45] The paradigm of nation is rigorously "complicated by the nearness" of its others (Kiely 12), and historical memory is, now, not so much, as Luke Gibbons has it, a "Third World" remembrance (1996 3) but the recollection of *another* nation—of who we once were or who we are no longer or who we ought to be. The transformation "invariably triggers complex reconstructions of national identity within and across the borders" (Cleary 20). Striated and frayed, rather than the devout member of Anderson's thickly, discursively described[46] collective, or the ensconced resident of Heidegger's constituting locale, the post-partition subject is "polyfilial," her nation a "multifamily" system. She is beholden to and under siege by a junction of selves and "other(s)" that are now uncannily *like* her extremely unreliable ontologically manifest self.

The central concern, Cleary says, "was—and still remains—how to exercise conflicting claims to national self-determination in conditions where the national communities involved are territorially interspersed" (19). He asks:

> Should 'the nation'… be reformulated to include only the population resident within the territory… Or, should the state continue to define 'the nation' in terms of the wider trans-border community and/or territory that it also claims as 'its' own? …For minority… communities stranded in states on the 'wrong' side …how to reconcile commitments to the state in which they actually live with commitments to their ethno-national kin in the 'parent' nation-state? (Cleary 20)

This cross-border interspersion means the subject shifts, floats, stumbles and falls between multiple selves and multiple others as "the signs of these erstwhile residents are ubiquitously present" on both sides of the border designed to distinguish and alienate them (Mufti 224). The editors of *Ireland in Proximity* contend that a "self-conscious awareness of proximity, that is, how nations are haunted by their definitional others characterises the postcolonial condition" (Alderson et al 4). And, surely, the nation is a constitutively ambivalent and liminal structure, predicated on a "radical alterity" (Derrida 1994 75), haunted by alien other(s) and embodied and represented more than otherwise by "cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers" and "saturated… with ghostly national imaginings" (Anderson 1991 9). Nationalist ideology always "involves a supplementary movement" whereby we are "render[ed]… vulnerable to an other, an image, by means of which we transform ourselves" and "the possibility of alienation is always already inscribed within [nationalist] freedom" (Cheah 384). At the same time, the "hauntology" particular to state division is both more complex and *more* "multiple."[47] The post-partition nation is a tautologically haunted house whose pre-partition forms are as furies menacing the new incarnation. This "spectralization" (Derrida 1994 158) is made up of *multiple* doubles which take on the order of a palimpsest or incorporation. Additional shadows subtend the structure because: it is plagued not just by an "uncontrollable proliferation" of "figures of finitude," death and apocalypse, but by the memory of former nations, *lost* imagined communities, dead or unborn because mapped out of existence, or as yet uncreated (Cheah 381).

The "ghostly" effects understood as intrinsic to anti-colonial nationalism metamorphose in such a way that the others by which the subject is defined, and the possibility of alienation to which they are at risk, double and redouble. Residents live with an overwhelming spectrality of nation-ness, the existential flux of an "over-populated" multi-nation, dutybound to the claims of each. After partition, in other words, the ghosts multiply. They are not merely colonial and cultural but political too, not only the spectral other but specters of the *self*. The combination of willed national futures and Irish national memory, including the mourning of associated political and geographical losses, come together to thoroughly disrupt the divided national present and confuse the self-other relations founded on it. The force of partition's displacements involve remembrances of nations past that render national alterity indistinguishable. In this, national memory is a key factor. Pre-partition national memory does not align with post-partition structures, as former nations and borders are not forgotten and "co-exist" in the episteme, in how the nation—now *nations*—is imagined. Waterman defines the partitioned nation as one where "two or more new states are created out of what had previously been a single entity and when at least one of the new units *claims a direct link with the prior state*, as in the cases of Germany, India, Ireland or Palestine" (117, my emphasis). And so, the question becomes that asked by Alexander: "how does memory work… when we confront the loss of place so that, rather than following through to the order of things preserved in memory, the rupture of place forces us to confront [their] radical dislocation" (2009 6)? To consolidate the impossible post-partition community, memories of pre-partition communal arrangements are to be repressed and new antimonies invented and interpellated. Now an inter-boundary association, the bonds across that line are to be forgotten, and partitionist discourse works to ensure that they will be. But that does not and cannot happen.[48] The "links between newly created states and the older pre-partition territorial units" continue to function as a critical modality of their disarticulation (Cleary 19).

This connection is "a haunting repressed memory: the memory of… proximity, indeed familial ties" (Hochberg 2) the "radical separation of the two people is… attainable only on the basis of repression and active forgetting" (Hochberg 3). But, of course, to *actively* forget is precisely to remember. As Rushdie parenthetically reminds us, the post-partition community is "(…a nation of forgetters)" (1987 37). Really, he means they are *rememberers* trying to forget what cannot be let go. Saleem Sinai must "confide in paper, before [he] forget[s]"—and precisely so as *not* to (Ibid). And that is the precise, peculiar "amnesia which afflicts an uprooted people" (Kiberd 539), particularly a partitioned people. Regarding post-independence India, Jasbir Jain observes how partition's spectrality brings about a mourning in and of the nation:

> [partition] is real, more concrete…, as one forgets the loss and the anguish and encounters the aftermath, one which is a constant re-enactment in the minds of men. Death and loss become insignificant in the face of shrinking spaces and the

> constant alienation forced on every one of us. Singling out, segregation, ghettoisation, the madness of hatred, the erasure of languages and cultures—these are the losses that go to make the aftermath a living hell. (xi)

These insights are equally germane for Ireland: highlighted here is the oft-neglected fact that, in speaking of partition, we are talking about a situation of multifarious loss and endemic societal grief, a problem of irrepressible memory that plays out in the aftermath. O'Leary likewise maintains that "the brutality, and the artificiality of dividing a 'national' territory, a homeland, and a province" (3) leaves the divided nation-states in mourning. The chief loss is the nation itself, the lost "ground" of a people. Jain suggests, as I argue, that residents are left to mourn the former state arrangements and seek out unrealized structures in which the political concerns of their group would be recognized. Often these strivings have taken the form of paramilitary action, communal violence and all-out war, as seen in Ireland and the Troubles. In *Imaginary Homelands*, what makes Rushdie's journey to his ancestral home so perilously fraught are not only the perplexities of postcoloniality attending it but the material fact of a partition border, and the political fact that the nation in which that home was located no longer exists. It has "died."

And, this undoing of the nation throws the post-partition society into a state of perpetual grief and means that the territory sacrificed through partition will become a deeply nostalgic geography. The inaugurated place—"Northern Ireland"—is a location of rupture, death and loss for its Catholic, Nationalist population and one of (ostensible) shelter for Protestant, Loyalist residents. From the standpoint of anti-colonial nationalism, partition meant the surrender of a long sought freedom—four sovereign "green fields" where the native population would no longer suffer under the tyranny and affront of British domination. From the opposing Unionist perspective, reorganization represented the decline of an empire that had been their chief identification, the opening episode in which those doing its work, descended of, benefiting from or otherwise identified with the Crown witnessed a withering in its reach and sway. The ontologies of partition and "deaths" caused have neither been mourned nor faced in a broad, societal sense. And, as with the legacy of slavery in the U.S., on both sides of the Irish border lives a great wall of silence around partition's deaths, conceptual and literal. And these registers have little hope of articulation in political process. The only modality by which they appear is in grief-stricken, literary work populated by specters and dominated by borders, the "nationalism of mourning" (quoted in Kiberd 531) that laments the nations, the selves, the others, the places and times and dreams that vanished with inauguration of the new borders.[49]

The play of memory, nation-ness and proximity renders the new state arrangements foreclosed embodiments of the nation. National memory, political will and a begrudging awareness of existing state structures come together to leave the partitioned subject traveling and falling between fragments of a larger nation-piece rather than standing in a single grounding "locale." This process of "disconcerting the self with its own uncertainty" (Mufti 224), the trading out and disowning of members now defined as alien to the structure, clearly shakes the ground on which the subject stands, the walls founding their ontological existence. Recognizable in post-partition Irish life, then, is a version of the "self in partition" theorized by Aamir Mufti in the context of post-partition South Asia: that is, a "dialectic of self and other in which the subject and object of desire do not so much become one as simultaneously come near and become distant, exchange places, [and] are rendered uncertain" (211). Newly divided territories are "*almost identical* culturally, ethnically and linguistically, with the others" (Waterman 123, my italics) and these destabilizations enervate national integrity. To sustain itself, as Anderson theorizes, the nation requires clear and present others *outside* its boundaries. But the subject of partition is “located at those borderlands of self and world where autonomy and heteronomy lose their distinctness, where the self is confronted with the uncanny presence of an other that is also the self” (Mufti 223 – 24) and the “other” is now comprised of all those members of the collective who were relegated, by division, to the other side of the new border. As René Girard rightly notes, the North is a place of “‘great hatred [with] little room’ *where antagonists resemble each other*” (quoted in Hufstader 11).

Irish Studies scholars David Cairns and Shaun Richards isolate a line from Shakespeare’s *Henry V*—“What ish my nation?”—as a rhetorical question to which the answer is obvious: the Irishman Macmorris is undeniably consolidated through empire as a British colonial subject.[50] This is the question prompted by the ambivalence of postcoloniality: to what nation am I subject, the imperial or the native? With which community is my belonging, the colonizer or the colonized? Shakespeare’s query echoes across the centuries in a new way after partition, however: now, the nation-structure is all border and Ireland a “border country” (Hughes *passim*); now the “direct link” Waterman speaks of is remembered in spite of a post-partition discourse that aims to erase it. If indeed the necessary national other is also the nationalized self, then there “ish” no border and there “ish” no nation, no Andersonian community. Instead of postcolonial encounters with cultural difference and politico-cultural differentiality, there is no single people with a recognizable other (Cairns/Richards *passim*), and the post-partition answer to Shakespeare’s question must be an unnamable nowhere or unidentifiable everywhere. Imagining oneself part of Anderson’s undifferentiated nation-collective—represented through journalistic writing, literary work, and other “models” (Lotman quoted in Cairns/Richards 8)—is now a Beckettian “endgame”: the protracted life of the modern nation-state end-stopped irretrievably as a strangely grotesque mimic-community, its Frankensteinian subject awaiting wholeness, constitution, recognition, belonging. The national paradigm deconstructs and the self so contradictory as to be nameable only as Beckett's "unnamable," her existence founded on an unanswerable query, spun into the unending, abstractly postmodern whirl… *What ish my nation?* Thus, we have an unimaginable imagined community whose subject lives in perpetual crisis. If the structure subjecting residents is "almost identical" (Waterman 123) to those which must be other to it in order for the interpellation to succeed, if the putative post-partition other is not wholly other and the subject cannot tell the difference between those on either side of the new border, if she is both the self and the other—not as an effect of postcolonial ambivalence but by means of a redefinition of the ground beneath her feet—then, exactly what ground is she standing on? Who is this subject and how is she to be named? What is one who is Northern Irish? One who is "waiting." And what is that? It is to be a purgatorial no one, *yet*. It is to be nowhere, *yet*—dislocated and disarticulated, unnamed and "unnamable."[51]

~*"besieged within the siege": Interned by the Nation, Awaiting Release*

> *"…to be at home and feel so utterly enclosed."*
> ~Salman Rushdie, Midnight's Children

The location of the Northern Irish subject—mourning and melancholic over the political dead, crowded and flummoxed by novel, unforeseen Frankenstein nations, determinedly dreaming of or working toward a just political framework and stable, "nationed" belonging—does not inspire awareness of an Andersonian "imagined community" (1991 *passim*). Not only is this *unimaginable* collective too parented and parenting, dragging behemothic Irish history behind it—like Beckett's leashed porter and slave, Lucky—it is also a trap. Even as the fragmentations of partition would seem to be potentially freeing, its palpable destabilizations leave them more incarcerated than ever, in fact, and the other key aspect of partitionist subjectivization is that problem: existence as internment. The partition of Ireland has led, then, to three essential transformations: the rise of a cosmological, striated conception of the nation and condition of national mourning, as outlined above, and, as explained below, the subject’s irremediable emplacement in the partitioned nation: waiting for release from a perceived temporary, uncertain political incarceration, waiting for inauguration, waiting for a pulse.

Benedict Kiely characterized partition as an “enclosing wall” (ix), and McGuckian places her speaker “between the window and the storm-sash” (1982 30), an incarcerating hall of mirrors symbolizing her location. We recognize the issue in Irish Studies scholar Liam O’Dowd’s description of the primary communities in the North: they are, he says, associated in the manner of Albert Memmi’s colonizer and colonized, “linked…in a reciprocal but mutually destructive relationship within which the identity of each is forged, *and once forged, is frozen*” (40, my italics). Tethered to a nostalgic, lost location and belonging, a *broken* nation is an inescapable territory—it cannot be left, fully, ever. Because of the profound tie between Being and the geography understood as “homeland,” because the subject cannot *not* grieve the death of something of such profound ontological importance, ontologically, partition is indeed a “fatal intersection of time with space” (Foucault 1986 22). The nation is warped by means of the nuclear signifier—the geopolitical border separating Northern nationalists from their imagined true nation and Northern Loyalists descended of colonial plantation and settlement from the imperial motherland—and the subject holds fast to a dream scored in an antique time. They live out an existentialism-in-wait for the “Godot” of nation, whole, intact, familiar and familial:

> *Is there a life before death?* That's chalked up
> In Ballymurphy. Competence with pain,
> Coherent miseries, a bite and sup,
> We hug our little destiny again. (Heaney 1975 54)

This "hug" of a dreamed, willed nation is both compulsory and never-ending. It surreally shifts, in the shift from pre- to post-partition Ireland, from affectionate, protective gesture indicating belonging and home to the damning, grip of a stranglehold that is both deathly and confining.

Political history has hemmed this speaker into place, "umbilically" stitched the nation into their being, with little possibility for freedom or mobility or agency, as partition binds the colonialism *and* the nationalism through the place ever more thoroughly. What we observe are "problem[s] of the human site or living space" (Foucault 1986 23), a politico-historical situation in which both Michel Foucault's disciplinary opposition—carceral vs. panoptic culture—and Homi Bhabha's postcolonial liminality would seem to break down and merge. Foucault's binary of the "culture of spectacle" vs. the (later) "carceral culture," in which spatial confinements are both dispersed and internalized (1979 *passim*), has evolved in Northern Ireland into a surreal form. While the subject is self-disciplining in the post-nineteenth-century hegemonic manner (Foucault 1979 *passim*), with that, the "strategies and ideologies of containment" arising through partition (Cleary 100) hem them into a daily life that takes on the order of a claustrophobic, incarcerating "cell." And, with regard to Bhabha's view of the postcolonial condition, rather than a meetingplace of difference and the generative identities thereby spurred, partitionism provokes a crisis of entrapment not (merely) through the cultural or racial "liminality" borne of migration and colonialism, but, critically, by means of the concatenating force of geopolitical rupture.

The wait for a grounding "Godot" means the subject is incarcerated by multiple "Berlin Walls" of the nation: confined within the confines of a spectral subjectivity,[52] panoptically crowded by remembrances of collectivities past, unresolved, traumas, unfulfilled political hopes. Much like life at HMP Maze, the subject's locatedness in the world takes on the phenomenology of a spectacular internment: his resident is not simply "buffeted by too much history," as

Rushdie's midnight's children are (1987 37), but met, surrounded and defined by too much space—or too many *spaces*—none of which are distinct, safe or temporally clear, none truly enterable, none truly exitable—a "space that claws and gnaws at us" (Foucault 1986 23). The subjectivity engendered recalls Heaney's comment that, during the Troubles, it was "just routine" to "glimpse a couple of youths with hands on their heads being frisked on the far side of the road" (2002 44 – 45). This image is familiar from iconic images of the Troubles: a young man in the search position, back to the viewer, facing a graffiti'd brick wall, soon to be interned, his arms and legs reaching toward each cardinal direction—in each, a foot, a hand, a memory, a grievance, a dream, a self. (The question he asks: *Is there a life before death?*) The picture, I argue, exemplifies everyday life for this subject: the "external space" of relations (Foucault 1986 23) is a kind of panoptical prison where she is both surveillable and surveilled. The borders, ever frayed and fraying, leave their occupant "fork-tongued on the border *bit*" (Heaney 1975 52)—like a clustered puzzle piece, or the young men Heaney recalls seeing, or a participant in a game of Twister: right foot on the pink dot, left straddling the red, one hand on green, the other on blue—entangled by and hanging on to a "falling" structure whose center has indeed not held.

By way of explanation: in July 2005, the IRA made an historic announcement. While the organization "reiterate[s] [its] view that the armed struggle was entirely legitimate," its membership had decided to transform into a "purely political and democratic programme."[8] This conversion brought the North to a new, still fraught era in which the power-sharing government—the final stage of implementation of the Belfast Agreement—could finally begin. And so it has. This para-political evolvement was historic in a way that redefines the term. It crosses the many long centuries of the nationalist fight for control of Ireland and the imperial endeavor to conquer and maintain it: the epochs of the Troubles and the Civil War; partition and the birth of the North; the Easter Rising; the famine; the “failed” rising of 1798; the penal era and that of Cromwell and the plantation schemes; the battles at Boyne and Kinsale... A wildly protracted spatiotemporal movement culminates: all that history is “with” this single, signal event and, in turn, “with” this subject. As resident of the Northern statelet—resident of that whole arc, a time-place mélange that is here, there and everywhere: in the partitioning of streets and neighborhoods; in the Peace Line that turned Belfast into an H-blocked Maze much like the actual prison; in the shops and churches; in the schools and playgrounds; in the public murals, the segregated pubs; in all the flags, the painted curbstones, the graffiti—“*Welcome to Loyalist Larne!”* All these visual and linguistic signifiers—“monuments of a historical consciousness” (Benjamin 262)—craft the bizarre node of space and time that is this subject’s locale.

These events define and locate the subject in the world such that, after partition, existence is multifariously split, partial and perplexed. Caught in that “border bit” (Heaney 1975 52), located astride the “pile of debris” (Benjamin 258) that is Irish national history, the subject can’t *not* remember that colonialism and partitionism profoundly determine their existence, cannot escape coincident, continuous interpellation by a blanketing behemothic swath of time which arcs all the way back to twelfth century; all the while, their gaze fixed on some distant, more ethical and properly self-defining political future. Citizens are stretched across a wide swath of temporalities, forced to straddle antediluvian memories on one end and controversial political dreams on the other. To be resident of Northern Ireland is to be located at the site of a desperately protracted, long-dead history that founds and perpetuates one’s living presence, grants legitimacy to both the present and the imagined future. More than mere loyalty or patriotic enthusiasm, residents are sutured to assigned roles as they await some other political reality to unfold. National rupture places the subject in the future *now*, an existence legitimated and buttressed by ancient political pasts and old grievances that set the idea of the self and of Being in a time-space extending from some antique era all the way through to an imagined, still imaginary national future. In Anna Burns' *No Bones*, Wolfe Tone's watch acts as symbol of this fusion of the long-dead past and dreamed future: while reaching for other political futures, all the while fully dissatisfied with the political present, the deeply antagonistic communities of the North are sunk deep in imperialist and nationalist pasts, taking dogged recourse to a time when things made sense and the nation was the nation, dwelling in "a temporality marked by perpetual aftermath" (Alexander 2009 20). Events like Tone's "failed" rising of 1798 or the massacre of Protestants by Catholics in 1641—these events loom larger "…in the folk memory" (Fraser 9) of the Northern Irish people than do major events of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

This is a historical time-warp bursting with antagonisms, desires and dreams. Foucault describes the precise function of the "heterotopia of compensation" in this way: he says it is "to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. This latter type would be the heterotopias, not of illusion, but of compensation, and I wonder if certain colonies have not functioned somewhat in this manner" (Foucault 1986 27). The entire space of Northern Ireland—and before 1921, Ireland as a whole—performed exactly this kind of function. For the British, the island reified their imperial self-idealization, their Anglo supremacy, achieved, first, by means of plantation and settlement. At the time of decolonization, the fervent call to cordon off and retain the Northern enclave was rooted in the will to maintain this utopian romanticization and force the island to continue functioning as a heterotopia of compensation. Partition constituted a break initiating this heterotopia which drives the colonial stakes still deeper, intensifying by the same margin both the fight to free the six counties and the antimonies buttressing each struggle. The shocking intensity of the fight to preserve that miniscule slice of land—writ large in the Loyalist catch-phrase: *"Not one inch!"*—is a clear effect of this heterotopic psychology. Having lost the gravity of nation and nation-ness, that singular reality and its "othering" borders, subjects hold on to entrenched identifications as if to life itself. Loyalists cling to the tiny territory and nationalists fight to regain control with the intensity of Heaney's atypically grotesque lines: "Long sucking the hind tit / Cold as a witch's and as hard to swallow" (1975 52).

While the persistence of the ancient in the "time of the now" (Benjamin 261) is in part the effect of socialized, traumatic memory, it is also an outcome of the imposition of a bizarre, shocking, alien and alienating border, now a great seething wound and centering "god" of the locale. Political conflict and the institutionally reified partitioning of the people together create a situation in which time effectively stopped with the trauma of partition (Herman 37), and the whole of Irish colonial history became present, unyielding and unending. Burns writes: "We looked at the clock. It wasn't working. It was cracked down the middle and there was someone's dried blood on it" (2002 244). Like a stopped timepiece, the subject is forever located in the breaks forming new Foucauldian Irish emplacements: 1601. 1641.1690. 1798. 1916 and '21. 1969. Every year, July 12th comes to Belfast and August 12th to Derry and each one is the same July 12th, the same August 12th, as the year before and the year before that. In this ever-present-past-and-future place, every day is "the same day that keeps recurring" as "remembrance" (Benjamin 261). "In this petrified place, there is greater consciousness of ancient political history" than events of today as "multiple irreconcilable time horizons and life-worlds jostle as so many spectral presences in the dense time of the now" (Sarkar 32). As such, identity is a spatialized wait in a long, deathly time warp where there can be no such thing as a "pure now" (Benjamin 262). "Now" does not exist with respect to the past in the way it normally does

(Derrida 1994 63): the present *is* the past and time is *fully* the "dead-ness" of history, the pregnant promise of a stillborn future that never comes. (Beckett directs: "gravedigger picks up forceps…" *Godot*, 1982 104.) Benjamin's "angel of history" enfolds the subject within so much spatiotemporality (257 - 58) that Heaney writes with aching of "the tight gag of place / And times," concluding with a simple, sighing nod to *Endgame*: "yes, yes" (1975 53).

The combined forces of dividedness, national memory and the predicates of political ideology—a cross-section of past, present and future communities continuously orbiting the subject—provoke a compound sense of nation-ness that houses, displaces and incarcerates all at once. Far beyond the precariousness of postcoloniality as understood, this figure is not merely located between and trying, with difficulty, to negotiate multiple cultures, nations or selves, or to manage a marginalized position in a wider socio-political canvas. Rather, the condition of partitionality *imprisons* her within a network of spectral spatiotemporalities, unable to escape and awaiting release, always. This territorial meaning is perceptible across the work of artists from the North—the political "solution" Benedict Kiely referred to as an "enclosing wall" (ix), which Corcoran later described as a "penal topography" (167) and Brewster as a "compressed, interrogative environment" (128). Through insidious segregation, the divided populace is trapped as in the "H blocks" of HMP Maze—that penal monstrosity, formerly known as Long Kesh prison, that "inflammation on the black countryside" (Heaney 2002 46). The Maze is a bizarrely real diorama of the society as a whole, set down in the middle of the landscape. And that, above all, is what the Northern Irish territory has come to *mean*: internment as a way of life, panoptically surrounded by multiple H-blocks of the nation, conscripted, irremediably, to one of several "good fights." Calcified at the gate of partitionist waiting, there the subject lay, under the soiled rubble of history, endeavoring with each written word to dig out, to emerge as a self in a place: *homed*. There the subject resides, “mutilated by doors” (Rushdie 1987 37), “besieged within the siege” (Heaney 1975 54), flanked by the walls of a hexagonal post-partition siting. The *place* where these events are remembered—the imagined community of a reunified Ireland in which the British Empire has been fully defeated and the nation lives out a utopian dream of a “pure” national sovereignty—is an apparition of the future. The locale “occupied”—both imagined *and* imaginary—does not exist in the world, yet. And so, haunted by too much space, too much time and too many Irelands, the subject waits for Godot: poised at the starting gate of a little nation, a little life, a little self “that can’t.” And there, as Heaney flawlessly articulates: “we hug our little destiny again,” and again, and again (1975 54).

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~Part III: *Closing Thoughts: Postcoloniality, Partitionality*

It is said that a house divided against itself cannot stand, and it would seem that *this* is the critical lesson of the late modern phenomenon of national partition, in particular in terms of its consequences in Ireland. It seems a partitioned nation is a deconstructive thing, a house that does not “house,” a bordered locale whose defining walls are riddled with fracture and breakage. Naturally, then, a more convoluted set of belongings and otherings has been produced in the North of Ireland, circumstances that come to overlay long-standing, pre-existing colonial hybridities. In this analysis, I do not mean to suggest that outside partition contexts postcolonial ontologies are unconfused, knowable or certain. Postcolonial theory has proven otherwise. The geopolitical schism alters that condition, however, in such a way that pre-existing liminalities—experiences of unhomeliness, ambivalence and double consciousness, for example—dramatically intensify, and, I add, the nation can no longer “be” what it was. Prior to division, Irish nation-ness and identity were long constituted by Albert Memmi’s dichotomy of the colonizer and the
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colonized, political manifestations playing out through a struggle of opposing ideals that continuously and confusingly interpellated citizens: the fight to sustain the empire as against protracted efforts to free the island from it.[53] The Irish subject was (and is) located "between" these binaries—subjected by, ambivalently belonging to *and* exilically alienated from both, a "postcoloniality" explicated, in the theory, as both a situation of oppressive othering (Said, et al) and a hybrid, unhomely double consciousness borne by an antagonistic, ambivalent, precisely "confused" colonial interpellation (Bhabha, Anzaldúa, Lloyd, et al). This *entre*, the postcolonial condition, is, I contend, materially changes following the adoption of a partition plan precisely because of the compulsory re-conception it calls the nation, now *nations*, to and the ways it re-defines the bordered space that founds, places and grants legitimacy to the subject.

And, where there had been "place," albeit an uneven, politically disproportionate one, there is now profound unmooring. Homi Bhabha recognizes the important phenomenon of allegorical dwelling places in postcolonial literature. In an allusioin to the famous poem by Yeats discussed earlier, the "house of fiction" is a metaphorical space where "great world events [erupt]... and their happening is turned, through that peculiar obscurity of art, into a second coming" (18). Bhabha suggests that postcolonial authors utilize the "recesses of the domestic space [as] sites for history's most intricate invasions," where "the borders between home and world become confused" and the realms of private and public collapse (9). These "mumbling houses" (10) figure home and unhomeliness for Bhabha, imbricating "the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence" (11). In "Locations of Culture," he considers the question of modernity as experienced by subjects defined and oppressed by its most common political structures: slavery, apartheid, empire and, most of all, settler and administrative colonialism. Where he loses the resonance of Yeats' poem, and of the “postcolonial burden” of partition (Zamindar 3), is in the way Bhabha’s unhomely house of the nation is not seen as having fallen apart, and is not falling apart. Rather, the structure stands, solid and erect, it evolves teleologically, through multicultural encounters which function to generate new, postmodern ideas of self, culture and location (Bhabha 1 - 2). The political figure located there stands *in* a place and does not, as McGuckian describes her world, “float” or “stumble” in “tents” (2002 23). What makes Bhabha’s understanding of the house of fiction unhomely is not that the structure’s foundation or walls are porous and on the verge of falling apart. More readily, it is that those residing in his liminal space “differ,” one from the next, live in the sway and flux of interpersonal and multicultural *différance*, experience the high political as part and parcel of the privately domestic in confused, ambivalent ways.

How measure the structure of national partition as against Homi Bhabha’s reading of the repressive, colonial structures of modern contemporary political life? The unhomely house of postcoloniality—whether cohering through fiction, poetry or theatre—must be transformed by partition. Zamindar’s notion of “partition effects,” if generalizable beyond South Asia, involve the concomitant unraveling of standard postcolonial binary ontologies of self and other, colonizer and colonized and the dualistic cosmology of center and margin (238). National identity no longer lines up with Memmi’s binary but plays out as theorized by Joe Cleary and Gyan Pandey: members of a former nation-collective are split and re-grouped. In contradistinction to Bhabha and Anderson’s major theories, rather than the sense of belonging to a single group set against a proximate, knowable other by a subject experiencing a *postcoloniality*—encounters with an other they are discursively defined as inferior to and negotiating a cultural ambivalence, hybridity and liminality between native and colonial cultures in the space of this unequal relation—imagined instead is a multipart transnational *partitionality* that exceeds and substantially complicates pre-existing conditions. Contrasting the liminality with which we are familiar in Postcolonial Studies, the subject, herself (rather than, in Bhabha's example, a reader displaced and "confused" by a postcolonial text), is "continually positioned in the space between a range of contradictory places that coexist" (Bhabha 48). Realignment of the all-important borders strikes deep at the constituting locale and drives a consecutive wedge through an always already psychologically and colonially split self.

The echo of the colonial past is magnified and convoluted, reverberating more as this partitionality I theorize than the more straightforward postcoloniality heretofore articulated.[54] Ontology and selfhood transition from binary constructs—of this nation and its other, of a nationalized self and her other—to a webbing.[55] "Partitionality," as I use the term, refers not to a "third space" or junction of archaic identifications sloughed off in favor of new, hybrid belongings that are livable and sustainable. Rather, new post-partition awarenesses are superimposed over a former (and continuing) *postcoloniality*: the ambivalence of that structure, the double consciousness, the *frontera*, liminality and hybridity all continue but are transformed into more complicated shapes. The subject is displaced over and above *posteriori* imperial displacements. Now, a palpable fault *cuts through* the pre-partition postcolonial location, segments it into newly named places and throws into flux related loyalties, grievances and identifications—past, present and willed. The existentialism that is part and parcel of Northern Irish life is rooted in the fact that, rather than living in or experiencing what we have come to call postcoloniality, lived and experienced is a no-place between nations, selves, histories. Imagined instead is a nation of no one's located in a nowhere that has as its "mother" a traumatic sundering. The partitioned self may be impossible, then, as the subject belongs to and is necessarily alienated from each quadrant of the collection of ruptured, "dead" and dreamt nations. Ontologically, there is nowhere else *to* dwell and yet there is “no there there.”[56] Here is a true “*unheimlich*” born of waiting for the “Godot” of a whole and just nation that will never come: the single and singular historical imagined community and settling down into a knowable, sustainable place, time and self—constituted by Heidegger’s requisite temporality and recognizably imaginable in Anderson’s frame.

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Chapter Two:

"Au contraire": The Troubled Poetics of Northern Irish Literature

> *…But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be,*
> *it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy.*
> ~Salman Rushdie, "Imaginary Homelands"

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~Part I: *"Astride of a grave and a difficult birth…"*

> *A nation is the same people living in the same place…*
> ~James Joyce, Ulysses

The ontology of partition echoes the attitude of modernity in the dissatisfaction with the break it constitutes and the will to evolve teleologically, from rupture to reunification and wholensss. Equally so, this condition is constitutively postmodern, betraying a clear poststructuralist reverberation in its status as an anxious, existentialist bordered wait for some new reality to unfold, along with an atheistic disbelief that the interval will ever end. The second part, as I illustrate in this chapter, is the posture epitomizing Samuel Beckett's work, and, the sensibility of many contemporary representations of broken Ireland, especially by writers from or writing about the North. The subject in partition (Mufti 211) is interpellated by a series of interrogations answerable only in the affirmative: Do you live in the past, wait for the right political future, and lack any sense of existing in a clear and present temporality? Have you refused to name names in connection with the conflict you are involuntarily and inescapably part of, and in which you have a stake even if you don't want one? Have you fought your "good fight" and are you properly silenced, as with Heaney's historical imaginary, such that, whatever you say, you are sure to have said nothing (1975 53)? The politics of location encapsulated in this series of interrogatives, and sketched in Chapter One, is signified across imaginative work in
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particular and particularly novel ways. Indeed, in the place that goes by the name Northern Ireland—because, to residents, no such place actually exists—not only is the subject resident of a tenuous house-ness that cannot call them "home" because it is more imprisonment than dwellingplace, so is the author of the text, the character of the fictional work, the speaker of the poem. The question now—how does partition trouble, imbue and texture Northern Irish literary production? How is the territorial meaning of the North, the indivisibility of nation and ontological crisis provoked, explored and assessed in literary writing? How draw this partitioned warzone, a strangely deformed partially-free post-partition nation, an abomination of modernity that, because mapped, was supposed to hold its disfigured form and *not* "fall apart"?

The poetics suited to this territorial meaning is an uncanny paradox: Northern Irish writers compose within the chaos of a question mark regarding how to manage partition's destabilizing effects, the palimpsest of dislocations, the unimaginability of the place and its "nations." The division that cordoned off the six northeastern counties and alienated artists from the only claimable nation also exiled them from its literary history—from the cultural production and historical expression of Ireland and Irishness. Poet Tom Paulin encapsulates the issue:

> What cadences, what rich voices
> Have you hardened against?
> What images have you broken?
> In the great dome of art…
> I am free of history. (Ormsby 225)

Freedom from the past is both a freeing and a vexing, isolating estrangement, a deathly silencing loss, a "Cadaver Politic" as Paulin elsewhere writes (Ormsby 218). Authors of the North lost not just the nation through partition; they lost the poetry, too, and the storytelling. The tradition of the political ballad so central to Irishness would come to have an incongruent meaning, South vs. North. "Carrickfergus," the mysterious song, even as it proffers a Northern setting, is no longer part of the imaginable community of Irish intertexts. Gone is all that literary history held so dear: not only the Fenian mythological cycles and nationalist forms, like the eighteenth-century *aisling*, but the Modernist literary Renaissance and all the history surrounding the Abbey Theatre. What remains is a vacuousness and the concomitant need to fill it anew—with sound, word, story, spectacle—to gesture in a way that performs the presence of the people of the North, reveals how they live out an invisible alienation in a small place. Echoing Yeats, Seamus Heaney cries: “Yet I lived here, I live here too, I sing” (1975 51) and dramatist Cristina Reid opens *Joyriders* with a performance of a Belfast street song, sounded with greater force in each successive round: “And if they can’t hear us, / We shout a little louder” (103).

For most Northern Irish authors, it has been “urgent that the social and political exacerbations of… place should disrupt the decorums of literature” (Heaney 2002 43 - 44). And this is a response, first and foremost, to the fact that the border rewrote the will and testament of Irish art. All the beauty of what *might* have been inherited: the clarity of lines and delightful orderliness, the lucid naturalism and pristine English—even the brilliant sway of James Joyce: his ingenious, pleasing answers to that impossibly protracted stretch of imperial offense, his experimentations with and ultimate refusal of Irish (literary and cultural) conservatism—are legacies that do not speak “truth” to their time, to their nation(s), to their contrarily subjectivized selves. Joyce could envision pathways for Stephen Dedalus. In sharp contrast to McGuckian, Muldoon, Burns, McLiam-Wilson, Devlin, Friel, McGuinness, he invented an Irish outsider, Leopold Bloom, an “other voice” (Paulin) who, in spite of his impossible “atheist” (that is, his Irish-Jewish) exile, *could* negotiate Dublin roads. Joyce was able to create for his Odysseus a chart-able journey through known roads and enter-able locations. *Irish* places. Barred from the seat of Irishness as from Irishness itself, how is the Northern author to imagine and craft a

Dublin *flâneur*? At the same time, how locate the figure in Belfast with its rubbled, bloodied, dangerous and dangerously segregated streets? How scale walls invented by colonialist partitioning and transcend the forgetting historical trauma and all its many losses demand? Save *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce's only post-partition novel, all his work—though experimental, radical and "new," and, in these ways, "properly" Modernist—offers meanings we gather and tuck, a line we follow until the teleology is complete, its orgiastic epiphany spent.[57] Those lines of meaning and place disintegrated into the beautiful postmodern "mess" of Joyce's third and final novel—its partitionist subject "hurtleturtled out of heaven" (Joyce 1976 5), its "clay feet, swarded in verdigrass" (Ibid 7). Civil War and state division—concluded the year *Ulysses* was published—demolished the perceptible nodes of national and ontological meaning, gave birth to the unrecognizable non-negotiability of *Finnegans Wake*.

In some way, the struggle for the Northern Irish author has been one of either trying to deny or to come to terms with the fact that their only access to Joyce is through that *inaccessible* final book. What gets inked when pen hits paper astride such unreasonable, crushing partitions? These manifold exiles constitute a towering, exiling, silencing wall.[58] Unsurprisingly, much of the imaginative work of Northern Ireland does not betray the expected gathering of intertexts. Though sometimes perched in the corner of Heaney's work, Yeats does not perceptibly inspire McGuckian, Paulin, Muldoon. Undeniably, for Medbh McGuckian to reach toward quintessential national poets, like him or Pearse, as guide or muse, is a vexed, impoverished endeavor. Instead, she reaches blindly into the chasm and comes up with Rilke. Picasso. Dickinson. Beckett. Friends and contemporaries, such as Anne Devlin, Paul Muldoon and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill. Sometimes hers is a tragically nostalgic grasp (from a *Northern* perspective) toward historical figures who sang or fought for *pre-partition* forms of the nation: like the *aisling* poetry of Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill or rebels such as Thomas Ashe and the Fenians of Wolfe Tone's 1798 revolt.[59] Norman Vance speaks of a divergence in metaphor, North vs. South, in the time after partition, saying "it was only in the still problematically British north… that the old-fashioned National Question [still] had any real currency" (206 – 07). Indeed, in order to "speak" contemporary Ireland, the writer must move beyond and circuitously circumvent the era of the Renaissance. And this is because the moment of Irish freedom was a death for McGuckian's Northern enclave—or rather, it heralded the birth of an uncannily "murdered" place.

Traumatically severed from Dublin—and all it symbolizes for the Irish author—those of the North *cannot* navigate the terrain their Irishness and Irish literary text cannot "live" without. They write in partition's rubble. Rather than Dublin roads, they walk pathways where bombs blast—both in real-time and in the recollection. Political severance carved out a non-negotiable path, imaginatively and creatively, for them, relegated the writer to an always already fragmented, inescapable heterotopian emplacement (Foucault 1986 *passim*). Heaney's trademark angst about the question of poetry's utility stems partly from the fact that he does not give himself over to his territorial meaning; he does not write in and through the war as many of his contemporaries do; he does not speak the nation from inside the "pile" of historical "debris" (Benjamin 258), amid the corpses, the bloodied streets, the masses of wreckage. Heaney observes the rubble from afar, names it now and again, particularly in *North*; he digs but does not (wish to) see the sundered ground, unhealable in its brokenness. Writers like Muldoon and McGuckian, on the other hand, write from inside their sarcophagine, interruptive earth. Heaney's beautiful language and stunning metaphor are out of sync with the bloodbath that is *his* place. When it has been his subject, this Nobel Laureate has attempted the impossible—perhaps both blind spot and genius of the work: to speak the North anachronistically, in the aesthetical time and place, in the pre-partition nation, of Yeats and Joyce.[60] And all the beauteous outcomes of this crooked, helter-skelter struggle do not negate its disconnections, slips and blindnesses, what the poet, himself, memorably names “the tight gag of place / And times” (1975 53).

In keeping with his student Medbh McGuckian’s most incisive lines, Heaney “listen[s] in black and white / to what speaks to [him] in blue” (2002 103)—he listens in the Modernist disposition of Joyce to the ruptured soil and ruined muse addressing him in the postmodern locutions and syncopations of Samuel Beckett. While Vance sees writers of the North employing “Joyce’s example of lofty detachment” (212), indeed, the muse answering their call is Joyce’s secretary. Because his absurd, deathly landscapes match their lived location, their ontological despair, *he* is the forerunner capable of holding many a Northern author’s hand through the ontological, historical, political, human mess of the Troubles. These authors generally admit to an exceedingly small number of influences. Tellingly, only two answer Anne Devlin’s call to inspiration. Aside from Sean O’Casey, she has refused the spectacular baggage of the Abbey, its nationalism, its idealism, its founders; she has *had* to. In interview with Enrica Cerquoni, the dramatist speaks of O’Casey as theatrical guide, mentions Sartre as a key thinker, and remembers having needed to “shed Shaw” and “struggle out of naturalism” in the move from *Ourselves Alone* to *After Easter*. Devlin takes pains to underscore a full denial of Joyce, insisting that “if [he] has influenced [her], it’s unconscious” (Cerquoni 107 - 08). Then, she remembers Beckett: “Another dramatist who has been influential…–and I realize this now from a later perspective –is Beckett. …[His] image of purgatory… is so wonderful a translation of this territory” (Ibid 108). Purgatory is, of course, the most precise mimesis possible for Devlin’s homeland. I argue that the “quaking sod” (Kiberd 555) provoked by partition was first conjured by Ireland’s most border-conscious, death-obsessed author, the first to come to terms with the grief and loss of division, to recognize the nation as the ontological wasteland partition transformed it into.

As to the large question of this chapter: how to represent Northern Irish subjectivity and nationhood, how convey a subject adrift in the interstices of multiple proximate nations, selves and others? How make absence visible, how represent a non-existence? In considering these matters, Samuel Beckett springs instantly to mind. Making absence visible? This was his lifelong artistic endeavor. And, of course, it was the geopolitical plan that brought Ireland to the colonial question Beckett infamously encountered—of necessity, a misguided query and one we recognize as a version of Cairns and Richards', "What ish my nation?" A French journalist once inquired: "You are English, Mr. Beckett?" ("*Vous etes Anglais, Monsieur Beckett?*"), and the playwright notoriously replied: *"Au contraire"* (Nixon 43). "*Au contraire*"—it is not the same as "*Non*"; rather, it is a way around an answer. And, Beckett did not clarify: refusing to claim Britain, failing to declare Ireland, he offered no nation as self-defining or compulsory. I believe the inquiry was refused on principle: what other rejoinder when one hails from a place that is and is not "itself"—all at once and all the time? Regardless of whether he experienced a sense of belonging to the Irish nation—and I suspect he did not—Beckett *had* to say *"Au contraire"* in reply to the quintessential query of Irish invisibility: "You are *British*?" We note, of course, that he was not asked the "other" question: "You are [Irish], Mr Beckett?"

Despite never surrendering his Irish passport or citizenship, this "unambiguously Irish" artist (Kiberd 535) has been universally misunderstood. And the misconceptions that attach to him are object lessons in Irish postcoloniality: the paradox of this blind, dumb, unfortunate inquiry mirrors the reality of Beckett's life and that of his Northern Irish inheritors. It betrays the political burying and invisibility of Paulin's lines: "The syllables chirp / Like a dolphin, lost / In the grey depths of the state" (Ormsby 224). When home is the "unnamable" post-partition nation, this inquiry is unanswerable whether invoking England *or* Ireland. And it is neither insubstantial nor arbitrary. Insofar as Beckett's sensibility is grasped, so too the meaning of his broken nation. His unhoused houses, selves and places, his absurd abstraction and (seeming) indifferent groundlessness, all the stultifying confinements and internal contradictions of the work, however intended, function as incisive representations of post-1921 Ireland. Seen through this lens, many of the metaphors and objects staged by Beckett appear suddenly as apparitions of partitionality: the "bottling" of Nagg and Nell in *Endgame*; the "spools" containing Krapp's "other" life, history, memory and words in *Krapp's Last Tape*; the spectacular gravesite of *Happy Days.* As with *Godot*, the Northern Irish subject is located "astride of a grave" (1982 103) and the birth of the North was a "disaster" in the way Beckett viewed *his* genesis[61]: "an incomplete or bungled affair" (Donoghue 254). To be partitioned is, like Beckett, never to be "born entirely," it is to live with a ruptured sense of "mind and body [as] mutually alien" (Donoghue 254).

For the Northern Irish author, there is, at a certain level, only Beckett. Along with Devlin, many of her contemporaries reject Yeats' euphuistic verse *and* Joyce's homiletic narrative in favor of Beckett's defiant metaphor, his fragmentation and despair, his bizarre babble. As authors struggle with and against the question eclipsing daily life—*You are English…?*—they turn to Beckett whose "[c]orpsed" characters wait, just as they do (1986 106). (As Kiberd notes, Estragon and Vladimir wait "without hope for a deliverance from a being in whom they do not really believe… they are doomed to repeat the past precisely because they have never allowed themselves, or been allowed, to know it fully," 539.) Beckett's await Godot; theirs await the nation; all occupy an interval bereft of a sense of history, place or identity. The apparitions they faithlessly anticipate are nation and nationalized self. Because there "ish" no nation

(Cairns/Richards), because home is that symbolic urn of the *Endgame* stage, its subject trapped inside the "spools" of *Krapp's Last Tape*, which continually replay a "dead" time and bygone nation, home is for him much as it is for Anne Devlin, a "lingering dissolution" (Kiberd 532). When one is doomed to the (non-) existence of the specter—a figure whose presence is predicated on its absence—one writes a text that works against itself, like Beckett's anti-dramatic theatre or the anti-linguistic poetry of McGuckian who turns away from language in work thus constituted. Because the division estranged author from nation, experimentation and abstraction, translation and *bricolage*, incongruous inventiveness have all been necessary. Northern Irish writers have had to begin again, originate a new poetics rooted in local, contemporary realities, a post-national, post-partition, "post-Irish" *poesis*, engage a parentless promethean self-invention from out of the nothingness, the loss, the exile that is their lived territorial meaning.

In the wider Northern corpus, work by Muldoon, Paulin, McNamee, McGuinness, Deane, McLiam Wilson, and Reid, among others, is perceptibly postmodern in terms of the formal, aesthetic aspects of the work—style, metaphor, language and voice. There is a clear move toward the postmodernism of Beckett not just because his tropes and moods work for them, but that he turned Irish literature toward an aesthetic of abstraction that speaks to the discontinuities and many *tearmanns* defining their contemporary world. In Joyce's oeuvre, we recognize such apparitions, but there is also a quintessentially Modernist urge there to keep one foot inside structure and tradition. His is an ordered disorder bound by the *über* structures of modernity: nation, self, place, truth, teleological "faith."[62] Joyce performed nonsense from a sensible place. Beckett, on the other hand, unleashed the tightropes of form and flung the idea, the work, the narrative, the language, the subject of art into a poststructural bedlam.[63] He offers neither temporal trajectory nor escape nor any answer that can be settled into. Beckett wrote plays like

Endgame where character and world are compressed into the suffocating coffin-prison of a bizarre ashbin. What better way—intentionally or otherwise—to speak of post-partition Ireland? Seamus Deane argues that Joyce and Beckett offer distinct aesthetics, and that the ways by which critics have labored to ally them are largely unsatisfying. I believe this is so, and that the fissure constituting Heaney's poetical conundrum—and the poetics of Northern Irish literature at large—is more expressive of Beckett's postmodern "disconsolate art of incompetence" than the Modernist "new art of incorporation" characterizing Joyce's work (1985 123 – 24).

Writers located "at the periphery of event" (Montague quoted in Deane 1985, 135), texts sandwiched between genres, meanings, selves, voices and languages—critics such as Peter Sirr and Helen Blakeman have recognized that, in order to express a "self in partition," one located "at the disjunctures of language, culture, nation, and community" (Mufti 211), authors have had to invent an avant-garde poetics that "works at the level of indeterminacy, ambiguity and polysemy" (Blakeman 66). For the Irish woman writer, the barrenness of heritage provoking reinventions of form, metaphor and language is further complicated by gender, of course—by the fact that their deeply patriarchal, colonized world is still so bereft of women's voices. But the need, in the North, to reinvent form and language in order to devise a politics of location has been universal. As Bernard MacLaverty wrote, obliqueness is the "Northern Ireland art form" (quoted in Haslam 205). Indeed, just as geopolitics alienates the subject and deconstitutes the nation, so the forms by which it will be represented move beyond modernism, beyond the era of decolonization, partition and the Renaissance, beyond structure and inheritance, into reinventions of form that imbue the writing with a conspicuous transnational postmodern. To illustrate the partitionality of Northern Irish life, the author needs abstraction and chaos; because located "outside" *politically*, because victimized by an *a priori* severance from the nation, they work outside paradigm and the borders of form. Because partition calls the nation beyond itself in such a way that it is no longer recognizable *as* the nation, because it "died" in this way, an avant-garde body of work that re-conceives aesthetics and transmutes language is prompted. There has been loss—real, unhealable, unending. Difficult to know, and even more difficult to represent. McGuckian pushes words toward the pictures they cannot be, praying for a miraculous metamorphosis; Burns writes anti-narratives that fragment and bamboozle all generic building blocks of the historical novel; and Devlin and Friel conceive of impossible selves that do not "exist" in spite of their presence on stage, voice the spectacle in a native Irish despite that it is supplanted by colonial English in performance, literally and intentionally.

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~Part II: *Specter & Scrim: "…between the bell for waking and the bell for sleep"*

> *It's hard to grow up in Northern Ireland and not be* forced *into second thoughts, sooner or later. With so much division around, people are forever encountering boundaries that bring them up short. Second thoughts are an acknowledgement that truth is bounded by different* tearmanns*, that it has to take cognizance of opposing claims.*
> ~Seamus Heaney, "Something to Write Home About"

Northern Irish writing is, I argue, spectrally "overseen" by Samuel Beckett, the Irish predecessor who understood partition best. I think of authors of the Troubles as Beckett's literary "descendants" not merely because of a conscious or direct influence but because his style is such a profoundly useful mode for representing Northern Irish history specifically.[64] Partition's effects in Ireland—dissolution, mourning and entrapment—are the defining trio forming the tone and sensibility of the oeuvre. In his work, authors see their experiences, psyches, selves and world views modeled, the character of their loss, the profound destabilizations of nation and nationalized self shaped and stood before them: as the buried Winnie, as an interned Krapp,
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Nagg and Nell, as so many Estragons and Vladimirs. Samuel Beckett was fifteen years of age when the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed and division conceded. He was ten at the time of the Easter Rising, when his father took him "to the top of a local hill, from which the burning inner city could be clearly seen" (Kiberd 530). But while the father laughed out loud, "Sam was so deeply moved that he spoke of it with fear and horror more than sixty years later" (Ibid). This extreme experience was, Kiberd says, the birth of Beckett's "spectral nationalism": "What began in the young boy's mind on that Dublin hill in 1916 was what… Aijaz Ahmad would later call 'a nationalism of mourning'" (531).[65] Beckett was the first to develop a hermeneutic of mourning: in his work, we observe the Irish subject located in a burial site and place of a perpetual, grieving exile. Seamus Deane recognizes in his work "[t]he note of a deeper alienation" and "figures of exile and refuge" (1985 135). But where he speaks of his writing "exemplify[ing] the *felt loss of energy* in the conditions then prevailing in Ireland" (Ibid, my italics), it is mourning and melancholia, the grief of loss, detected here—this nationalism of mourning.

That sensibility likewise characterizes literature of the North, where we discern a great blinding grief, textured and toned as a keening spectrality. Accordingly, along with a recognizable postmodern aesthetic, discussed earlier, literary work from the Northern amputee is dominated, too, by a desolate spectrality in content, tone and metaphor, with mourning as its most obvious mood. The literature representing the North has this spectrality because ratification of the Anglo-Irish treaty, which created the territory, triggered a whole series of deaths: those of the two conflicting Irish "dreams," the hope of a thirty-two county, all-Ireland Republic aggressively worked toward for four centuries, and, the vision the British Empire had of itself—a dream that had its beginnings on the island in the twelfth century and enjoyed full dominion there for the same four centuries it had been resisted. Retention of the Northern enclave by the

British came at the cost of the “death” of Irishness in the North, a key ontological consequence, a loss signified throughout the imaginative work. Benedict Kiely described partitioned life as a Beckettian “dance of death” (11) and Joe Cleary likewise says the border “haunts… as a spectral presence” (130) in such a way that it functions as a Gramscian interregnum in which the “old is dying… the new cannot be born” and “a great variety of morbid symptoms appear” (Gramsci quoted in Cleary 8 – 9). He suggests state division manifests precisely the circumstance of an unacknowledged death: it is a demarcation of the end of a former collectivity and sense of brother- and sisterhood and one of several deaths of the imperial paradigm (Ibid). Sarkar, too, describes the partitionist interregnum as “a catastrophe with haunting repercussions for community life” (1), suggesting that it necessitates the “hermeneutic of mourning” much like that theorized by Kiberd and Ahmad. Partition “emerged as a national trauma ting[ing] subsequent national endeavors with an unspeakable sadness” in South Asia; the losses prompted by it inspired “a body of discourse” that is “in mourning” (Sarkar 2 - 4). This has been equally true in Ireland though perhaps differently—certainly asymmetrically between North and South.

McGuckian, for example, describes her place as an author grimly: she sees herself as an entombed writer, soiled and buried by a colonial language. English is “imposed,” she says, and “although it’s my mother tongue and my only way of communicating, I’m fighting with it all the time. …at some level I’m saying get out of my country… Get out of me. …and I’m lying like a corpse under it all. And so every time I use a word I’m shoveling off…” (O’Connor, L. 605 – 06). Like Winnie of *Happy Days*, McGuckian orates from the entryway to the underworld, a deathly political internment where the writer breaths and eats, puts words down on paper, and is nonetheless “dead” in each performed action. Hers is a space of creation encircled by death: this poet picks up her pen, as in *Godot*, as a “gravedigger pick[ing] up forceps” (Beckett 1982 104);

this poet experiences her location as a continual digging out of a place she was buried alive by colonial history and its partitioning blows, forever shoveling off the imperial filth. Elsewhere, like an embalmed corpse, McGuckian says her "childhood is *preserved* as a nation's history" (1982 21, my emphasis). For Tom Paulin, too: "The theatre is in the streets, / The streets are in the theatre, The poet is torn to pieces" (Ormsby 223). In collective mourning of a death perpetually sought, this body of work is always asking Heaney's paralyzing question, one that could easily have penned by Beckett: "Is there a life before death?" (1975 54).

In different ways, Burns, Devlin, McGuckian and other writers of the North offer a mimesis of the past overlaid by bodies of "the dead," Joycean apparitions set in proximity to survivors of the Troubles, or inserted as a spectral "embodiment" of the split nation. Through art, the colonized, later broken nation regains a completeness diminished through the vagaries of empire: the nation is repaired through a literary "reparation" that enacts, in Walter Benjamin's words, a profound brushing of history against its colonial grain. Various forms of apparition appear in Northern Irish letters in order to score the invisibility of partition—of the blind question asked of Beckett and his circumlocutory riposte. Hence, the most resonant figure in this political representation is the ghost: that is, the "visibility of the invisible" (Derrida 1994 125) that exists only by virtue of the discontinuation of its existence. If one is Northern Irish one is actually *not* Irish, and yet in order to be *that*—one who is excluded by the nation—one must, in fact, be Irish. Indeed, this subject is legally British and, like Beckett, everywhere "assumed" to be British. Drawn across literature of the North is "a spectral existence, a ghostliness…, quite precisely because of the impossible nature of life as given" (Alexander 2009 34). In part a response to the affective thrust and deconstructive ontology of partition, to their compressive, chaotic, traumatizing world, in the past five decades a “melancholic” nationalism (Sarkar 34) has come to define the poetics of Northern Irish literature.

This has, as central allegory, not the *spéirbhean* of the *aisling*, but the specter of Beckett, not the dream of liberation allegorized in the *aisling*, or in other ways by Yeats and O’Casey, but the suicidal, despairing Beckettian nation. Gramsci’s “morbid symptoms” (quoted in Cleary 8 – 9) occur and recur across the literature of this small place as aesthetic devices illustrating the situation of divided indivisibility: metaphors of incarceration and interrogation; of the dead, death and dying; encounters with the dead, the many Michael Fury’s of the Troubles returned as furious political furies or situations of a deathly entrapment are literally everywhere. Clearly reflective of a partitionist ontology and unimaginable imagined community,[66] figures “suspended between one life and the next” (Alexander 24) proliferate, and a sensibility of stifling deathliness and spectral despair. Both are used to draw out the condition of the subject: moments of crisis that occur at death’s door; ghosts that appear and those living in memory; figures obsessed with or surrounded by death, or who are themselves, like many of Beckett’s, dead though living. Representations of the statelet tend toward a frightening, unfathomable degree of hopelessness that often resolves in expatriation or death, a particularly suicidal eschatology or petrified alienation articulated often in nonsensical gibberish that edges impossibility.

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In contemporary literature from the North, we recognize a clear postmodernism and a deployment, at the same time, of traditional Irish literary tropes. Staged and drawn is a politics of location in which the subject, speaker or other figure is at once perceptibly spectral *and* liminally located: dislocated and purgatorially sandwiched by contrasting locations that limn and refract the dissonances of Irish postcoloniality, including partition and its protracted discontents.
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Northern Irish authors place the representative subject at a junction of terrains where some crisis plays out and the figure awakens on the other side of a border or they fall or are pulled or willfully leap into a neighboring "world," alternate reality or time. Many texts set important moments in spectral sequences occurring in incarcerating spaces or characterized by a palpable partition. The ground beneath the figure's feet—symbol of the nation—is frequently fissured and split, and we observe the subject gazing into an elsewhere, afraid of sliding, notwithstanding all best efforts, into another realm. This bordered aesthetic is often achieved by means of an ancient Irish trope: a version of the device Paul Muldoon identifies in his survey of Irish literary history, *To Ireland, I* (2000). There, Muldoon traces the "world-scrim" (7) through an alphabetical journey across the literature of the island—including everyone from Amergin and the four "Anonymous" poets to Yeats (of course) and Zozimus (9)—employing Joyce's "The Dead" as text of reference. In so doing, he demonstrates the centrality of "[t]he idea of there being a contiguous world, a world coterminal with our own, into and out of which some may move" (7).

These *world* borders are spaces of connection between and the distinction of perceptibly discrete realms or alternate realities, as in the faery and human domains in the Irish mythological cycles. There, as Muldoon notes, "the *áes sídhe*, the 'fairy' or 'gentle' folk… are made invisible by virtue of the *féth fiada* or *ceo sídhe*, the magic mist or veil" (7) indicating transport between realms of the Irish cosmos or shifts of setting; they show characters at risk of falling into an alternate reality or perilously located in some hazardous "between." He says the prop is "a kind of world-scrim, that hangs about" the characters, transporting them across worlds of the Irish mythological cosmos (7).[67] Not only can these scrims make characters invisible, but, more often than not, they are platforms for transmogrifications between realms or selves. In the ancient tales, anthropomorphic reincarnations of humans as deer or other mythologically significant animals habitually occur in this way.[68] There, kidnappings occur, too, whereby a figure is drawn over to the faery realm through a cosmological crack, or scrim.[69] Often too the figure is set inside some panoptical spectacularity, imprisoned at some "fatal intersection of time with space" (Foucault 1986 22). The ancient stories frequently involve "time warp[s]" (Muldoon 7)—which serve now as representation of the warped time and waiting posture of partitionality—and the "critical position[ing]"of characters or speakers (Muldoon 8). Muldoon identifies a series of "critically positioned figure[s]" who have been prominently and troublingly located in a scrimmed setting, climactically neither "here nor there, [but] at some notional interface" (8).

In his reading of Irish literature, Muldoon offers a theatrical device, then, as metaphorical embodiment of a key literary trope: a "scrim" is really the backdrop used in theatre to distinguish "worlds," spaces or settings of the play. It signifies, from scene to scene, movements of location or time. The Belfast poet argues that certain literary props function like stage scrims. In modern Irish literature, manifestations of the scrim include varieties of interface, such as the misty veil Muldoon mentions, as well as clouds, fog and pivotal boundary locations, often a window, gate or doorway. As with the spectral tropes discussed above, this metaphor offers a "location to reflect on the world" (Alexander 2003 284), a historical imaginary and space of *poesis* for drawing the broken nation and the author-subject constituted by that unimaginable structure. The scrim is one of several allegorical devices by which, to use David Lloyd's words, Irish culture is seen to "[play] out the anomalous states of a population whose most typical experience may be that of occupying multiple locations, literally and figuratively" (3). Muldoon notes that "[t]he idea of a parallel universe… offers an escape clause, a kind of psychological trapdoor, to a people from under whose feet the rug is constantly being pulled, often quite literally so" (7). Since the time of the Tuatha Dé Danann,[70] the experience of being overthrown "has been repeated by successive invasions of the country, leaving a sense for many so-called native Irish people of their own invisibility" (8 – 9), of an unhomely alienation *in* the place of origin (Kiberd 530). Thus, the world-scrim has always been a postcolonial metaphor, one that can "be traced back to some deep-seated sense of liminality that was, and is, central to the Irish psyche" (8).

Not only does the "scrimming" of a poem's speaker or story's character signify Irish postcoloniality, in contemporary work it specifically addresses the condition *overlaying* that one: Irish *partitionality*. As a border metaphor, the world-scrim in Irish literature, I argue, is less a place where cultural or political difference is confronted and negotiated, as typically theorized in Postcolonial and Irish Studies, and more one of a political crisis or clashing struggle and the entrapment and interrogation of the subject. In this way, the figure is used to convey not simply the condition of postcoloniality but the perpetual crisis of the *partitioned* postcolonial nation. Witness the time-space junction of the Northern Irish subject via manifold appearances of this world-scrim by which the subject is "critically positioned" in a bordered deathly locale—precisely as Beckett represented the Irish figure. In earlier work a response to colonialist alienation, in later writing to partitionist compression and confinement, the scrim is a useful mechanism for representing a cosmological political life. The politics of location articulated by many works reflects that "grounded groundlessness" Muldoon theorizes (7), cohering as a placeless place that is not a "borderlands"—the kind of frontier organizing forms of difference—but the dividing line and meetingplace of distinct worlds that create for the subject a political emergency. The allegory of the scrim matches partition's effects: residents occupy a heterotopian amalgamation of spatiotemporalities and the scrims of localization, compression and transport provide an articulation of the subject as "critically positioned" (Muldoon 8) and fundamentally hemmed-in. The trope, as used, suggests that the Northern Irish subject is "mutilated by doors"

(Rushdie 1987 37), located in a place where borders everywhere delimit them, even to the point of "mutilation." Through deployment of the scrim in contemporary writing, Northern Irish authors represent the spectral, Foucauldian "siting" in which they find themselves placed in the world. It is a most efficacious "setting" for representing a non-existence lived out in an inhospitable location where the subject is haunted by and mourning pre-partition nations, fighting for other post-partition futures, fully dissatisfied with the political present.

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The Northern Irish subject, though not *literally* incarcerated, is perceptibly housed at a "fatal intersection" (Foucault 1986 22), and this "waiting," entrapment is rendered across Northern Irish literature through the marshalling of scrim and specter. The poetics has three key registers, each of which is prescient in terms of form, craft and content: a spectrality of mood and metaphor that springs from historico-political loss and conveys the ontology of partition; a critical borderedness and boundaried multi-worldedness—of location, story, genre, voice, narrative, perspective, language, the texturing of the text—that forms a politics of location for the partitioned nation-state; and, with these, a distinctly postmodern aesthetic and uniquely *partitionist* postcolonial text. That the "the massive fissure [partition]… com[es] to be figured as the experience of prolonged separation from the beloved" (223), as Mufti suggests, in the work of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, has an analogous figuration in work from the North—in the precarious cliffs of Burns' novel, the suicidal windows in McGuckian, and the gothic death-dreams in Devlin's plays and stories. (Anna Burns writes at the close of *No Bones*: "…it was then Amelia noticed she was on the edge of the cliff… They looked over. It was a heavy drop, a deep sleepy drop, easy, so easy to let go, just fall over, and disappear," 291.) Parsing out the unique importance of the world-scrim, we recognize how these metaphors, often deployed in tandem,
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have been particularly useful to contemporary Northern authors as demonstrations of the hauntedness of the broken nation and of the subject's placement between nations of memory, the present and the dream. The key symbol developing the politics of location in many texts is a spectral boundary, the "between" of the dead and the living or Being and non-Being. The trope is extremely useful in representing a subject trapped by a nexus of contingent political locations. Scrimmed sequences frequently take on the aura of a haunting "betweenness," sometimes taking shape as surreal dream sequences, such that the tools and modes adopted and adapted, explored and exploited come together as a *spectral scrim* or *scrimmed spectrality.* Like Beckett's, the borders of Northern Irish literature are death-defying and often suicidal: the boundary location between "the dead" and the living, between life and death, between corporeal coherence and "oblivious dust" (Rushdie 1987 37). These complex metaphors convey the fragmented, unimaginability of the nation. Recognizable in them are not only the deathliness suffusing daily life but also a sense of place as a sloped slip and fall, of landscape as dreamscape, of the real as the surreal. Its creators are unusually death-obsessed, with protagonists and speakers skulked by death as by a deathly politico-historical complex. And this holds true regardless of genre as well as whether the author is Catholic or Protestant and of what political affiliation.

Composed at the meetingplace of speech and silence, of language and gibberish, of madness and sense, of perceptibility and incomprehensibility—this bordered spectrality is the primary modality by which history is refracted and the meaning of Northern Ireland and crisis of Northern Irishness conveyed. We first noticed this marriage of tropes as a key facet of Beckett's work, in his many spectral borders and deathly scrimmed figures. The man Muldoon dubbed "Lord of Liminality" (12), some of his best known works shape up as archetypes: *Waiting for Godot*, *Malone Dies*, *Endgame*, *Happy Days* and *Krapp's Last Tape,* among others. Of the latter play, Muldoon discusses how Krapp and his first love "tremble on [a] threshold" (Ibid) and that, in *Malone Dies*, "Sapo's gift-to-be… is obscured by a series of barriers or scrims… the 'lid' of the box… the 'tissue paper', followed by the prophylactic 'rubber band'" (14). The setting of the play signifies post-partition subjectivity in its central object lesson: the audio tape and recorder embodying, compressing and containing Krapp's story. Add to that the drawers of the desk, his (as scripted) "cracked voice," "laborious walk" and "very narrow, pointed" boots (1986 215). *Krapp* is compressively located in a bordered, deathly, cosmological space; the character approaches death's door but seems dead already, his soul transmogrified before the fact into the "spools" through which he listens to himself speaking, as if from another world and existence. Krapp seems to have lost his memory and appears self-alienated: he listens to his own words as if hearing them for the first time, as if they are not his; he must look up the word "viduity," which he knew and used in that other world and life. Like a "self in partition" (Mufti 211), he stands outside himself, watches his other, living self in awe and surprise, perhaps longing. *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Endgame* insinuate isolated, eschatological worlds that "might be uninhabited" (1986 221), their settings are wastelands housing spectral figures.

Endgame is, I think, the best example of a scrimmed spectrality in Beckett's oeuvre. The set of the play is a "dead," dying structure which, like so many others, works as allegory for a "dead" nation. The action occurs inside a complex structure housing "Corpsed" characters (1986 106); it functions as interface separating them from the menacing world beyond as from looming death—"Outside of here it's death" (96). Complicating the play's spectrality and the nation-ness it represents are the "ashbins" in which the characters Nagg and Nell reside: like the internal partitioning of Belfast, they are borders inside a bordered meta-structure, "urns" holding the ashes of dead characters who nonetheless speak, breath and eat biscuits. The bins are coffins in which dead-living characters are “buried,” first in “sawdust,” later “sand” (100). The “bottling” of Nagg and Nell (97, 103) is analogous to the emplacement of the subject in a panoptical, partitionist frame. Clearly what we have is the subject of a dead nation structure living out an incarcerated spectral subjectivity that will never bring them to Heidegger’s “good death” (352). Indeed for Beckett, questions of life and death, of desire and loss are spliced with those of nation and nation-ness as in *Krapp*: “We drifted in among the flags and stuck. The way they went down, sighing, before the stem!” (1986 221). The playwright includes multiple references that take us down this interpretive path. Markers of the nation are everywhere: the wasteland-world outside becomes metonym of famine-era Ireland since, there, “You’ll be hungry all the time” (95). He also incorporates a translation of *Sinn Fein*, “we ourselves,” which is repeated twice and enunciated as directed: *“[with emotion]”* (108). This reference is followed immediately by: “To think perhaps it won’t all have been for nothing!” and, “Let’s go from here, the two of us! South!,” and then, most importantly, “That here we’re down in a hole. *[Pause.]* But beyond the hills? Eh? Perhaps it’s still green. Eh?” (108 – 11). The color green symbolizes life, yes, but it is just as readily, *and far more likely,* the green of the Irish nation and nationalism. Yet another Beckettian moment at which the question of the subject’s life and survival are woven inextricably with the problem of nation-ness. Clearly Beckett satirizes that structure in this play but the parody is, like partition—like so much of his work and that of his Northern Irish inheritors—Janus-faced: nationalism is lampooned *and* nostalgically mourned. Within this analytic framework, *Endgame* shapes up as not only the standard apocalyptic movement it is understood to comprise *and* the unmistakable allegory of post-partition Ireland.

The post-partition nation “gives no footing” (Kiberd quoting Corkery 555) and is represented through the intense “grounded groundlessness” (Muldoon 7) of scenes like these.

After Beckett, in highly spectral, frantically bordered Northern Irish writing, the world-scrim coheres as critical symbol of the post-partition nation and subjectivity. The importance of scrim and specter in understanding Northern Ireland, literature, place and people, is clarified by looking at key scenes from work across the genres. The dramatists routinely take recourse to specter and scrim, for example, staging the spectral nature of Northern Irish existence. With clear influence of Beckett, this bordered spectrality maintains a strong presence in productions of work by Anne Devlin's and all of her peers, notably, Frank McGuinness, Cristina Reid, Stewart Parker and Brian Friel. McGuinness contends with deathliness in order to work through questions of history whereas Friel's development of the problem regards his transnational conception of the nation, a Northern Irish Anzaldúean *frontera* (*passim*). Reid's aim is similar to Friel's: she critiques and collapses colonial and nationalist discourses. Devlin's enactments stand out in the sense that she thinks about the political *through* identity, habitually staging the deeply conflicted, deathly nature of being Northern Irish.

Of her contemporaries, Frank McGuinness, a playwright Devlin much admires (Cerquoni 2001, 114, 122), hovers closest to her own method in terms of its preoccupation with the borderland between the living and the dead. McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1996) is a memory play dramatizing the sundry forms of death that become possible in the place of partition and conflict—actual death, ontological death, survivor death, living death, etc. Likewise, in Stewart Parker's *Pentecost*, it is the ghost of a dead child that "evokes all the recent dead of Belfast and the North…who call on the living to redeem them" (Roche 228). In a singular rendering of specter and scrim, Friel's 1973 play, *The Freedom of the City*, opens with a group of Beckettian "corpsed" characters. His stage directions read: "Three bodies lie grotesquely across the front of the stage—" (1986 107). Written in the aftermath of

Bloody Sunday, in the scenes that follow, we observe events leading up to their deaths and get to know the characters *post-mortem*. Since their deceased status is immediately and dramatically announced, the play proceeds as a series of ghostly "flashbacks," and the figures speak and act *as* specters. This spectrality comes through likewise in the way the performance and space of the theatre take on the aura of the dead viscerally.

Friel's play represents the deathliness also vital to Anne Devlin's work in a way that defuses the power of colonial murder: he refuses to build up to and stage the character's deaths thus extinguishing the flame of colonial power the moment the curtain is called and the first spectacle on view are three dead bodies sprawled across the dais—bodies who will soon resurrect, speak and tell their stories. Beckett's echo is heard and felt conspicuously in Devlin's writing for the stage. She perceptibly channels her theatrical predecessor in enacting a (paradoxical) reach for universal human concerns from out of the particular while retaining an unambiguously profound "Irishness." There is an unforgettable scene in *After Easter* when, hearing gunshots outside, the family crouches under a table, the way Beckett "bottles" Nagg and Nell, on which the dead body of their father begins its transformation from embodiment to ash. And the closing scene of this play refers to *Endgame* in its reenactment of its "my story" thread. Devlin renders Beckett's abstracted, non-referential spaces as historically specific reference and, in turn, her spectacular nation-space becomes recognizable as the setting of *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Waiting for Godot*.[71] Through a poetic of the spectral scrim, Devlin's work offers one of the fullest, most compelling representations of the territorial meaning of her homeland. In each major work her (always) female main character is eventually found in a life or death situation and prominently scrimmed place; this is true of Finn in "Naming the Names," Helen of

The Long March, Josie of *Ourselves Alone*, and Greta, her sister Helen and the unnamed *seanachie*, orator of the closing monologue, in *After Easter*.[72]

Notice the importance of the scrim, also, in the design of the closing scene of Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game*. The desperate panoptical force of partition is a clear presence in this film, set in the North and representing the political character of the place. It offers a proliferation of borders and boundaries seen in so many representations of the statelet. Most profoundly, it is in the dreamy, tragi-comic conclusion to this film, when Jordan's romantic hero, Fergus, is incarcerated in a British jailhouse and located behind a Plexiglas divider through which he speaks to his beloved, Dil. Jordan's character transitions from paramilitary jailor to colonial prisoner of the colonial state and, in an ironic turn, is lovingly "interrogated" by Dil at the close. The Plexiglas represents the bordered liminality that defines him as a Northern Irish subject, the line between freedom and imprisonment, as well as that between death and life. Having taken responsibility for a murder committed by Dil, Fergus' life is essentially over: as a Northern Irish Catholic with a history of involvement in the IRA, he will likely never leave that prison. The Plexiglas functions as a see-through "house" Fergus is not precisely at home in but where he is housed and from which he cannot escape. It is important in Jordan's closing scene that viewers can see all of the walls surrounding him, thus recognizing the allegory of his political placement in the world by the forces of colonialism, nationalism and, of course, partition. That it is transparent insinuates this dual carceral–panoptic imprisonment characterizing divided Ireland.

Specter and scrim recur from end to end in the poetry of Northern Ireland, too. Heaney, Muldoon, Paulin, MacNeice and McGuckian all offer speakers bereft of a sense of self or ontological existence, beset by confused, changeling structures, some dead, some living, some undefinable. Novels and short stories from and on the North are likewise dominated by the scrimmed spectrality seen in McGuckian and Heaney's work. Like an invisible tethering, like the framing devices in theatre and film, McGuckian and Heaney's metaphors of location—the "snow" blanketing work by the former and the trope of "ground" in the latter's—reveal an amalgamation of times, places, borders, shadows that follow the subject, "blanket" their world and them in it.[73] McGuckian habitually works in this kind of space—note the many convoluted, contradictory spatial metaphors, the moments of falling, transmogrification and death. Her poetical "slip and falls" convey the hopeless float between Friel's flimsy piecemeal paper-nation,[74] the need for a conceptual "landing pad"—which, as established, must take the form of Anderson's nation-ness—and the anguish caused in never finding it. McGuckian frequently scores the issue, as in the lines, "[m]y words are traps" (1988 59) or "[c]ontained, containing—perfectly alone" (1995 33). In "Slips," McGuckian's speaker "forget[s] names, remembering them wrongly / Where they touch upon another name / A town in France…"(1982 21). Her "childhood is preserved as a nation's history," and, like a dead thing sealed in the Bog, the "shells / Leased by the hermit crab" metaphorize the location of the subject (Ibid).

An outstanding exemplification of spectrality in combination with a memorable world-scrim is in Seamus Heaney's gothic poem from *North*, "The Unacknowledged Legislator's Dream," in which his Romantic muse disappoints as the poet-speaker is rendered "questionable" by the forces of politics in the most primary way. Heaney gives us the Northern Irish poet as Percy Shelley's failed unacknowledged legislator,[75] imprisoned in a Bastille where he is ostensibly "safer" and his "wronged people cheer from their cages," where the "guard-dogs are unmuzzled" and the poet "stood blindfolded with [his] hands above [his] head" (1975 50). The poet is a duped figure who fell through a scrim much like the one familiar from Irish lore: while the speaker thought he had been led into the house of poetry, in fact he finds himself in a completely different realm as occupant of a dungeoned internment, bitted, invisible and unheard. It is from this buried location, and worse still through an inlay—another scrim and "partition"—that the poet spies his Romantic predecessor. Like a lover, he asks: "Were those your eyes just now at the hatch?" (Ibid). That is to say: do you see what and who the national poet of Ireland has become? Far from legislating the world, or any "small place" therein, the poet "speaks" through a tiny hatch. Heaney therefore cryptically implies: while the poet's role was to regulate and order a world in imperialist disarray, on the contrary, the world has legislated the poet as he stands colonized, partitioned and incarcerated: buried alive, unheard with no hearing.

Literature of the statelet is written from Heaney's impossible, "bitted" sarcophagus—also the place of so many of Beckett's most memorable characters—author, subject and character trapped at the divide and the connect between the dead and the living. This snapshot of a subject position like a grave, redolent in Heaney's poem, conveys the confused, confined, interrogatory nature of life after geopolitical sundering. It is an allegorical space seen throughout the body of Northern Irish literary writing which functions like a "signature" of divided Ireland. The episteme of partition rings loud and clear through a politics of location that takes shape as a Kincaidian small place—unenterable by those outside and unexitable by those inside. The subject is routinely located at carceral, suffocating scrims and caught within movements of disintegration and collapse. Another exceptional poetic expression of these tropes is in McGuckian's long poem comprised of forty-seven unrhymed tercets, "The Aisling Hat" (1995 44 – 49). This piece reflects the critical, intense borderedness of so much work. And, it makes use of another ancient trope, the *spéirbhean* (pronounced "spare-van") or muse of *aisling* poetry, a sorrowful female often with supernatural qualities. *Aisling* is an Irish word understood to mean "dream-vision" but which literally translates as "beautiful woman." The tradition of poetry so named emerged during the penal era and featured this political muse. The quintessential personification of the nation, the *spéirbhean* comes in a vision to the sleeping poet. She is a damsel in distress longing for liberation from a cruel, protracted captivity. Popular examples include James Clarence Mangan's "Roisin Dubh," the dark rose or "Dark Rosaleen," and Yeats's theatrical translation of the figure in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*.

Writers such as Derek Mahon, Anne Devlin and Medbh McGuckian have reincarnated this penal era figure in such a way that she "speaks" to contemporary Northern Irish life. Rather than existing in a simple, complete exile from the trappings of Irish literary history, we recognize in their work a careful political parsing in a way that rejects the literary Renaissance—the work and the forms that arose in connection with the era of independence and partition. These writers all make a clear circumlocutory leap over that period, evading that which may be too agonizing, by harnessing their vcontemporary, postmodern work to ancient, resonant tropes and in the process reinventing them. The eighteenth-century muse is remade in "The *Aisling* Hat"—turned like a kaleidoscope to function, now, as mirror of the post-partition Ireland of McGuckian's birth. Devlin's work offers a similar schema through recognizable allegories of nation and nation-ness: when her protagonist in "Naming the Names" is moving in and out of dreams, for example, or trying to save her grandmother whose house had been burned down. For her, the *spéirbhean* is closer to a banshee, a gothic fury or menacing "auld hag" whereas in McGuckian's long poem, she is a muse in (Northern) exile who has transmogrified in terms of gender—a transsexual *spéirbhean*, now a *he* and thus more properly renamed a "*spéirfhear"* ("spare-arr"), a neologism translating as "beautiful man."[76] The political resonance here is poignant: in this poem, not only, like the national poet, has the *spéirbhean* transformed sexually, changing from a "she" to "he," the muse is also dead—and yet remains, there, in the poem, as a corporeal body.

Slowly washing and preparing this body—for burial or rebirth, this being the question—the speaker describes the dead body of her muse in detail and, in that, allegorizes partition and the coterminous birth of McGuckian's post-partition homeland.

The speaker surveys Irish history by relating his biography and as the story is told, it is clear that the *spéirfhear* is unwell: "His body is unwashed, his beard / wild, his fingernails broken, / his ears deaf from the silence" (48). The North is figured through a deathly fall, likewise the death of the *spéirfhear:* "The earth like some great brown / ceiling came rushing at your head. No one heard it hiss…" (46). And then: "You burst the frontier at some / undefended silk crack—shreds / of splashed brain on the chestnut trees" (47). These moments suggestive of suicide, death or escape give way to the pivotal crisis of the poem, where, for the final eleven stanzas, second person is displaced by first and the piece transforms from narrative to lyric. Now, the speaker dramatically calls the nation forth, wills the resurrection of her spectral muse:

> Now all questions and answers rotate about—
> did it thunder or not?[77] Now I begin
> the second stage of restoring the picture.
>
> The helix of my ear takes on new whorls,
> becomes a bittersweet instrument,
> to undress spring from the neurotic May,[78]
>
> the inherited river, the world
> which, unpopulated, continues
> to signal his speech-preparatory moves. (48)

To ensure his *survival*, the speaker must deny "history's death" by "the birth of his storm" (49), by getting to know "his bones, / the deep sea origins of the mountains, / the capsule of his crypt" (48). This politics of location through McGuckian's manifestation of the spectral scrim is striking: not only is her muse transgendered, he is located at the pivotal border between death and life. He is both the argument and question of the poem: will he rise like Lazarus or continue the decomposition in progress? Can the national poet, whose breath is the life of the nation, breathe life back into this broken place that was, like Beckett, never born entirely and lingeringly dissolves? (Or, as Devlin phrased it, is "[g]one and going all the time," 1988 118.) The question "did it thunder or not" which "rotates about" implies both the thunder of the trees hitting the ground at the moment of national rupture *and* the thunder of a poet-God bringing the nation's muse back to life. "The *Aisling* Hat" seals a pact between poet and muse, its purpose not merely poetically suggested but spectacularly declared: the move to first person at this late moment indicates McGuckian's will to take on the role of national poet and resurrect her dead world.

The tropes of specter and scrim are perceptible presences not only in the drama, film and poetry representing the North but throughout contemporary fiction as well, as seen in work by writers such as Eoin McNamee, Robert McLiam Wilson, William Trevor, John Banville, Colum McCann, Anne Devlin and Anna Burns. Within the first few pages of *No Bones,* Amelia Lovett is surrounded and enclosed, barricaded under the kitchen table with the family dog, "Dachau." The windows and doors are covered by wooden planks as the family prepares to keep their house from being burned down by Protestant neighbors. A few chapters later, she hides under a bed with her treasured collection of rubber bullets gathered from the streets of Belfast. Through continuous use of these kinds of scrims, Burns' territorial meaning is well-defined. The novel is littered with bizarre dreamscapes and mad movements, streets like mine-fields and homes like battlefields. Another memorable scrim, where we likewise observe the signature of partition, is in the piece that first put Colum McCann on the map: his long short story "Everything in this Country Must," set just outside Derry. It features a horse—symbol for the North of Ireland, for the whole island, for its "workhorse" Catholic population—trapped at a prominent border, a river in Derry[79], the way the Northern statelet is "trapped" by partition and awaiting freedom. McCann begins his memorable story: “A summer flood came and our draft horse got caught in the river...” (2000 3). The space thus drawn metaphorizes the partition border and its long-term effects on the nation: the story takes place in the aftermath of a mother’s death and centers on an oppressed father, a child in deep grief and the murder of a farm animal that is defined by its incarceration at an emblematic interstice. After being saved from peril, with aid of British soldiers stationed nearby, and having survived its internment at the river border, the horse is nevertheless put down by its owner. In this way, the nation is shown to have “died” at the moment of rupture, exactly in the way McGuckian portrays the history in her poem. McCann pulls this implication up to the surface, writing: “…because Stevie and the draft horse were going to die since everything in this country must” (10). The title sentence is thus completed with the verb “to die”: ultimately, everything in the North of Ireland must die, is always already dead. The story ends by drawing attention to the location and clearly signifying partitionist compression: “Oh what a small sky for so much rain” (17). The man’s murder of the horse is, literally, a return to and working through of an earlier loss: that of his wife and child. Symbolically, it is a return to the loss of the nation by the people of the North.

McCann figures partition as a death through setting and symbol and incisively conveys the condition of partitionality, a condition likewise conveyed in the work of Anne Devlin. Though she is best known as a dramatist, Devlin writes of “[p]artition effects” (Zamindar 238) in Northern Ireland with with unique force, clarity and poignancy in “Naming the Names,” an early short story later adapted as a film. In this tragic piece, the author deploys not only an unhomely housing structure, but one that is incarcerating and interrogatory, as key allegorical space. The story closes with a shock to the reader who discovers, that its protagonist was Janus-faced like a partitioned people, not merely the innocent wee girl employed by a bookshop, but also a volunteer in the Provisional IRA who has colluded in the murder of her British boyfriend, set him up and is now incarcerated and interrogated by the British authorities. The character is under search and seizure in an allegorical location representing a tiny miserable state where citizens are beholden to and surrounded by silence. Perhaps Ireland's most perfect narrative of partition: the two faces of Finn betray a self partitioned by an unnatural border, confused by the haunting presence of an inextricable and irremediably foreign other, a ruptured figure facing in antipodean directions, incapable of knowing or seeing itself. Of central importance to Devlin's endeavor to represent the nation here, rather than naming names, Finn recites a taxonomy of streets: "Osman, Serbia, Raglan, Bosnia, Belgrade, Rumania, Sebastopol. The names rolled off my tongue like a litany" (1988 108). She is asked to identify people she works with in the IRA: "Who are the others? What are their names? 'Abyssinia, Alma, Balaclava, Balkan,' she replies" (109), and instead offers a litany of actual street names in Catholic West Belfast: "Lincoln, Leeson, Marchioness and Mary, Slate, Sorella and Ward" (105).

Devlin's allegory for the border—the several listings of street names—reminds readers that there "ish" no nation, and no nationalized self, only a bordered, slippery constellation that does not name or place, only the *différance* of so many signifiers of place. This is Finn's Beckettian "*Au contraire,*" her circumlocutory way around Shakespeare, Cairns and Richards' impossible question: *What ish my nation?* Devlin's character recites the only nameable thing in a political location emptied of meaning, in a nation without nation-ness existing as a proliferation of "empty and broken beaten" spaces: "Once more they came back for the names, and I began: 'Abyssinia, Alma, Balaclava, Balkan, Belgrade, Bosnia,' naming the names: empty and broken places. I know no others. / Gone and going all the time. / Redevelopment [read: partition]. Nothing more dramatic than that; the planners are our bombs now. There is no heart in the Falls these days" (118). Precisely as portrayed in McCann's story and McGuckian's poem, the Falls, the main road in the area, signifies the border and its impact, a falling into death, the heart of the nation, stilled: *Dead and dying all the time*. Politically bankrupt, the North is signifiable only by means of a circumlocutory collection of signposts that have meaning and function purposively in *other* places. Northern Irish alienation is clear as a place with "No road sense" (106), the "streets of West Belfast" (108) exist in the world not as "themselves" but as places in *other* nations. They are borders bifurcating a city in the wrong geography, sign posts populating some other imagined community, perplexingly drained of any signifying value in Ireland.

Devlin's territorial meaning is communicated in this story with great clarity. The subject, embodied by Finn, exists in a dream. Her British boyfriend tells her: "The trouble with you… You're improbable. No one would ever believe me… Sometimes I think -- …you live in a dream, Finn" (103). Finn is indeed improbably bizarre, a nationalized figure fighting for a dream-nation that does not exist and alienated from not just that nation but from any kind of ontological existence, too. The condition in which Finn MacCool finds herself at the close of the story—incarcerated by the British authorities and under interrogation—is not merely reflective of the literal circumstance of a citizen in para-militant revolt against the state. More importantly, it is suggestive of a larger life condition: Finn's responses to the interrogatives by her colonial captors imply that there is no one *to* name in Northern Ireland, that its residents are "dead," paved over, rendered invisible by a partition plan and the uncanny statelet it produced. When asked: "And the names? The names of those involved?," Finn replies, "There are no names. Only places" (115). Revealed here as Rushdie's "oblivious dust" (1987 37) are both Devlin's nation and its subject, a figure locked into a "nowhere" as a "no one," bereft of any ground on which to construct an authentic self, sense of place or stable belonging in the world: Finn does not name names, they are the silence of her story; Finn does not have a self—that is the silence of her life. And what she does name, a taxonomy of *other* places, is symbol of the complex of spaces and times, nations and empires, selves and others in which the Northern Irish subject is imbricated—too many places of belonging and no place like home, so many alienations in a chain of exiles.

Finn, and the Northern Irish subject she exemplifies, is "Besieged within the siege" with nowhere to "be" (Heaney 1975 54). We have hardly encountered a better metaphor for the move from pre- to post-partition Ireland than this haunting story by Anne Devlin. Another brilliant exemplar of the social conditions and tropes under review, also from Northern Irish fiction, is the critical *denouement* in Anna Burns' *No Bones*. This author offers a scrimmed sequence and critically positioned figure that depicts the absent-present condition of the subject and carcerality by which they are constitute. In "Triggers, 1991," her protagonist Amelia Lovett's alienation, unnameability and political "intersectionality" are poignant, visually rendered and thus entirely lucid. The character has recently expatriated to London from Belfast and visits a grocery store where she has the long-awaited nervous breakdown. Inside the store, Amelia paces back and forth between the canned beans, which she hates, and the Corn Flakes, which she loves. Like all the female characters in Burns' world, she has been anorexic for years, punishing and rewarding, hating and loving herself with food. Finally deciding on the hateful beans and now, in line to pay, Amelia notices a security guard who has "placed himself prominently, eye-catchingly, in front of her" (281). After leaving the store she pauses, wondering why this guard was eyeing her, thinking, in a fit of misplaced defensive rage, that she's done nothing wrong. Outside the store now, a small crowd gathers, all eyes on her. As Amelia becomes increasingly anxious and is ultimately overwhelmed, she does an about-face so that, then, she peers into the store through a window covered by a security grill: "…and she turned round to the grill, and faced away from them all" (287). After contemplating "what war is," Amelia "held on, and she held on tight and she looked into the supermarket. She locked eyes with the guard" realizing he'd been "staring out all this time" at her (289). While she is certain this man despises and plans to arrest her—after all, she has experienced inexplicable hatred all her life from most anyone, *especially* officers of the colonial state—the fact is, he sympathizes with her.

The guard doesn't accuse her of a theft she didn't commit; instead he recognizes a woman in pain and helps her. It is not until he speaks to her—"'Tell me. Can you hear me? Is there someone you want me to call for you? Can you hear me?'" (290)—that Amelia realizes that, rather than harm, he is trying to help. Burns writes: Amelia "was standing peculiar, her arms and legs spread wide. She was holding onto the grille, the way men do, the way men did, over and over, being searched, by soldiers, in her childhood" (288). The arrangement of her body is key signifier of the character's partitionality: holding on to that grille, arms and legs akimbo, accompanied by uniformed agents of the state, ready to be searched, then interned, then become the participant of an imprisoned anorexic hunger strike, then to die—so the story has gone… Through the London setting, this portrait of the Troubles is placed in the frame of empire: Burns splices spaces of the colonizer and the colonized by placing people in the London scene who are "speaking Belfast" (283). Amelia is in London but, in another way, she remains in Belfast, now and ever. The episteme of partition follows her, crowds, arranges and emplaces her body. And so, Amelia "assumes the position" without being told to, without having any reason to. She assumes it panoptically, through its internalization. Amelia is not in Belfast; still, she assumes the position. She is not being interrogated or arrested or accused of anything; still, she assumes the position. Well-visualized in the episode are the way memory, history and political ideology leave the subject *locked* in that position Amelia assumes without evident cause. The assemblage of discrete, proximate nations that comprise her post-partition imagined community are symbolized and the search posture symbolizes the historico-political node constitutimg her. This image—a character holding the window grille, making eye contact with a colonial guard, standing in the search position, and all this, setting for a nervous breakdown—is an incisive, complex allegory of post-partition life. The mesh she grasps, the window, the "search stance"—*the* iconic image of the period—together signify the condition of the subject: her incarceration at a nexus of worlds and incapacity to have a sense of place, self or Being in the world.

Split cross-wise along the axes of diverse worlds, there is no place and no time that she is *home*. Burns develops one of the most elucidatory scrims in recent literature from the North: the window, the window grille, the wall of the store, the doorway in and out, all are scrims of this pivotal scene. The window straddled and the wall of that public building are the boundary-place from which Amelia sees the multiple "worlds" constituting her. In the search position, she reaches toward the compound defining realms that simultaneously embrangle this protagonist. The grilled window figuratively divides Amelia's world from the British world where she is literally located and which politically occupies her Irish world. Both are present in the scene, side-by-side, and we see how London and Belfast are co-existent geographies constituting this, how she floats between this nation and that one as between past and present. Clearly a "critically positioned figure" (Muldoon 8), following this scene, Amelia awakens in another realm, delirious and drugged. She has no idea where she is, and, as with the ancient mythological cycles, it is as if she has fallen through a world-scrim in the shift from this incident to the title chapter. As with the suffocating political entrapment Devlin's protagonist experiences in "Naming the Names,"[80] Burns charts the fall into the "oblivious dust" of mental collapse in tandem with the progress of the war (Rushdie 1987 37), likewise illustrating the meaning of the territory and constricted place of the subject. How can the subject have a nation at all when her location is the one drawn here or in the closing scene of “Naming the Names,” when life is lived out as an internment in which the citizen is always subject to interrogation and search?

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~Part III, Conclusions*:* *“We’ll hang ourselves to-morrow… Unless Godot comes.”*

Where exactly… is the poet’s home?[81]
~Aamir Mufti, Enlightenment in the Colony

Through explicating specter and scrim, we recognize the amalgamation of nations and times, the despairing inescapable locatedness, the too-haunted, overly boundaried topography constituting the subject. Paul Muldoon suggests that the trope of the scrim has been serviceable to Irish authors from long before 1921. But if it is true, as he likewise maintains, that the “scrimmed” character of Irish literature is rooted in political history, an effect of histories of conquest and colonialism, then we will see a transformation of the aesthetic in its use by authors since division.[82] How the critical tropes of specter and scrim have been reformulated elucidating contemporary Irish life is revealed with striking clarity in looking at a classic pre-partition poem by William Allingham next to a contemporary example from the work of Medbh McGuckian. In Allingham’s epic, “Laurence Bloomfield in Ireland, A Modern Poem” (1864), he writes:

> One old man, tears upon his wrinkled cheek,
> Stands trembling on a threshold, tries to speak,
> But, in defect of any word for this,
> Mutely upon the doorpost prints a kiss,
> Then passes out for ever… (quoted in Muldoon 8)

Allingham’s figure is surrounded by scrims: the doorway to his home, the threshold between life and death, the time-space connecting home and exile and that of colonial enfranchisement and vagrancy, the frontier of language and illiteracy. This romantic drama—a kiss placed upon the door to the subject’s home followed by his expiring at the very moment it is repossessed by the
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colonial authority—is not merely a lyrical moment intended to arouse sympathy for the colonized and provoke outrage over empire. The doorway area and other scrims, the speaker's critical positioning, all symbolize the place of the colonized Irish subject. When the speaker painfully mourns the loss of home and dies in connection with it, he likewise bids adieu to the living world. The figure knows where home is, he can touch and kiss it, lose it and grieve the loss. Home is a "body" that can be lost to death, like a human body. There can be no life once the house—allegory of the homeland—has been taken by the immoral, disciplining colonial authority. What is tacit in this action is that the nation is a distinct, coherent place; it is identifiable and remembered, a loss signifying not a blurred, dispersed death but death absolutely, a "good," grievable Heideggerian dying (352). Allingham's spectrality is direct: the speaker literally stands at a doorway and at the temporal and corporeal "door" between life and afterlife. The location betrays a clear pre-partition positioning: his speaker occupies an ontological *trajectory*, from embodiment to death and mourning which, as with Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom, can be followed, along a temporal, horizontal line.

This kind of movement becomes a problem, post-partition. If the subject *is* the specter haunting Northern Ireland, she can by no means realize a "good death," cannot die as Allingham's romantic speaker does; that "good death" requires a previous state of Being and a continuing, full "dead-ness." Consider the postmodern, post-partition spectral scrim in Medbh McGuckian's poem titled "Birthday Composition of Horses." The difference exemplified in Allingham and McGuckian's scrims is, I argue, the critical change from pre- to post-partition Ireland. McGuckian uses the dramatic metaphor of the sieve—which strains, sifts, filters, fragments—as figure of place, self and death. Her poem tells of a death at a window, by means of a suicidal leap through it. She writes:

> The country flattens, falling arms first
> through a window. The train bends,
> narrowing away to the middle,
> to embrace a wider Ireland.

To be Irish in Northern Ireland is to dive through a window into a compulsory ontological death. McGuckian continues:

> In tents on ground adjoining churches,
> people floating or stumbling in fancy dress
> might be said to have been put through
> a sieve, to go home and be nowhere… (2002 23)

To be Irish in Northern Ireland is to be sieved to a nowhere, to a no one. For McGuckian, the home partition built is a distinctly temporary dwelling providing little in the way of safety and nothing like the feeling of home. Her location ("tents") is founded on a borderland (the "ground adjoining") between mutually hateful sect groups ("churches"). McGuckian's tents are the homes residents would return to if only they were not "nowhere." Residents of the place do not occupy unbroken ground, they do not walk, run, sit or stand, but *float*, ungrounded, stumbling from one stopping point to the next. The terrain of this nation is not only "schismed" (it forms distinct "churches") but shakes; its residents wait for the quake to end but the Godot of a habitable place never comes and the stumbling continues, anon.

These allegorical borders are both spectral, equally articulating scrimmed, deathly experiences of Irish unhomeliness, but their performances of those ideas are altogether distinct. Irish subjectivity, identity and ontology were all utterly, fully transformed by partition and McGuckian's experience of them is reflected in her choice of metaphor and object. Her scrim develops as the location of an interstitial suicide, an impending self-annihilating leap out of the living world. Rather than dying at the doorway to a wider Ireland, McGuckian's compressed, flattened nation occupies a *vertical* time, and lacks groundedness. Her speaker leaps willfully into the only possible kind of death: a suicide, not by means of a doorway (a scrimmed passage to a known elsewhere) but through a break in the structure of an unhomely house: a window in a confining wall. Doorways suggest passage, crossing, the ability to leave, to hide, metaphorically to fight or die trying. Windows signify confinement, compression, a stifling domestic entrapped "emplacement" that forestalls revolt or even alteration. More than an embodied homecoming—like the good, full Heideggarian death in Allingham's poem, whose speaker requires and is provided a doorway, that is to say, a "passport" into death—the figures in the post-partition poem are sifted, like flour or spices, "through a sieve." The location depicts a mass of contradiction and perplexity filtered according to the machinations of history, a harnessing to a place of stumbling and floating that is unimaginable and not really anywhere, to an unidentifiable time, a little ontology that "isn't."

Complicating matters, the scene is witnessed—because this is Northern Ireland, because this is McGuckian—through the window of a *moving* train. In this, the critical post-partition shift in the scrim crystallized in the movement from doors to windows *and* from stillness—place and nation-ness—to movement—a partitionist scattering of places and nations. This change in allegory indexes and figures the transition from pre- to post-partition Ireland. McGuckian's speaker is unhomely in the most radical sense: for her, home is not kissed, mourned, loved and left, as it is for Allingham, but precisely nowhere. Her poetic death is not a nostalgically remembered loss but the suicidal shattering of the speaker into fast-moving air and space through a "North" window, the existentialist sieving of a nowhere beyond its everyday chaos and anarchy. The windows of McGuckian's poems are a partition through which free Ireland is viewed, always symbol of the damning geopolitical border. This window poem is an image-centered narrative of the birth of the North as Beckett's "lingering dissolution" (Kiberd 532). But the contemporary author also does not lament a brutal captivity, as with the *aisling* and its *spéirbhean.* Rather, here is a reckless, despairing existentialism, a willful negation and "blind" Oedipal suicide, a damning of and turning away from the nation as from the self, as from any conceivable ontology—a loss within a palimpsest of compound losses. Far worse than losing the fight for life is being born dead, being kept alive *in* a state of dead-ness. Enacted instead, therefore, is the dramatic suicide of a "thing" always already "fallen apart"—like a specter, dead before the fact, dead necessarily—and a return to that barely breathing stillbirth: "to go home and be nowhere," now and again and again. In this poem, the nation falls headfirst through a house "partition," the window, to a simple aesthetic nowhere for the purpose of ending its imprisonment in a broken, seething wound. Perhaps the poem suggests a Beckettian continuous reenactment of this spectacular suicide everyday—an "everyday" suicide then, a deathly transmogrification which is neither passage nor conversion nor any kind of true end.

Indeed, there is nothing to die for because there *ish* no imaginable, housing nation. And that is why this suicidal window is the place McGuckian's speaker is continually led. The shift from a doorway passage to a deathly windowed sieving demarcates the "purely" postcolonial and the postcolonial partitionality I theorize. The difference between postcoloniality, as understood, and its post-partition incarnation is conveyed in the change from Allingham's scrim to McGuckian's: it is in the passage from a doorway—which relocates the figure to another knowable realm—to a window—built for willfully jumping through. The distinctions between his goodbye kiss and her sieve are a node containing the meaning of partition and its territories. Now, the scrim is a mechanism for witnessing a world from which the viewer is forever partitioned by a window through which she might, at any moment, jump to her death; through which a bad, non-death is radically chosen against all the rules of structure and structuredness housing it. In work from the North, there is rarely any sense of something lost and grieved but a hovering, at an edge—the slapstick stagger, felt in Burns' work and in the poetry of Muldoon and Paulin and is not unlike Krapp's nonsensical travelings around Beckett's stage. Surely the only kind of death Beckett would have put his faith in is the atheistic, suicidal "lingering dissolution" McGuckian so skillfully performs (Kiberd 532). For the Belfast poet, there is no moment of loss which can be isolated, mourned and moved on from. There is only the defeat that defines the time-space of every lived moment since the traumatizing Northern birth: waiting for that which will never come, for the no one and the nowhere, for the ontological Godot of nation. "What ish my nation?" That is, what is the meaning of the Northern Irish territory? It is a home that means exile, for to be Northern Irish is *"to go home and be nowhere"* (2002 23, my italics).

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Chapter Three:

Self-Contradiction in a Small Place: Anne Devlin's "Other at the Edge of Life"

How is it your identity's still breathing between the pages?
~Yehuda Amichai, "Two Photographs"

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Northern Irish dramatist Anne Devlin was born in Belfast in 1951. Like her compatriot Medbh McGuckian, she came of age with the onset of the Troubles. These women writer's lives are ineradicably bound up with their political history, and their work has occupied an important place in the cultural life of Northern Ireland since the early 1980's. For Devlin, though, the link is more profound. As a former Member of Parliament for the Social Democratic and Labor Party, her father, Paddy Devlin, was a well-known political figure in Belfast.[83] Devlin grew up surrounded by the state politics that occupy a central place in her work. Like several of her characters, she left Belfast eventually and took up residence in London; thus, unsurprisingly, escape, expatriation and exile shape up as key themes. Indeed, all of her original writing—a collection of short stories (*The Way Paver,* two of which were adapted by her as films), three theatrical plays (*Ourselves Alone, After Easter,* and *Heartlanders*, co-written with Stephen Bill and David Edgar), and the original screenplay (*The Long March*)—is political and historical.[84] Titles of major dramas reflect the fact: *Ourselves Alone* is a translation of "Sinn Fein" (usually "We, Ourselves"), the nationalist party committed to Irish freedom, north and south, and reunification of the island. Though set in the post-partition era and addressing the more contemporary Northern Troubles, the title *After Easter* alludes to the chief event leading to Irish independence—the 1916 Easter Rising—"after" and primarily because of which came independence and the partition that created the North.
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The theatre, as we know, is a social literature, and in the case of Irish drama, it is also political. The theater has certainly been a critical facet of anti-colonial resistance in Ireland. The tie between political praxis and theater art in Ireland is extremely profound as evidenced in events like the week of rioting following the Abbey's staging of Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* (1907) and the pandemonium attending the opening of O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* (1926). Northern Irish theatre has maintained this link: theatrical culture there is undeniably a culture of political resistance. The Troubles influences the shape, content and purpose of much of the dramatic literature coming out of the North, where we saw a zenith in literary production in the decade of the '80's. Like the earlier Dublin Renaissance spearheaded by Yeats and Lady Gregory, this *Northern* Irish phenomenon has given us a generation of emerging authors who write in direct and strongly critical ways about the political situation in the region, often offering radical, cooperative responses both to the oppressive policies of the colonial state and to armed paramilitary responses to it.

In liberally quoting from and alluding to O'Casey's *The Shadow of a Gunman* in her proletarian drama *Joyriders*, Cristina Reid signifies the profound relationship between the Dublin and Northern literary flowerings. The public nature of drama and its deep concern, historically, with themes of politics and justice is seen all the way back to its Western origins in Classical Greece. One of the most radical artistic evolvements in the theatre is the point at which artists and their supporters cease to view the production and consumption of art as an individual enterprise and stage collective responses to politico-historical events. Much Irish theatrical production, on both sides of the Irish border, has been collective. The work of drama companies holds a central place in Irish literary history. Most important, in the North, are the Field Day Theatre Company, centered in Derry and co-founded in 1980 by Brian Friel and Stephen Rea, and the Belfast-based women's group, Charabanc Theatre Company, cooperatively founded a few years later by five female actresses.[85] The express aims of the theatrical branch of Field Day are to "redefine Irish cultural identity" and offer "readers [and audiences] a 'fifth province of the mind' in which potential identities for Ireland could be explored outside the constraints of existing traditions, whilst at the same time renewing the investigation" of history and politics (Welch 187). Anthony Roche maintains that Field Day has achieved these aims by "[returning] Irish theatre to one of its greatest strengths, the impact of live drama as a means of considering political issues which were hopelessly polarised in the official sphere" (244). The Charabanc group, on the other hand, set out to produce new Irish plays representing and exploring the condition and particular experiences of Belfast women. The work of female dramatists Christina Reid and Marie Jones (who had been with but later broke from Charabanc) has held a central place in Northern Irish theatre. Many maintain the focus on national identity that has been important for Field Day.[86] While it is true that Reid and Devlin likewise "deconstruct the problematic issues of identity and self-definition facing both the Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland," they do so in decidedly different ways (Delgado x). Rather than performing a critique of cultural identity—which is Devlin's general project—Reid's aim is to deconstruct dominant discourses of the North and moderate the third space between the region's cultural Others. Reid's transnational posture is closer to Anna Burns or Brian Friel's, in that these writers all amalgamate and collapse enemy communities in interesting ways so as to draw out correspondences and shared histories, indeed third spaces between them.

The theatre's status as a collective response to political conflict, as with the Abbey, Field Day and Charabanc, or the staging of theater of war as autobiography in plays like Geraldine Hughes' *Belfast Blues* and all of Anne Devlin's work for stage and film, ascribe to the theatre an exceptional status in the context of historical literature. Like official state performances of the meting out of justice, such as the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission or the Nuremberg Trials, theatrical history functions to administer mimetic justice in a public form and forum, through representation, commentary and critique. Just as the musical politics of banging bin lids protects a population under siege from oppressive policies of a colonial state, political drama refuses such policies and appraises their destructiveness, consolidates anti-colonial nationalism and evaluates the condition of postcoloniality. In *Observe the Sons of Ulster,* McGuinness asks: “Did you intend that we should keep seeing ghosts?” (97). It seems dramatists coming out of situations of war, colonialism and partition, including those of Northern Ireland, do indeed intend that audiences be visited by spectral figures. They signify the need to recognize and answer the rights of the dead by bringing to dramatic life the survivors’ “interiorisation” of their voices and selves, the very deathliness of the dead (Roche 273). Dramatists from areas of political unrest resurrect the dead as part of the process of representing history: they bring ghostly figures into the performance in order to address the silent, silenced entitlements of the dead and of history, so that audiences suspend disbelief in an unusual way and hear—in the actors’ voices—the voices of the dead, see—in the actors’ bodies—the bodies of the dead.

That aim is familiar to the literature of Northern Ireland and Éire, particularly that of the dramatist who is this chapter’s focus. Playwrights like Anne Devlin, who lived through the Northern Irish Troubles, endeavor to make right the wounds and losses of that personal-political era. Devlin interrogates issues of partition, colonialism and anti-colonial nationalism through a concentration on national identity. Her plays and screenplays line up as a series of distinct autobiographical stories that likewise portray her history and the social and political life of her homeland. Plays like *After Easter* deconstruct the binary of public and private and remind us that national history is likewise personal (hi)story, that one of the functions of theatre is to play a juridical role in this regard. In her theatrical work and her fiction, the playwright from Andersonstown dramatizes the effects of Ireland's partition, and with that the history of empire there, on the experience of Irishness for residents of the North. Devlin is that "quare" woman dramatist who cannot seem to remember that she is Irish while doggedly refusing to forget it. In her writing, we observe an abundance of tropes of dislocation, confinement and suffocation—numerous strangulations of female characters—a proliferation of "small places" of contraction and struggle and waif-like subjects. She doesn't break down cultural or political binaries, as Friel and Reid consistently do; instead, Devlin reveals their inherently unsettled, "partitionist" status. She addresses the ways political history has transformed the people of Ireland, these many survivors of protracted state conflict, into a spectral population. Hence, my adoption of the specter as a conceptual model here. Devlin delineates the problem of post-partition impossibility in drawing the North as a place where a stable sense of self or sustained coherence of an ontology is never permitted to grow or to endure in the lives of citizens. If there is no possibility of fully "incarnating" as a nationalized self, Northern Irishness must be a lived deathliness, where the space for constructing a new hybrid wholeness does not exist. And this representation has been staged or otherwise drawn by Devlin, time and again.

This chapter traces that spectrality—the deathliness that hangs like a mist over the North of Ireland and infuses her characters' experiences of being alive—across four major works: "Naming the Names" (1981, a short story adapted as a film), the dramas *Ourselves Alone* (1985) and *After Easter* (1994), and the original screenplay, *The Long March* (1984). My analysis responds to her *oeuvre* through the frames of Postcolonial and Irish Studies thought. I consider the way postcolonial theory works and also fails to explicate Devlin's plays and stories and how pertinent gaps are bridged through work focused on the North, such as that of Joe Cleary, and through poststructural theorists like Jacques Derrida. Derrida's work on the apparition, in *Specters of Marx,* is of particular importance regarding the conclusions I draw about the expressly Northern Irish identity developed and performed in Devlin's work.

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~**Part I:** *Being Northern Irish: "…or not to be"*

When the lead character in Anne Devlin's 1994 drama, *After Easter,* is asked "Who do you think you are," Greta replies, "That's what I can't answer" (19). This exchange is more than simply rhetorical or humorous. It points to a problem of critical importance in Irish Studies: the question of what it means to be Irish in Northern Ireland. We might ask if such an identification is even possible—can one be from the North and "*be* Ireland" in the manner of Padraig Pearse, or be "*of* Ireland" in W.B. Yeats' conception?[87] Indeed, can one be "of" the North at all? The authoritative voice in these nationalist poems is unfamiliar in *Northern* Irish literature. Anne Devlin's work is narrated through a split, panoptical voice. Her speakers are surveilled rather than empowered as they "always [listen] for footsteps" (1988 104) and express a postmodern ontological atheism, believing that "there are no individuals, only scattered phrases and competing ideas…" (1994 63). Devlin represents Northern Irishness as a palimpsest of displacements, so many transitory exiles. How can subjects of the North claim the status of Irishness when partition's express aim was to reify the status of the six counties as definitively *not* Ireland; when the place that goes by the name Éire has become Irish in a way entirely unavailable in the North; and, when this citizen-subject more than likely carries a British passport, lives on British pounds, and is habitually obliged to identify as British? At one and the same time, how can the subject not declare herself Irish when—as the location of ancestry, of
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birth, of personal biography and memory—Ireland is the only place *to* claim? What other national, political, historical or communal identification is accessible, forgeable or tenable? It seems any allegiance available to this subject is, of necessity, a profound forgery. And it is in the spirit of this ontological crisis that, when asked to identify members of the IRA, the main character in "Naming the Names," Finn, replies: "There are no names. Only places" (1988 115).

We observe these conundrums in literary representations of the geography by authors on both sides of the communal divide. The trouble with Being in Northern Ireland arises, first and foremost, by means of inauguration of the partition border, a circumstance in which the always-complex question of national identity is further convoluted. Devlin delineates the problem of "state estrangement" (Cleary 11) and the condition of an irremediably present-and-absent Northern Irish subject by offering narratives that are internally at odds. Her representations suggest that the contradictoriness inherent to partition is undeniably the groundwork of national identity. At first pass, one might not view her work as embodying a self-contradictory ontology, as it may so easily be seen as nationalist in tone or intent—as the celebration of an "authentic," traditional Irishness and articulation of an Irish cultural distinctiveness. With the very same confidence, however, a reader or viewer may well regard the narratives as profoundly hybrid, insinuating an extreme cultural and national indecisiveness and deeply amalgamated view of Northern Irish identity. Both readings are appropriate, in fact, because the work enacts both movements as it undulates between ambivalence and specificity of national culture and creates acute tension around questions of self-identity. Whereas Brian Friel self-consciously constructs a liminal Irishness, Devlin enacts Derrida's "principle of indeterminacy" (quoted in Bhabha 171).[88] Friel's Northern Irishness is surely emancipatory, and while his transnationalism does indeed invite constructive postcolonial critique, it does not elucidate what may be most important about being Northern Irish. Devlin's representation centers on the disjunctive character of identity in their Northern Irish homeland. Unlike Friel, she does not cancel out expressions of national culture in order to articulate an ethic of Irish syncretism. Instead, her characterization of place and subject is simply indeterminate: now expressive of Yeats' national culture; now utterly cosmopolitan, postmodern, agnostic and queer, simultaneously nationalist and transnationalist

In McGuckian's words, a dead "stored statelessness" (1995 53) defines the North, and this is the condition Devlin likewise outlines. Her representation aligns with Daniel Corkery's observations from a decade after partition: Kiberd explains how partition provoked

> neither an English nor an Irish sensibility, nor any admirable hybrid. It led instead to confusion. …Corkery detected not just a lack of native forms, but the want of any foundation on which to shape them: 'Everywhere in the mentality of the Irish people are flux and uncertainty. Our national consciousness may be described, in a native phrase, as a quaking sod. It gives no footing. It is not English, nor Irish, nor Anglo-Irish.' (555, in part quoting Corkery)

Devlin's theatrical work, I argue, viscerally conveys this experience of home as a quaking sod that gives no footing—that, in other words, alienates the citizen from the ground of nation that is designed to house and locate them. And neither is her work neutral: the plays and stories do not *not* belong to either side of the conflict but dwell simultaneously in both. What I sense is not so much a position, for the problem of self-contradiction is never acknowledged and remains unresolved. Rather, here is a collage of rival ideas, a quarrel in which all sides are equally favored and mutually convincing, a simply incongruous microcosm. Devlin finds the mimesis she's looking for in a fraught no man's land, the only place from which one may genuinely speak this partitioned part-nation if it is to be spoken at all. And this is the location the playwright intends to foreground, place before audiences, and occupy in representing the statelet.

These dynamics are readily observable in *After Easter*, a complex allegory of the problem of ontological contradiction centered on Greta Cook (nee Flynn) originally of Andersonstown, now, resident of London. This play is fundamentally concerned with self-contradiction, as when, for example, Greta tells us she can “see out of two separate windows each with a different view” (1994 31). The play moves back and forth between nationalism, transnationalism, and even colonialism: Greta is drawn as a mimic woman[89] who admits she “want[s] to be English” (21). Yet, Devlin’s protagonist is clearly Mother Ireland and, at the same time, categorically uncaptureable. She subscribes to all religions and political affiliations and to none of them. Greta is nationalist and anti-nationalist: opposed to Catholicism and the play’s *seanachie;* she is the madwoman in the sanatorium—that is, the colonized subject in her small place—and the play’s wise visionary. Greta is a waif-like citizen-of-the-world who is everything and everyone and yet manages to be the most culturally Irish figure in Devlin’s oeuvre. Of course, since she is Northern Irish, Greta is, at some level, not Irish at all. When her doctor asks, “Why do you resent being Irish so much?” Greta replies: “I don’t resent being Irish, I only resent it being pointed out to me…” (10). What she dislikes is that in being reminded that she is Irish, Greta is in fact being reminded that is *not* Irish. She is, after all, from Belfast, *Northern* Ireland and thus lives an existence ever displaced from the Irish identity her birthplace ought automatically grant. When speaking of her migration to London, we see that Greta has no real conception of the location to which she arrived: “…I left Ireland in 1979, but I never arrived in England. I don’t know where I went” (22). She cannot understand the meaning of place because she was born in the North of Ireland—a quaking sod that gives no footing, no experience of locatedness in the world.

Perhaps ironically, the first stage direction reads: *"The present. / Greta, an Irish woman…"* (7). In the opening scene, while viewers are thoroughly confounded in terms of who Greta Cook really is or just where she belongs, they are sure about one thing: she is by no means "an Irish woman," this fact being the critical problem of her life. To begin with, the character she is like no other female we've seen in the Irish theatre. And that, I argue, is entirely the point: she is *Northern* Irish, which means Greta, "an Irish woman," is legally, politically and in every practical sense *not* Irish. It is, I argue, precisely because Devlin's protagonist hails from a partitioned place that she experiences extreme ontological exile and is revealed as a mass of conflict and perplexity. As *After Easter* unfolds, it becomes clear that Greta's identity crisis hovers around the idea of the nation specifically—that her ability to be "an Irish woman" is the play's chief query. The unintelligibility of her identity *vis-á-vis* the nation is everywhere evident. Greta's is a crisis of homesickness whereby the "whole of Ireland" cries out to her, calling her home (8, 19, 24). Scenes One and Two feature movements between a number of national and religious identifications, some Irish, some international. In the opening scene, Greta is "a Catholic, a Protestant, a Hindu, a Moslem, a Jew" (13), whereas by the time Scene Two begins, her nationality and religion morph *and* merge: "…Me, I'm not even a Christian. I don't want this. I don't want to be Irish. I'm English, French, German" (18). Her nationalist sister, Aoife, tells us that Greta is "so clear," saying she is "not on anybody's side. And yet she's on everybody's side…" (18). What is in fact least clear in *After Easter* is the question of who Greta Cook is and where she belongs, if anywhere.

Devlin's work manages to contain the pulls and discordances of this self-contradictoriness. Gender is a fruitful location from which to assess issues of the state and national identity and an important line traceable through Devlin's work. She is able to pull off this contradictoriness without losing the effective thrust of the piece because she works through the trope of gender and speaks exclusively through the female figure and voice. That thread is critical to why the plays and stories "work" in spite of the dissonance plaguing them. Devlin's dramas, *After Easter* and *Ourselves Alone*, feature trinities of women in which female figures represent a type of politics and dramatize one of the few life-choices available to women. Her plays show how women are oppressed by both colonial and anti-colonial structures and have precisely *one* desperate opportunity for life. These movements headed by women do not merely sketch the place of women in Northern Ireland, however, or that of Catholics or Nationalists, but the compressed location and deathly condition of residents overall. These characters and stories embody the meaning of being Northern Irish, in each case functioning as representative of this conflicted subject, illuminating the tiny breathing space in which not just women but subjects of either sex may act and think, dwell and "Be." Cousin reminds us that Greta "inhabited…a limbo space" (194), but this is not only a woman's place; it signifies the location of the Northern Irish citizen at large. Even as Devlin does not deny the unequal, distinct condition of women, she likewise reveals the condition of the subject at large through female-centric narratives.

Women drive all of Devlin's narratives. The problem of self-contradiction is usefully amplified when located in and conveyed through female characters. Women are at variance with themselves not only as colonized (or formerly colonized) persons, but simply as women who occupy an oppressed place in relation to nation, state and para-state. They suffer multiple exclusions such that, through their dramatic presence, viewers experience the displacement and invisibility of Northern Irishness in a visceral way. The peripheral location where the woman writer often finds herself, and about which Devlin is self-conscious, allows her to comprehensively articulate the general degree of national disorientation. Political life in this split state is deeply patriarchal and divided along not only political and sect lines but those of gender too. Greenhalgh explains that "[f]or the women in Devlin's plays, the history of Ireland is a suffocating dream of violence initiated and carried out by men…" (167). And, analogous to Christina Reid's work: just as anti-colonial nationalism sets native culture against colonialism, "women's experience is asserted against history" in Devlin's (Roche 233). Ann Rea notes, too, how "…women…occupy the grey area on the boundaries of nations… Yet in that position on the edge of the nation—as part of that nation but not active in devising or governing the nation—they constitute a threat, in the men's eyes, by always having a peripheral and unstable relationship to the national order" (210). Male privilege can blur the lens through which we view social issues. Therefore, it is precisely the underprivileged female perspective through which Devlin writes that permits our recognition of the cold, hard, dead facts of Northern Irishness.

The gendering of the performance augments its effectiveness as both historical text and political commentary. The political landscape and "power of the eye to naturalize the rhetoric of national affiliation and its forms of collective expression" (Bhabha 143) is portrayed doubly: in the mutual representation of high politics and sexual politics. Because female figures carry the critique of the state and the narrative as a whole. Greenhalgh suggests that such metaphors usefully expose the condition of the region as "an 'armed patriarchy' in which the cult of violent virility makes political and domestic brutality both ubiquitous and inseparable" (164). But while the critic is correct, she does not address how Devlin has used the trope as modality for articulating an overarching appraisal of state politics and structure. The gendered narrative constitutes the strongest representation for the Northern Irish politico-historical context because it is through the female figure that we arrive at the necessary impasse in terms of agency in the broken nation-state. On this point, Joseph Cleary's ideas about the occlusion of state structure in

Northern Irish historiography and literary narrative considerably elucidate Devlin’s work. Cleary observes the dynamic whereby the crucial relationship between sectarian discord and the state’s partitionist configuration is rendered indistinct in much literary writing. Many texts, he maintains, enact a “despairing flight from politics…” which “must be read as [both] a sign of imaginative failure…” and as a “corresponding faltering of political will: one that refuses to confront the fact that resolution to the sectarian conflict would require not just a modification of attitude on the part of the communities involved but substantive transformation of the existing structures of state power” (115). As Cleary shows, such a narrative strategy precludes the fashioning of any true reconciliation between enemy others because it ignores the fact that state structure, organized by the geopolitical rupture, and wider Irish political history are not tangential to but indeed constitute the sectarian divide. Of narratives of the Troubles he writes: “Were [they] to adhere to the narrative impetus to imagine how Northern Ireland’s communities might…become reconciled, they would have to take seriously the relationship between sectarian conflict and the existing state order. But since they…insist on seeing sectarianism as… distinct from…the state, they…stop well short of any such radical interrogation” (Ibid).

Anne Devlin’s work stands out in terms of Cleary’s concerns: she has committedly refused to evade the geo-political and historical, has always taken seriously and represented the profound connection between sectarianism and state structure. Her work might represent the failure of imagination Cleary speaks of but it cannot be said to sidestep the importance of partition to individual and communal conflict and does not represent the conflict bereft of political roots or as the mere struggle of clans. Devlin may not articulate a full reconciliation or alternative polity, but, her work cannot either be seen as part of the corpus that constructs “Catholic and Protestant sectarianism [as] simply an unfortunate anachronism” (Cleary 11).

Rather than concealing the connections between the state and the status of the divided citizenry, these issues are imbedded into each work and unmistakable. The umbilical nature of state structure and subjectivization is spectacularly clear, for example, when Frieda, of *After Easter*, is shown to be powerless to refuse political interpellation. Try as she might to resist, this character is drawn back into politics by the patriarch who beats, dominates and seduces her. Her situation functions as allegory for the relation between the subject-citizen—of any sect, sex or politics—and the state. Through Frieda, Devlin shows one cannot be Northern Irish and remain untethered to political process, as national identity is inescapably political. Her subject is political because she must be: signified across all the narratives is the impossibility of Being Northern Irish *sans* politics. First and foremost, that means being a Loyalist or Republican, a peace or civil rights activist, a member of Sinn Fein, Labour or some other party. Especially since the rise of Civil Rights and the Troubles, one cannot overstate the importance, in the lives of Catholics and Protestants, of the sense of duty to "do your bit" for the cause. Though this problem is often swept under the discursive carpet, it is a critical aspect of the Northern Irish ethos.

Very often, too, the irremediable tie between individual identity and high politics finds expression through the trope of naming names.[90] Finn's narrative, aptly titled "Naming the Names," culminates in a moment of confinement and questioning where, rather than naming names, she "[takes] refuge…in a childhood skipping game, 'naming the names' of the streets of Belfast, which themselves commemorate an imperialistic military past and encode the maze of a violent history from which there seems no escape" (Greenhalgh 166). This dilemma however is not Finn's alone; as an incarnation of Fionn mac Cumhail, Finnula McQuillen is intended as a representative figure—the new, *Northern* Irish national hero. In *After Easter*, Aoife guesses that a banshee Greta sees is "an English ghost" in response to which Helen asks, "…does everything have to have a nationality? Even a ghost?" (1994 17). The nationality Aoife assigns this specter stems from her own nationalism. Moments later, when Greta's sisters argue about this, Helen insists that the vision Greta sees is of the Pleiades, while Aoife is certain it was the "Plough. The symbol of the Irish Citizen Army" (20). Yes—the political conflict has created a situation in which subjectivization *requires* choosing a side. The Troubles are so fundamental to Northern Irishness that there is simply no room to proclaim oneself apolitical—not even for ghosts. Frieda, of *Ourselves Alone,* attempts refusing this political dressing but at every turn is brought back into the fold of one or the other. Her lover persuades her to participate in Labour Party politicking even as she has expressed an unwillingness to do precisely that. Eventually she finds she must emigrate in order to free herself of the assigned politico-nationalist identification. This exilic shedding occurs beyond the scope of the play, however, and is therefore unrealized dramatically. In *The Long March* and "Naming the Names," characters fall into a life of paramilitancy not because they are naturally violent or psychopathological, but in response to the simple fact of being Northern Irish in the time of the Troubles. Finn is militarized in response specifically to the history of the place—the political (and not merely sectarian) violence of August 1969 that she neither brings about nor participates in but experiences and is constituted by nonetheless. What is more, she wouldn't be Northern Irish without her second, surprising narrative—without her secret, shocking identity as agent for the Provisionals. This other "Finn" is part and parcel, Devlin suggests, of being Northern Irish: the citizen is partitioned because the state is.

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~**Part II:** *Postcolonial Devlin: "something is rotten in the state"*

Cleary's analysis usefully highlights the fact that Devlin refuses the problematical "flight from politics" seen in much literary work (115), that her work is not, after all, limited to the
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pacifist, feminist social critique it may be more obviously open to. Rather, this oeuvre encompasses a full-blown critique of political process and state that is located in spaces of self-contradiction. Cleary's reading of the Northern Irish political imagination begs an additional question: does Devlin imagine a newly organized nation or does the still-partitioned statelet foreclose any such vision? I believe it does: in fact, one of the things Devlin specifically wishes to reveal is the impossibility of transforming the "existing structures of state power" (Cleary 115), imaginatively and materially, for as long as the island remains split. And this is not because she avoids confronting Irish politics. On the contrary, it is through Devlin's gendered self-contradictory suffocating movements, in the imbrication of the political and the female, that such a conversion is shown to be impossible. And this is critical: it reveals the unfeasibility of personal and social transformation under partition and the concomitant need for a revolution of the unlivable state. Devlin's work is distinctive in revealing that there is no social or psychological place for the subject to go to from the conflict, that the passage into Homi Bhabha and Gloria Anzaldúa's generative ontological dwelling places is foreclosed in Northern Ireland.

Insofar as postcolonial notions of liminality and ambivalence are seen as spaces of Being—as productive and occupiable even while supplementary and unhomely—these concepts remain unsatisfactory to explain Anne Devlin's writing. It would be easy to read her work through such a lens, but that interpretation falls short of the explications more urgently invited by it. When Homi Bhabha theorized a "third space" for postcolonial collectivities that is generative in spite of antagonisms, I do not believe he had in mind the kinds of recalcitrant enmities or deep, alienating modalities that thrive in a place like Northern Ireland.[91] In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha develops a theory of postcolonial performativity, suggesting that, in the postmodern, postcolonial era—the aftermaths of empire, migration and the concomitant augmentation of global Diasporas arising by means of both—culture has become dispersed, and the constitution of the subject liminal, hybrid and ambivalent. Formerly homogenous, singular, located cultures are now heterogeneous and plural, existing in multiple locations thus defining those places. In “the articulation of cultural differences” (Bhabha 1) subjects lead “border lives” (*passim*): rather than a dominant culture cancelling out those marginalized in Darwinian fashion, Bhabha optimistically maintains that the postmodern, multicultural space of encounter is a borderland in which new identifications emerge and those of the long, arduous colonial past—“narratives of originary and initial subjectivities” (Ibid)—are sloughed off. This generative “third space,” a condition borne of histories of colonialism, empire and migration, is a “terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood…that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (Bhabha 1 – 2). Bhabha’s ideas have been deeply influential in terms of our understanding of postcoloniality. But the intersubjectivity theorized is, we are compelled to admit, deeply problematized in the aftermath of partition. In *undivided* decolonized locations, subjects experience a truer postcoloniality. Even with the continuing and burdensome presence of colonial discourse, subjects conceive of and compose habitable, hybrid narratives of self and place. The generative borderlands of postcolonial identity performatively evolve because the wait for sovereignty is over and residents can “think” the future as the result of a manifest (if still complex) freedom of the nation.

Not so in the North of Ireland where there persists a crisis of identity borne by fragmentations of the nation-state such that ontologies inevitably dissolve and nationalized selves are profoundly confused, lacking any evident third, alternative or liminal space to look to for reintegration. Gloria Anzaldúa begins her magnum opus, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, by invoking a literal, geographical, nation border, announcing a theory centered on the US-Mexico border. But even as she goes on to offer one of the most perceptive, efficacious readings of the postcolonial condition, the rumination remains mired in the strictures of multiculturalism and evolves, like Bhabha's, into a theory of the location of (American, postcolonial) *culture*. She recognizes the play of "confluent streams" of self-contradiction in the intersubjectivities of the nation (19), which are often cast in the frame of a discomfort similar to the one detected in Devlin's work. But Anzaldúa does not focus on specific effects of the invention of the U.S. Mexico border and geopolitical remapping of contiguous spaces. The concept of a new *mestizo*, where the "lifeblood of two worlds [merge] to form a third country—a border culture" (25), was derived mostly through a thinking of the space and structure of the U.S. and its historical shaping. That is to say, a single bordered space and subjects on one side of the allimportant boundary. The central concern here is the defining trope of American daily life: the multi*cultural* encounter, its causes and the options for productively responding to the hails and interpellations of this fraught ontological site. She writes: "Borderlands are *physically* present whenever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races *occupy the same territory*, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy" (19, my italics). Little thought is given to the question of the specters of nation subtending the site in question. As in the Northern Irish situation, Anzaldúa notes how "[b]orders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*" (25). However, she goes on to define a "borderland" as the "place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants" (25). And this is where we run into trouble when setting this theory against the North of Ireland: Anzaldúa speaks to an individual able to hold multiple cultures within a single ontological "site," one capable of straddling cultural borders and enduring the enemy within, of turning an ostensibly disharmonious clashing into something new and productive (*passim*).

Had this theory been derived through theorization of the reservation specifically—as opposed to Chicana groups amalgamated into wider U.S. society—it may have evolved more in the direction of the kind of existentialist spectrality that plays out in Northern Ireland. Where we have that border—of the reservation, of the partition—we do not have the borderlands as conceived. Like Virginia Woolf, Anzaldúa arrives at a place—conceptually, historically, culturally—at which she declares herself a citizen of the world: "As a *mestiza* I have no country" (102). Such a statement is, I argue, simply not utterable in Northern Ireland, where we have dual "counterstance[s]… locked in mortal combat, like the cop and the criminal, both are reduced to a common denominator of violence" (Anzaldúa 100). Anzaldúa's subject is, like Devlin's, "half dead," but hers is able to "cross over, pass over or go through the confines" (Anzaldúa 25). Devlin's is incapable of any such traveling or exodus. In her world, difference does not open up to or form the basis of cultural identity, but lives in abeyance and unsettled flux. As such, cultural performativity is largely foreclosed. Her plays and films express not a "third space"—constitutively between but occupiable in spite of this postcolonial "twoness" (Dubois 5)—but a no place in which the bouncing ball the subject is to follow moves back and forth through a variety of identifications, never settling anywhere, where there is no stable self and no stable, reliable other, indeed where self and other and difference are largely indistinct and profoundly amalgamated. Devlin's work reveals how Northern Irish identity is neither located in a generative in-between or a clear nationalism or transnationalism nor founded by a colonial frame. Rather, the characters in *Ourselves Alone* "inhabit an intervening space" (Bhabha 7) where they are "frequently *silenced*, either by being *shouted down*, *ignored* or *physically struck* *in the face*" (Roche 237, my italics). In "Naming the Names," the subject's location is symbolized through a "succession of slammed and locked doors" (Greenhalgh 166), and, in *The Long March*, through Helen's repeated placement before gates. Like a Greek goddess, the gateway—a transparent symbol of the meta-border—is her identifying symbol: in the film's final three sequences (39, 41 and 43), for example, Devlin's express direction is to place Helen "at the gate" (1986 154 - 55). But the gate is not a gateway for this character; rather it is an entrapment. The playwright deploys the symbol to convey incarceration, as in a critical scene when Helen dreams of being hunted down by an enemy and so runs in the direction of security gates only to find them locked and herself trapped (1986 130).

Notions such as Bhabha's third space of enunciation (37) and Anzaldúa's generative *mestiza* consciousness (*passim*) are only partially practicable for this or any partitioned location. When these theories of postcolonial liminality are made to overlie realities of Belfast life, we see that something is been lost in terms of encounters with literal material limits by way of forms of spatialized discipline, punishment and exclusion. While an important form of transference occurs between the material and immaterial, the geographical and conceptual borders, and even as all frontiers are indeed all "political" in the broad sense, they are not collapsible and do not necessarily function in the same way. The peculiarities of the local alter the experiences of postcoloniality, and partition is certainly one of those grounded factors. Whereas Bhabha foresees a transnational, postmodern utopia, and Anzaldúa a politics of location where "two or more cultures edge," "alien elements" co-exist and "people of different races occupy the same territory" (19), the "postcolonial burden" (Zamindar 3) of partition profoundly changes experiences of difference and liminality, revises and augments the borderlands of nation, the *mestiza* consciousnesses and "third spaces" of articulation and ontological constitution. Colonial subjectivization isn't merely discursive, it is constitutively spatial; and the experiences, ontologies and alterities in a *partitioned* postcoloniality are profoundly constituted and circumscribed in material ways. The double consciousness produced through encounters with the raced other is a historico-political node that has a materiality—or "geographicality"—as part of its character. But the spatiality of that experience in the constitution of subjects and their assimilation to the state apparatus is more pronounced in locations where nation-ness is defined by contested, fraught, and (still worse) new borders. Beyond questions of identity and cultural difference are problems of bordered, antagonistic space in which those differences play out.

The partition border interferes with the capacity for a third space of encounter to be generative. Beyond experiences of exoticization and the cultural insult of Irish Orientalism, while still part of the dynamic, subjects of partition dwell in a palimpsest involving Said's colonial discourse *and* a new partitionism whereby residents across the border are newly and necessarily othered (Said 1994 *passim*). Discourses of partitionist othering yield not the standard self-other binary but a far more complex matrix of past, present and future selves and others, differences and samenesses.[92] Rather than living out an Anzaldúean "border life," the Northern Irish subject is "fork-tongued" on Seamus Heaney's "border bit" (1975 52): trapped, silent, and ontologically dead, with no hope of a passage to some *frontera* or amalgamated dwelling place. Anzaldúa's "border tongue" is likewise "forked," but it is *not* "fork-tongued on [a] border bit" (Heaney 1975 52): her theorized subject "create[s] their own language" (77) and although it is a "*culturally* [crucifying]" "[tongue] of fire" (80 my italics), at the same time this language is "a *homeland* closer" than the geographical place (77 my italics) that "cross-pollinate[s] and [is] revitalized" (20). This is very specifically *not* what Heaney is saying about being Northern Irish; and neither is it what Devlin's work teaches us.

All this serves to disclose the irremediable link between state structure and lived, sectarian reality Cleary insists upon. To paraphrase that best-known line from Heidegger's "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" invoked by Bhabha: the bridge does *not* gather as a passage that crosses in every postcolonial, postmodern circumstance—not when the territorial meaning of the place mirrors the H-blocks of Long Kesh prison. Whether the location can cohere as initiator of any "presencing" depends upon the specific, local circumstances, its materiality and those who encounter it as either "locale" or dead zone or Kincaidian prison.[93] Although Heidegger's geo-ontology is employed as guide in Bhabha's enquiries, he nonetheless loses its vital spatial registers. The borders he thinks through are cultural and conceptual, like Dubois' color line; they mutually theorize a space of encounter between selves and others in which the subject sees herself as culturally distinguishable from an other, or, where some hybrid, clashing distinction or splitting is experienced within an individual ontology—"two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals" in a single body (Dubois 5). But, as Bhabha reminds us, for Heidegger, the possibility of a sustainable existence depends precisely and specifically on a conscious awareness and material sighting of literal frontiers that, once observed, function ontologically. This would be, he says, the geographical area between walls or lines, between the banks of a river, for example, or the mapped borders dividing nations, an area made visible and knowable by what connects the split terrain, a borderland congregating opposing terrains as a dwell-able "locale" (Heidegger 355). Bhabha translates this into a *sociological* alterity, as metaphor for cultural differences constituting the multicultural, postmodern, postcolonial condition. Indeed, the place in which this subject "dwells," "thinks" and therefore "is" (Heidegger *passim*) is, for him, for Anzaldúa and for Dubois a "mister in-between" of race, gender, ethnicity, religion and sexuality—that is to say, of *culture*—between colonizing and colonized, powerful and powerless. The borders forming that locale are inscriptions, scorings of *cultural* distinction as key ontological setting.

Whatever Northern Irish "in-between" may exist does not parallel this one. It is *not* based on a sense of "twoness" (Dubois 5) or the "double" consciousness of "*two* warring ideals" (Dubois 5 - 6) standing in binary opposition, but a complex of interpellating worlds. The subject is still confronted by cultural distinction, but the encounter and negotiation have been re-mapped. They face not only the sect line—encounters with members of the other sect—and the colonial line—meetings with the colonial or native other (not a race line in this situation)—but, the new (literal) "lines" demarcating the nation which alienate and distinguish them from the only claimable nation and geography, that confuse the ability to know the difference (at all) between a self and her other. Now, the color line of a constructed difference is bifurcated and forked, and the nation akin to Anzaldúa's borderlands at a *structural* level: the entire construct is fringed, comprised necessarily of the edges of a number of nations, each one othered by the next, the subject belonging to and exiled from each. For residents of Belfast, the problems of self and other are not simply effects of a power structure that defines them as marginal and invisible or dominant, that demeans and despises or embraces and assigns masses of unearned privilege. Rather, it is a phenomenon of carcerality through reification of borders and the segmentation and disciplining of domestic space. In situations of imposed segregation, the panoptically dispersed, internalization of discipline, punishment and control re-acquires a carcerality as the subject is surrounded by a force field of invisible walls controlling movement and place, whereby the world comes to be experienced as a vast meta-prison and Kincaidian "small place."[94]

The life of colonial power transmits through and *as* space. And this material aspect—an awareness of the important distinctions between conceptual and cultural borders versus those that are geographical and come about through "high" political process—often gets lost in postcolonial theorizations of subject and nation. The high political dispersion of bordered space, the peripheries of *geopolitically* mapped places, are critical planes for the post-partition subject who experiences multifarious delimitations of movement, travel, entry, the progress of time and a protracted crisis rooted in the question of where the nation begins and ends—what it is called, what is its history, who are its members—and residents encounter material barrings, as the problematic border is reified by means of passports, checkpoints or the walls partitioning places like Ireland, Palestine and Germany. These high political boundary lines participate in initiating the ideals at war within and materially shape ontology: a passport is *literally* necessary in response to such limits, and whether we are referring to apartheid South Africa or Jim Crow in the U.S., the ghettoization of European Jews during World War II or the plethora of boundary points encountered daily by Belfast and Gaza residents, witness the critical role they play in the ontological status of the subject. It is important, then, to unpack not just the ways geopolitics alters the life of the subject and the nation but to recognize, at the same time, that the condition is borne by a *specifically political*—rather than mostly cultural—irresolution. Subjects continuously encounter material, geographical delimitations that, in the most conflicted, fraught locations, corner them into a carceral, confined, Foucauldian "emplacement" (1986 22). And this is less about being constituted through "the articulation of cultural differences" (Bhabha 1) than it concerns occupying a "series, [tree] or [grid]" of linked nation-structures (Foucault 1986 23).

The postcolonial subject is fundamentally "unhomed," part of two or more cultures, at home in none of them. The *post-partition* postcolonial subject is *part* of none but tethered to many, beholden to distinct times, nations and histories, none of which is she capable of occupying. The world faced by this subject did not arise merely by way of a derisive, alienating, oppressive (Irish) Orientalism, in other words, but by means of spatial enactments of power designed to keep the subject manifestly “in place”: the life of hatred as it takes visual and spatial form. Space and time do not “cross to produce” (Bhabha 1) new, livable figures and identities in the North of Ireland. That figure is frozen, always already “settl[ed] into primordial polarities” established by partition, immovable feasts where this subject-in-mourning waits interminably for whatever is to come next. Problematically, Bhabha hails the recent history of Serbia in thinking through the location of the subject, but he casts that history in the frame of a “new internationalism” rather than parsing its particulars—including the partition designed to resolve the conflict there (5). Predicaments of the state compel the critic to ask: if we are to speak of any prevalent postcolonial ontology—hybridity, liminality, ambivalence, double consciousness, the borderland—as a space of “*being* between,” where is this location in the North of Ireland, and how is one to “be” in it? The concrete borderlands of Belfast—the “interface” or “no-go” areas joining, detaching and demarcating Protestant and Catholic neighborhoods—are the most contentious locations in the six counties (Cleary 97 - 119). Here, an identification and its opposite are not ambivalently hybrid: the territory itself is an intersection of nation-worlds and the subject partitioned confusingly between them. In such a political location, there can be no settling into the third spaces or borderlands created at these lines because the originating fissure rendered subjects on both sides of that periphery present and absent *as* subjects.[95]

And neither, as Bhabha theorizes, do residents in-dwell in these contact zones produced through colonial history or by means of simpler, untethered migrations where new cultural homelands are generated and livable identifications take shape.[96] Rather than functioning to produce a third space or new singular-though-culturally-diverse community, partition leaves subjects to search, perpetually, for a place to land, caught in *la frontera* between first *nations* then *cultures*. And all this comes together to constitute the subject—the spatial constructs by which her segregated state is manifest and made visible cannot be separated from her sense of existing—or not—in the world. The idea of settling into something new? How can this be possible when the conflict and the problem giving rise to it have not come to an end, when there has been no acceptance that they are finished? All of what defines the postcolonial condition, as understood, continues to be relevant except that the ground is unsettled and the quake unending. Irish writers, Beckett and Devlin chief among them, show and tell us that theirs is not a place where one *lives*, it is not a dwell-able terrain. There is no sustainable, livable place that is gotten to and the future does not spread out in a way mirroring the optimistic visions of Bhabha and Anzaldúa. Not only is "thinking" the future of community and self an extremely fraught notion, it is also quite plainly impossible to forge a new nation or fashion a sustainable self and new relation to and with the other(s). How is that possible when the other is the self—*not* in the manner of the liminality and ambivalence of postcoloniality, but the self in fact. This is not a sharing, it is the memory of a shared space which has died and of a mutuality rendered as sanctimonious alienation. The rupturing break of partition tears through the subject's capacity to retain any of the porous walls distinguishing the self from any of her others. She is located at that purgatorial, spectral site sketched with such prolixity and precision by Samuel Beckett—there she nostalgically and habitually remembers a suicide somehow survived: "Do you remember the day I threw myself into the Rhone?" (1982 58). And that is where she remains for as long as the partition does. This, Beckett well understood, as does Anne Devlin.

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Irish alienation was engineered by the forces of colonial dispossession, and the structural dominion of a partition with no term limit—that great immovable wound that, through colonial
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process, has left the island and its people interminably broken. One aspect of Anne Devlin's work that serves to clarify the distinctions between prevalent postcolonial theories of the subject and the lived subjectivity in Northern Ireland is the poetics of entrapment developed in a number of works: interrogatory, confined predicaments into which the subject is gradually or swiftly enclosed and out of which they cannot escape. These are spaces not of generative new metamorphoses but of death and dying, whether of the interrogated, the named or both, often leading to the strangulation of a key female figure. This is the most obvious design in "Naming the Names": the bookstore and the park, Finn's grandmother's home and the interrogation center all function as cages or traps. Each confinement is political and historical: the park and bookstore are spaces through which Finn, as an IRA operative, captures her victim; her grandmother's home becomes a burning trap in the mob violence of August '69; and, the interrogation center is a state institution where Finn is interned after her arrest. In *Ourselves Alone* Devlin uses the motif of incarceration again, especially in relation to Josie who, however much we may be seduced by Frieda, is really the "center" of this play. Ironically, we witness the spectacle of Josie's incarceration as the result of her pregnancy. As Greenhalgh suggests, the narrative "offers [Josie] only two ways out: exile or refuge in motherhood" (166). It is important to remember that the exilic motherhood she is drawn into is more captivity than refuge, a kind of "death": near the play's close her father, Malachy, claims both her child as *his* progeny and Josie herself as a sort of "daughter-wife." Referring to her unborn child, this father tells Josie's brother, "I'm the father here, son!" as he puts his arm around Josie and informs the family, this is "[His] baby now. (Pause while he looks around.) Josie's going to live with me from now on. Isn't that right, love?" (1986 88). She submits to her father's will, uttering only a Molly Bloom-inflected, "Yes," and offering no reply at all when Donna calls to her as Malachy leads her away (Ibid).

It would seem that even her voice, clear and vibrant up until now, was taken. Josie's is a weirdly incestuous fall from the grace of active, vital, political life into a deathly, domesticated and twistedly "Oedipalesque" motherhood. She declares her independence from the IRA only to find herself, within the span of a few minutes of dramatic time, surrounded by her father's body and imprisoned within the safe-seeming domesticity he imposes on her and her unborn child. Reminiscent of the moment in *After Easter* when Greta hears the laughter of her baby from afar, Josie had earlier declared, "I'm tired. Tired of this endless night watch. I've been manning the barricades since sixty-nine. I'd like to stop for a while, look around me, plant a garden, listen for other sounds; the breathing of a child somewhere outside Andersonstown" (1986 77). Josie lives this "life" and becomes this "self" for precisely eight pages of text: the small space in which she genuinely exists is abruptly foreclosed when Malachy "*hammer[s] at the door,*" enters Scene Nine and assumes control of her life and the life of the child she carries (85).

That the collapse of the political in the life and identity of the individual is so fundamental to literary production of the North dramatically clarifies our understanding of Northern Irish subjectivity. Devlin's is a literary dramatic place that does not deny the symbiotic nature of state structure and subject formation and where we see that self-contradiction is not just a random cultural "fact" but arises through political history. For her, as against other postcolonial or Irish writers, the self- and state-estrangement dramatized are temporary conditions to be transcended or eradicated at some future time. Devlin foregrounds the contradictoriness that defines national identity in order to *reject* it. Undoubtedly this is something the author "waits" and hopes for, its absence something she laments. Until then, there can be no third space because there is no imaginable future. We recognize these precise tensions all through Devlin's work: a pull between the desire to be home and the urge to escape the small place. A constitutive fact of life in zones of conflict is that the location is inextricably stitched through the fabric of the self and cannot be left behind; such a departure is experienced as a failure or betrayal. And thus, even as characters experience the urge to flee, there is an equally strong desire to return or to remain in place. Devlin's characters often require a London exile much like Devlin's own—a gendered Joycean escape necessary for purposes of survival of the self. Her lead females either leave Northern Ireland as part of the narrative (Frieda and Helen and Greta of *After Easter*) or left prior to the time of the play (Greta and the two Helens). But though characters leave, they must return. In *After Easter*, home is "the shadowy past that gave birth to, and haunts, the present" (Cousin 187 – 88). This creates a situation in which the spectral presence of the *nation* means that there is no hope of absolute exile: Helen of *The Long March* and Greta and Helen of *After Easter must* return to Belfast in order to go on with their lives—in Greta's case, so as to be resurrected.

Devlin searches but does not find *la frontera* as theorized, at least not in terms of its productive potential. Indeed, in some way with Bhabha, Devlin does "[conceptualize] an *inter*national culture" (38), but she leaves the character "hanging," as it were, in a space of *discontented* self-conflict as opposed to one of synergy or locatedness. Aidan Arrowsmith makes this point, too: "Greta's position of marginalization, insignificance and instability generates a clearly felt need for a new sense of identity and rootedness" (139). Her progression out of "rootedness" and into synergy is foreclosed at the point of temporality, as Bhabha theorizes: "Such assignations of social differences… find their agency in a form of the 'future' where the past is not originary, where the present is not simply transitory. It is… an interstitial future, that emerges *in-between* the claims of the past and the needs of the present" (219). The Northern Irish subject does not find agency in this way because there *is* no form of a future where the originating past can be laid aside in favor of more contemporary needs. There is, in a word, *waiting*, and that means Devlin's work enacts, not hybridity proper, but a deep-seated discontented internal contradiction. Regarding *After Easter*, Devlin's most ambivalent play, Arrowsmith notes how "rather than 'authentic' nationalist Irishness, Greta feels that she has 'lots of meanings'" while, at the same time, "the anti-essentialist notion that there can be *no* meanings" is not tenable for her or for this play (139). According to the playwright, Greta's life must "become something more truthful than merely an echo of someone else's tongue" (quoted in Cousin 200). In other words, she must find her own voice and place and this play is not going to signal satisfaction through the liminal or the echo or the copy or any other postcolonial between. And, that choice is neither unimportant nor is it aesthetically, politically bankrupt.

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~**Part III:** *Self-contradiction & Spectrality:"thou com'st in such a questionable shape"*

As established, primary lines of postcolonial thought require reconsideration in terms of partition, in a large sense, and Ireland more specifically. They lose the "Samuel Beckett" factor so important to understanding postcolonial Ireland and post-partition nationhood: an awareness of "the borderlines of the 'present'," of "postmodernism, postcolonialism, postfeminism" (Bhabha 5 – 6) as "lingering dissolution[s]" (Kiberd 532) rather than spaces of (re)birth and regeneration. Our traditional notion of a postcolonial ontology is not sufficient, as such, to explain the Northern Irish subject and the literature representing that figure. We cannot overlay standard postcolonial ontologies onto these narratives and characters in part because what she outlines is the minute, fraught space in which the constitution of identity is possible. That tiny interval: the eight page hiatus during which Josie is "alive"—self-determining, aware of who she is and how her future will be shaped—is the space of being for the subject. And, as we see, it is short-lived indeed. The heavy presence of death and deathliness in the narratives, always a
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presence in Irish letters, is, in this *oeuvre* an obsession, the basis upon which the representation of place and subject rests. Even if Cleary's wished-for transformation of the state has proved impossible for Devlin, her work accomplishes something else important to this historico-political context: the trope of self-contradiction is, we come to see, a modality for representing the constitutive incongruity in the partitioned North and ontological deathliness that as a result defines the state. The conundrum of being Northern Irish observable across Devlin's oeuvre takes shape as a generalized spectrality seen in a deathliness that lingers, a dissolution without end, a repeated suicide repeatedly survived, a political location in which the specter haunting the subject is the subject herself.

This, the "meaning" of Northern Irishness, is one of the critical implications of Samuel Beckett's oeuvre and chief insight of numerous representations of the Troubles. Devlin's plays, stories and screenplays develop an exclusively *Northern Irish* Irishness in which "being" is strangely spectral and the nation a polity of "ghosts." This author employs tropes of spatial and ontological compression to signify the condition of the subject of a partitionist state: hers are places of unconditional convolution marked ontologically both by (postcolonial) *self*-contradiction and -estrangement (otherwise known as ambivalence) and, in a politico-historical frame, by state-contradiction and -estrangement (Cleary 11). Her work reveals how the disjunctions defining the small place make it impossible for citizens to construct stable identities. If any sense of self that begins to cohere disappears as quickly as it forms, the subject is spectral: not altogether existing, not exactly obliterated, not able, either, to move out of that limbo into a generative liminal space that holds the promise of new, postmodern, *mestiza* consciousnesses, ontologies and selves. This spectral condition cannot be transcended and in fact defines the ontology: the subject is located in a nation-state and "state" of limbo from which no exile or freedom is imaginable, attainable or constructible. They cannot, in other words, incarnate. Not at least in any sustained way. The metaphors are spectral because the liminal space of partition is more trap than gateway. Whatever Being is possible for citizen-subjects is so fragile and fleeting as to be extinguished before a single *atemwende*[97] or iamb is completed. Ontologically, they “live” and “die” and die and live continuously. Ambivalence and rupture in the state mean that the articulated subject is a self-contradictory ghost in exile. The specter is a dead figure who lingers in the world of the living and refuses to fully “dissolve.”

Devlin’s subject dwells at the surreal border between death and life, between being and non-being, *in perpetuum* where she waits for the war to end, for the imagined, imaginary nation[98] to come to life, for the moment at which she can declare herself whole and “real.” Thus, we recognize how and why Devlin’s spectral subject cannot precisely “exist,” cannot utter Padraig Pearse’s nationalist pronouncement (“*Mise Éire*”) or enact his revolt. At all her climactic moments, Anne Devlin takes the narrative to the border between life and death. The dead come to dramatic life and stand before us in living color within the space of the stage or the shot—on stage, on screen and on the page. Registered in each instance through the female subject, this ontological ghostliness derives through irresolvable contradictions within the structure of the state and the “state” of Northern Irish politics. Often we see her characters dramatically reduced to the status of a haunting apparition such that, even as they continue to live and breathe, “the life” has been “knocked out” of them. Devlin’s female figures are constituted by this spectrality, including and especially Finn, Helen (of *The Long March*), Josie and Greta. Greta is a surreal, Beckettian dead-though-living figure who magnetically calls the specter forth—the banshee, the voices of the dead. Ontological attenuation is conveyed in *After Easter* also by means of numerous incidents in which men strangle women as the contradictory nature of national identity is shown to choke any possibility of being. Moments of strangulation, the border symbolism of doors, gates and other partitions, serve to physicalize, reify and elaborate the problem of partitionist spectrality. In this way, the subject waits in her small place, her nation of “ghosts,” in the muddle and limbo political history has made—trapped, strangled and eventually “dead.”

Indeed, the notion of spectrality is the best way to conceive of the spaces of imagination, exploration and “thought” in this play. All ontological questions are expressed through the frame of death. Early we learn that Aoife lives in “Toomebridge” (1994 10) and when Helen’s boss tells her “slow down – your life will be there tomorrow,” she says she is “afraid it won’t” (15). Devlin constructs a clear dead zone around Greta from the first word of *After Easter*. She characterizes her most complex, memorable protagonist, Greta Cook, as a member *of* the dead collective even as this character lives. When the play opens, she is situated much like Finn in the scenes reviewed above: Greta has placed herself in the middle of the street with a very large bus heading directly for her. Her attempted suicide lands her in a psychiatric hospital where, as with Günter Grass’s *The Tin Drum*, we first meet this protagonist. Greta endures not one but several deaths. And as the play proceeds, we see that these multiple deaths, ironically, often bring her back to life. They are unlike Finn’s because Greta’s are mystical and otherworldly: Finn risks her life in a literal sense whereas Greta insists she has truly died and been reborn, more than once in a single lifetime that has, after all, not ended. Not only is she suicidal, but, through these metamorphoses, we see that Greta is in fact “dead.” Rather than being *haunted* by them, she thinks of herself *as* a ghost. When Aoife suggests she “threw herself away,” Greta says no, that she “had no self to throw away” (21). Later, Greta remarks that she is “not afraid of death... We have been companions for years. It’s the living who have given me most trouble” (36). While Helen insists that her sister is “haunted,” Greta says of herself that, no, she is in fact dead (16).

The trope of spectrality also finds expression by means of the particular ways characters come to be politicized. A number of works feature ghostly killers who destroy and are (thereby) destroyed. *The Long March* and “Naming the Names” offer female protagonists who find themselves in the position of having to negotiate the spectrum of Northern Irish politics, including the paramilitarism. The former work centers on Helen, who, like Greta Cook, has returned to Belfast from a London exile to find that she must face up to the political past. At the film’s close, Helen stands at a window peering up at the moon, remembering that what had turned her IRA lover into a killer was seeing his uncle murdered amid the throes of political conflict: “Colm was ten when the troubles started. He stood there looking at his uncle lying in the road. He didn’t know what it was about, but he knew he was in” (1986 154). What transforms Colm into a murderer is his contact with the dead, a “border” situation in which he stands at the juncture of mutually exclusive worlds not knowing quite what he sees but certain about who and what he will become. Residents of war zones frequently find themselves trapped in this kind of crisis: the (often unwitting) situation of witness that leads unavoidably to their politicization and involvement. The predicament is seen in “Naming the Names” where the trigger prompting Finn’s metamorphosis, from innocent young woman to “murderer” and IRA volunteer, is that she is witness to political violence which has tragic personal consequences. She watches her beloved grandmother die after being burnt out of her home in the violence against Catholics of August ‘69 (111 – 114). Thinking both of that traumatic time and the murder Finn is accomplice to, she reflects: “He [her victim] was my last link with life” (106). Through violence, in other words, she “dies” together with her victim, and what becomes clear is that being the necessarily politicized Northern Irish citizen means being a “killer” of self and other.

The effects of partition on the subject, the lived reality that "being" Northern Irish is too erratic to earn the label, are vividly conveyed in Devlin's use of borders in her work, particularly the intersection of the worlds of the dead and the living. Given the pervasiveness of actual death and dying in Belfast, it is no surprise that she turns to the border. The presence of scrims dividing these worlds creates an aura of deathliness in her writing. In *To Ireland, I,* Paul Muldoon locates this borderline in a figure from Irish mythology. He writes: "…the 'fairy' or 'gentle' folk… are made invisible by virtue of the *féth fiada*…[the] magic mist or veil, a kind of world-scrim, that hangs about them… (7). The literary device Muldoon refers to is a play on the actual "scrim" used in the theatre. He says that strategies have been "devised by a range of Irish writers for dealing with the ideas of liminality and narthecality that are central…to the Irish experience" including this "scrim," which Muldoon explains is visible in the "veerings from, over and back along a line, the notions of di-, trans-, and regression" seen in the literature of Ireland (5).

The poet assigns a far-reaching significance to the metaphor, emphasizing that both the *féth fiada* and the sliding between the worlds it borders are one of the most common motifs in Irish literature (7). In literature of the Troubles, Muldoon's observations are exactly right: the "*féth fiada,*" with its obvious partitionist implications, maintains a clear presence. This bordered spectrality is seen in the conspicuous ambivalence around space and occupancy in the work. Cousin discusses the set design of *After Easter* in this way, saying it

> …consisted of images partly suggestive of containment—doors, windows, cupboards, a fence, the wall of a bridge—[but] paradoxically revealed the insubstantiality of barriers and boundaries. Doors, after all, open as well as close. Windows are barriers…but their function is to let in light. …Boundaries …offer little protection against anyone determined to cross them. …This insubstantiality

> of apparent boundaries is an extension of Greta's own permeability, her availability to other time-spaces and possibilities. (189 - 90)

Whereas Cousin sees this mutability as a postcolonial breakdown of borders and boundaries, and Delgado as an adaptation of dramatic form, I view it as the adoption of a trope familiar from Irish literature. The fluidity in the set is equally present in the script: as Elish tells Greta, "Nothing stands alone" (1994 35). This description of Cristina Reid's surreal narrative structures is readily applicable to Devlin's: "merging past and present, dreams and memories, oral traditions and visual metaphors. Multiple tales are told in plays whose fluid structures make a healthy move away from the conventions of the classic realist" play (Delgado xvi – xvii).

Indeed, Devlin employs the strategy consistently. In every major work there is at least one scene, sometimes two or three, located at the scrim between the worlds of the living and the dead. Often such scenes occur as part of a dream and, in most, the character is drawn, through a dialectical struggle, over to one world, or "side," or the other. In performing these fights, Devlin addresses her audience in the spirit by which Josie speaks to her lover in *Ourselves Alone*: "I'm trying to tell you why – *about the first few moments when I took the wrong way*" (1986 78, my emphasis). Through these symbolic wars, Devlin searches but does not find a place for dwelling, a Heideggerian locale. Posing the query again and again, her characters fight for their conceptual lives, and either win or lose, usually the latter. Finn, Josie Helen and Greta are all found in bordered battles, these scrimmed life-and-death struggles, symbolizing the contest for power that has long defined Devlin's world. A resonant example is in the most significant scene in *The Long March* in which Helen has a nightmare about being pursued by "uniformed shadowy figures in black" from whom she runs (130). She is hunted by an enemy that will presumably force her to name names. In the dream, she runs toward security gates she does not know are locked, while her lover, to whom she speaks *through* these gates, is “unable to see or hear her” (Ibid). Devlin’s direction for the shot reads: Helen’s “terror and an atmosphere of trapped inevitability is essential” (Ibid). As she stands at this border, the character knows she is about to die; even though her lover stands within reach, he is deaf and blind to her presence.

Likewise, in Devlin’s body play, *Ourselves Alone,* Josie herself functions as this scrim. She recalls being drawn over to the other world when, during her first lesson in militancy and murder, she plants a bomb that turns out to be impotent (1986 63). Her teacher and soon-to-be lover, Cathal O’Donnell, provides this lesson, during which his pregnant wife passes them on the sidewalk. Devlin writes: “She was pushing a pram; a pregnant woman… ‘It’s my wife,’ he said. Safe [Josie thinks to herself]. I’m safe from him” (64). Josie’s fall to the other side occurs not in a dream but in realist mode.[11] During this lesson, O’Donnell reaches out his hand as if to pull Josie *through* the scrim: “…minutes later I slipped, slid, down the wet bank after him and came to a halt. ‘I can’t get down,’ I said. And he reached out his hand… I wasn’t safe. I was lost” (Ibid). Metaphorically, she slides not only into the murderousness of paramilitancy but also into infidelity. Her hand is clasped and pulled by O’Donnell, yet another of Devlin’s men who stand in for the nation. Later, at the play’s close, Josie rejects both this infidelity and her role as militant, saying “I’ve lost the killing instinct. Now I tend to think the crushing of a foetus is a tragedy” (63). Her body becomes instead the locus of a life-giving force as she is pregnant for the first time; now, the life-giving betrayed woman is Josie herself. Bur, of course, that “life force” is extinguished before it ever has a chance to incarnate.

In another dramatic work, Devlin employs the world-scrim rather differently. It is the scene from *After Easter* during which Greta prepares her father’s body for burial, surely one of the most memorable scenes in the *oeuvre*. Greta and Helen return from London after receiving news that he has died. While washing his dead body, Greta talks to her father: "Funny how people who leave their own country stop living, in some part of themselves…" (1994 63). As if summoned back to life at the speaking aloud of Greta's living death, the next stage direction reads: "*Michael sits up in his coffin, he rubs his eyes*" (Ibid). The irony of her father's resurrection is that shortly (in one of several strangulations of women by men in this play) this fatherly apparition will grab the suicidal, "dead" Greta by the throat as if to draw her over in to death with him (70). As we see, she must "let her father go. Otherwise she will be dragged into the grave" too (Cousin 189). Clearly this moment allegorizes Northern Irish nationalization, with her father as the nation and Greta as "every-subject." Thereafter, in the play's most symbolic space, Greta, her mother and siblings hide under the table, holding their dead father's body in order to avoid the gunshots being fired in the street. It is as if the entire family is about to expire right along with the beloved patriarch (73 – 74). Michael symbolizes both the partitioned nation-state that threatens to pull Greta in and engulf her and, here, the general condition of the nation-state, the strange double death of a nation through which we recognize the impossibility of *being* Northern Irish, symbolized by a father's body and the threat of death looming beyond the walls of the home. Much like *Endgame*, reflected in these dramatic scrimmed incidents is a whole people existing within the space of a dead house, the frightened prisoners of a broken anti-nation.

Most of these life-and-death border wars are developed using one of several specifically Irish muses. Not only does Devlin makes use of the better known figure of the *bean sidhe,* the banshee or "fairy woman" and prophet of death, she also develops contemporary versions of the *spéirbhean* and the *Shan Van Vocht*. Figures fitting these designs play important roles in *Ourselves Alone, A Woman Calling,* "Naming the Names" and *After Easter,* where versions of all three appear to Greta at different points. As in the mythological stories, these otherworldly females are embodiments of the nation. The *spéirbhean* (pronounced “spare-van” and meaning “beautiful woman”) is from the tradition of *aisling* poetry which emerged in eighteenth-century Ireland. The *spéirbhean* is a female personification of Ireland that appears to the sleeping poet in a dream. Devlin remakes this figure in a feminist frame, as a number of Irish women writers do, including McGuckian. Like the spéirbhean, the *Shan Van Vocht* also comes from Irish lore. The Irish term means “poor old woman,” and she too is a metonym of nation. Devlin’s *spéirbhean* takes a number of shapes, notably the figure that pulls Finn over to the “dark” side. In “Naming the Names,” Finn’s confrontation at the scrim is highly surreal. Like Helen’s, it occurs in a dreamscape: Finn has a nightmare featuring an old woman, a kind of *Shan Van Vocht,* who calls to her with hands outstretched. Minutes later, Finn recognizes this woman as her grandmother: “…the old woman came towards me again. It was my grandmother. She was walking. I didn’t recognize her the first time – she had been in a wheelchair all her life” (116). This woman grabs Finn’s hands and pulls her from the bed, in response to which she says, “She had very strong hands, like a man’s, and she pulled and pulled and I struggled to release my hands… But she would not let me go” (1988 115). This elderly woman has the oddly surreal strength of a man, that is, the resilient forceful hand of the nation. Since she died in the political violence, Finn’s grandmother is even more patently a figure for the nation. At first, Finn tells her lover, “Whatever happens don’t let go of my hand,” whereas, after recognizing the old woman as her grandmother, when the struggle begins again, she instead tells him: “Let go of me!” (Ibid). Here, Finn is consumed symbolically by the “nation,” that is, by the Republican cause.

Devlin’s critique of partition and the nation-state is often achieved through these dreamy, frightening, spectral figures. Often transgendered or transsexual, they are placed in this border location as a kind of Satan in the garden, like Donna’s devil in *After Easter* (53 – 57): to provoke and carry out the struggle with spectrality—will the character die, remain dead, live or be reborn? That question often depends on the presence of one of the Irish mythological figures discussed. It is in this way that we realize the bordered tugs-of-war at the scrim are symbolic fights with nation, home and national identity. While Cousin suggests that the figure struggled *against* represents "the dark hidden aspects of Greta's past… [which], along with their dying father, called [her] home" (196), it is equally the nation interpellating her, hailing the character back to Belfast, forbidding the desired exile and escape. Devlin's "world wars" function as allegories for the nation. Though she represents the conflict newly each time, these scrimmed altercations are undoubtedly metaphors for the internalization of conflict. They almost always center on the kinds of choices Northern Irish citizens are faced with every day. And these questions are all spectral: will you be a killer or a proponent of sectarianism and "die"? Will you do what Greta does—transfer "'communion' from the divided and divisive world of the churches into the community" (Cousin 193) in an attempt to bring the people of "rival" churches together—and thus "live"? Will you destroy or build? Will you name names and "die" for having done so or hold your silence, as Finn does, and still "die" as a result of *that* choice?

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~**Part IV:** *Derrida, Devlin & the Dead: "for murder, though it have no tongue, will speak"*

One primary way we see Northern Irishness, and this partitionist postcoloniality I theorize, scored is in Anne Devlin's search for understanding and articulation of her Northern Irish life experience by means of McGuckian's "Moon Script": "…a border searching night's inner vision / for ghost words after trees fall" (McGuckian 2004 68). Devlin is searching for Joyce's "the dead"; McGuckian is as well. They want to talk with them, hear them sing "Carrickfergus" and, in the cacophony, grasp the Irish nation and the Irishness taken from them,
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partitioned into nothingness. Greta, of *After Easter*, is her primary medium in this regard. Through this character, the endeavor to enact and dream a dialogue with the dead—a long-standing Irish goal—is staged. For Devlin and McGuckian this is, however, a far more intense, far more frequent, far more fraught encounter; indeed, it is the core and sinew of both women's oeuvres. Such a dialogue proceeds as questioning, suggestion, gesture; its questions and answers dwell on the living side of the scrim dividing author from object: the Irish specter. Where does the dream of a dialogue with the dead lead—metaphysically, historiographically, ontologically? Perhaps it is to that which we do not know, cannot surmise, do not hold—the vanishing point of thought. We reach what is silent and silenced, what has been made impossible in the present, in the past, through history, what is absent and lost, irretrievable. To the unknown of history, of our selves and our nations. To the dead as unconscious of the living, of the present and thus of what is absent and unrealizable (living finally, being finally) now. And thus to the concomitant question of justice—*the* concern of Western theatre.

In those dreamed questions we encounter a perfect storm of critical inquiries. Homi Bhabha reminds us that "it is the dialectical hinge between the birth and death of the subject" that must be interrogated by the postcolonial critic (64), and this has, I think, never been more relevant than in the Northern Irish context. In Devlin's work we witness not the intertextual haunting and repetition theorized by Marvin Carlson, in the theater (*passim*), but the "spectralization" of Jacques Derrida (1994 158). Even as her conception of Northern Irishness may not align precisely with theories of postcolonial identity, it clearly does intersect some of Derrida's concerns. Correspondences between these writers ideas are profound: they chart matching movements outlining spaces of spectrality, "dead zones" where, in spite of deathliness, a desperate struggle for life ensues. Both deliberate the question of how to function as a society by giving speech back to the ghost; both look for "resurrections" and seem to indicate that learning to live is possible only by coming to terms with the specter haunting the nation; both imply, paradoxically, that it is in confronting death that life becomes livable, mutually espousing the need for communion with the dead as a primary condition of living and being. In *Specters of Marx,* Derrida develops a metaphysics of the specter that begins with a question central for Devlin's work: "how to learn to live with ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, or the companionship… of ghosts" (Derrida xviii). Derrida answers this question in a way that would not surprise Devlin: he says that it is in attempting to engage a dialogue with the dead that this all-important epistemology coheres. Were we able to learn to listen to the dead, we might finally discover how to live as nations, or in what nation forms, if any, we arrive at a truly just society. The time and space of "learning to live" (xvi), he says, is accomplished "from the other at the edge of life" (xviii): to know life requires knowing death, to live, in Beckett's words, "astride of a grave" (1982 103) and sense oneself part of Joyce's "The Dead."

Importantly, like dreaming, the "time" of Derrida's meeting place is the time of Devlin's nation: a time "without tutelary present" (xviii), a time of *waiting*, a "no place" where, in Ireland, the pre-partition arrangements "hover" like the dark figure by the bed and former collectivities (regarded as "authentic") "haunt" post-partition nation forms. It is the temporal "structure of a disappearing apparition" (Derrida 1994 125). This is something Devlin has always understood; and, she has been saying it, though differently, since 1981 and the publication of her first book, *The Way Paver*. Primarily through the modality of dramatic performance, Devlin's narratives comprise a true "thinking," in the philosopher's sense, of the problem of Northern Irish identity. The space of thought sketched by Devlin is one of self-contradiction in a small place. Of course, the very idea of compressed oppositionality, or *différance,* is always already deconstructive: a philosophy of the space and time of binary opposition will be necessarily *small.* As the philosopher says, “Between the two beliefs, as always, the way remains narrow” (1994 221). In Devlin we feel the aura of the dead and are prompted to ask: What would we know had the dead not been lost, were they, like Greta’s father, like Finn’s grandmother, to return from the other side of the scrim and speak? Derrida reminds us that “the specter first of all sees us. From the other side of the eye… it looks at us even before we see it or even before we see period. We feel ourselves observed, sometimes under surveillance by it…” (125). Devlin explains the importance of dreams to her work in precisely this vein: “If you had grown up with that sense of watching your tongue in any situation…, if you feel under public surveillance and you want to keep some space where… you are not being scrutinized…, then the area that would be prolific in your mind is going to be dreams... What I feel is that dreams are the most free form of imaginative work… [There] I am not under surveillance. I am not under scrutiny. There is no censorship. It is the free zone…” (Cerquoni 111 – 12). She stages again and again characters’ efforts to engage the spectral observer, “that dark figure which hovered about the edge of [the] cot…” in order so that they can “live” (Devlin 1986 78). Not only is this ghost perched at the edge of the bed but also on the border of the subject’s strangely segregated, boundary-laden world.

Irish history, Northern Irish sectarianism or nationalism or loyalism, political violence, the memory of associated losses? Whatever that lurking presence signifies, it is also always the nation orbiting Devlin’s character, the specter haunting the nation.[99] In what remains for me Devlin’s most remarkably insightful work, “Naming the Names,” the dead zone Derrida theorizes is vividly figured. This story is the confessional narrative of Finn MacCool, an active member of the IRA whose job it is to lure the organization’s enemies to their deaths by using her sexuality. But that the story is confessional—that Finn is “involved”—these things are not known until the close, and indeed their disclosures are shocking. Earlier, Finn told of the events of August 14, 1969, when mob violence broke out in Belfast resulting in a number of Catholic families being burnt out of their homes, one casualty being her wheelchair-bound grandmother. She recalls standing on Balaclava Street in the chaos, fires and police turrets and gunfire all around: "Somebody shouted: 'The gun turrets are pointed towards us!' And everybody ran back. I didn't. I was left standing in the middle of the street, when a policeman, standing in a doorway, called to me: 'Get back! Get out of here before you get hurt'" (111). She wasn't "left" standing; Finn chose to remain there. Finally, however, she does attempt fleeing the danger, only moments later to find herself back in the same near-death situation on Conway Street: "A woman called to me from an upstairs window: 'Get out of the mouth of the street.' … I shouted: 'But the people! The people in the houses!' A man ran out and dragged me into a doorway… Then we both ran down to the bottom of Balaclava Street and turned the corner onto Raglan Street. If he hadn't been holding me by the arm then that was the moment when I would have run back up towards the fires" (112). That was the moment Finn would have given herself up for dead. The girl was "looking for her granny" of course, but what is important here is how Devlin keeps placing the character, not only in a variety of scrims—the "middle" and "mouth" of the street, multiple doorways, the streets themselves which are carefully marked by the author (and they are actual street names, as are all those named in this story)—but in such a way that Greta has chosen to put her life in danger and becomes suicidal (112). The other characters who call out to her remind the reader that she is about to die. That in each of these moments everyone runs away except Finn, that she didn't run back into the fire only because a stranger was holding onto her—these details illustrate the character's choices to let go of life and join ranks of "the dead."

Scenes like this, in which primary characters loiter by choice at death's door, are found across Devlin's work. In this way, she continually asks: How to be truly alive, how to emerge from the on-again, off-again existence her partitioned characters endure, how to exist in time—remember a national past, exist in a national present and imagine a national future? To answer the question, she incessantly turns to Joyce's dead collective. Derrida's reflections call us to consider whether the structure of the state, as critiqued by Cleary and Devlin, might be a location in which living and being are finally realizable precisely because it *is* a place of death. In *After Easter,* home is "the shadowy past that gave birth to, and haunts, the present" (Cousin, 187 – 88). In other words, the spectral nation means that there is no hope for consolidation of the post-partition nations, and no hope of absolute exile: Helen of *The Long March* and Greta and Helen of *After Easter* must return to Belfast in order to go on with their lives—in Greta's case, in order to be resurrected. As discussed in Chapter One, a constitutive fact of life in zones of conflict is that the location is inextricably stitched through the fabric of the self and cannot be left behind; such a departure is experienced as failure, betrayal or death. And thus, even as Devlin's characters experience an urge to flee, there is an equally strong, simultaneous desire to return. Thus, we recognize not only the permeability of borderlines in her work but also the tension between the desire to be home and the urge to escape that small place. Devlin's characters often require a London exile much like Devlin's own—a gendered Joycean escape necessary for purposes of survival of the self. Her lead females either leave Northern Ireland as part of the narrative (Frieda and Helen and Greta of *After Easter*) or left prior to the time of the play (Greta and the two Helens). But though characters leave, they *must* return.

Strangely, it is this back and forth movement between going away from and returning home that makes Devlin's work truly deconstructive. Devlin's use of the world-scrim is one way she endeavors to make that reach Derrida says is so important: of listening to the dead, of indwelling, however possible, with specters. It is especially *After Easter* that prompts this inquiry. Devlin places Greta within the throes of Derrida's spectrality quite evidently: she "traverses spirit worlds where death and birth co-exist" (Cousin 190) and over the course of the play demonstrates how "death" is necessary in order for there to be anything like "life" in Northern Ireland. Greta is undoubtedly the other on the verge of death, and Devlin is conscious of this fact. In a program note to *After Easter* she states: "…while traveling resolutely away from Easter 1916, and the traditional routes of that familiar dark story, …Greta finds herself confronting the identity that she had willfully excluded for so long. In order to survive this crisis, *Greta allows the ghosts to call her home*" (quoted in Arrowsmith 140, my italics). Devlin's women are always "the other at the edge of life" (Derrida 1994 xviii). For her, the ghost is Greta, a character placed dramatically before us in order that viewers will contemplate her, commune with her, "converse" with her, think with her from the border location she occupies—between death and life as between various "Irelands"—since learning to live truly and fully requires knowing the dead—that is to say, knowing "Greta"—in the most real way possible. *Specters of Marx* is likewise about allowing the ghosts to call one home: Derrida says, learning to live means "learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let them speak or how to give them back speech" (221).

Although *Ourselves Alone* has received greater critical attention, in my view *After Easter* is Anne Devlin's truly exemplary work. Her use of the spectral scrim finds its most operative expression here, the play in which her poetic of internal contradiction is fully realized. While Cousin suggests that she displays "the potential self-destructiveness of over-identification with the dead" (189), actually, her deep connection with death and dying is precisely what Devlin desires for her. The crucial difference between *After Easter* and all of Devlin's other texts is that the protagonist's status as a ghost isn't implied, as in "Naming the Names," but is explicit—the central paradox and problem of the play. We see Josie "die" in *Ourselves Alone,* we witness Finn's downfall in "Naming the Names," we recognize the trope in every work. But it is in *After Easter* that Devlin tells viewers directly and dramatically, and in true Beckettian style: *even as she stands before you, Greta is not alive.* We must believe that she is dead just as oddly as we must believe that we hear Irish being spoken in viewing Brian Friel's *Translations* when it is in fact English we hear. This fact of Greta Cook's characterization is reinforced through multiple deaths and because the play opens in the aftermath of her attempted suicide. Just as Beckett so often desired, Devlin too hopes that viewers of the play will instantly recognize Greta as an embodied specter. The author needs her to be spectacular in order to be recognized at all, but, she also wants Greta to be seen by audiences as a ghost.

As we see, there are good reasons for the deathliness surrounding Greta: Devlin intends to reverse the silenced, stifled endings arrived at in earlier work. Here, for the first time, the struggle at the world-scrim gives way to the living rather than the dead, a closing movement that opposes those of "Naming the Names" and *Ourselves Alone,* where characters fall through scrims into forms of deathliness. And, as we see, ultimately, it is the various deaths to which Greta is brought that allow the character to find a place from which she can tell her "own story," which she does in the play's final scene (1994 79). As Cousin argues, *After Easter* constructs "a different way of responding to experience, a dance of alternative possibilities which offers… a potential escape route from a fixity of response. In her birth experience, when she obeyed the voice that told her to turn around, Greta was rescued from the blackness that threatened to engulf her and she floated instead towards the light-filled globe" (195). In this play, Devlin works through a complex, contradictory logic of living *cum* dying. The deathly impulse runs straight through the play but I think it is clear that this is a process of learning to *live* in a cold, "dead" place. *The Long March,* "Naming the Names," *Ourselves Alone,* or even a work of short fiction like "Passages" (adapted as the 1984 film, *A Woman Calling*), all seem to lament the contradictory spectrality of being Northern Irish in ways *After Easter* does not.

Indeed, the trajectory of the play moves from Greta's confinement in a mental institution and first monologue, through the death of Northern Irish subjectivity (in Greta's deaths and near-deaths), closing finally with her presumably "free" return home, her struggle at the scrim with Helen, and closing monologue as *seanachie.* Taken as a whole, Devlin's play asks, how might the Northern Irish subject, represented by Greta, be brought back to life? What is needed for her to come (back) to life? The author answers this question by staging multiple scrimmed struggles at the meeting place between contiguous worlds of life and death. And it is through this bordered grappling that Devlin is able to give Greta, her ghost, the voice through which to tell her final closing story (1994 79). Over the course of this play, Devlin enacts the movement she and Derrida mutually advocate: to arrive at a place where, rather than being silenced (as Josie is) or incarcerated (like Finn), speech is given back to the ghost: dramatically it is Greta who speaks the final scene, symbolically she is the stag that metamorphoses into human form, from non-speaking and "cold" to speaking and "warm."

A translation and rewrite of the "my story" thread from Beckett's *Endgame*, the profoundly reflective closing of *After Easter* is reached by way of two paired scrimmed confrontations that close the play. The first is a realist rendition, in Scene Seven; the second is Scene Eight, a narrative *aisling* ("dream-vision"), a surreal monologue, and a mythological re-telling or "double" of Scene Seven. The second to last scene is, in my view, the final segment of the action "proper," with Scene Eight functioning as a kind of coda. In Scene Seven, set at Westminster Bridge in London where Greta and Helen have come to spread their father's ashes together, Greta comes close to suicide one last time. In a kind of drunken reverie, she climbs to the top of the bridge and tosses the ashes into the Thames while reciting Wordsworth (75). Both nations are "cremated" in this burial ceremony, which is nationalized and politicized through a variety of references. We see the allegory take even fuller shape when a British policeman on horseback—symbol of patriarchal and colonial power—passes by. He notices Greta as she yells "Wordsworth, your country needs you!" and shouts up to her, "Don't jump, will you?" (76). Once more Greta stands in the scrim between this world and the next, but of course it is highly ironic that an agent of the colonial state is the one who urges her not to kill herself even as she speaks deliriously of the duty of a national subject. Helen gets rid of the policeman only then to realize that her sister is considering jumping. Greta shrieks a series of statements about the impossibility of living: "I can't live without my children. And I can't live with George [her husband]. And I can't live here any longer and I can't – I can't–" (Ibid). Helen tells her twice to get down until she finally "*grabs [Greta's] hand and holds on,*" telling her sister to either come down or take her into the river with her.

In this re-enactment of the moment, from Scene Six, when Greta's dead father attempts bringing her into death with him, Helen wisely reminds Greta of that, saying, "Let him go. Our father is trying to drag you into that river with him" (Ibid). "Our father" is of course the primary figure of the nation in this play. Greta does decide to live, to return to her husband and child. Importantly, though, that choice depended upon Helen, who pulls her through the scrim—like Josie's O'Donnell and her father, and like Finn's grandmother or the officials who incarcerate her. The difference here, and it is a meaningful one, is that Greta's struggle comes out on the side of the *living:* Helen pulls her "back to life." All the significant references that close the realist segment of Greta's story—the life or death crisis at the scrim, the Yeatsian, threatening "horseman" (policeman), the baby she hears laughing, her hunger, the food she and Helen decide to eat (breakfast)—are all replicated in the closing fable in different forms. Scene Eight restages this scrimmed battle but, now—"*at home, rocking a baby*"—Greta has transformed from suicidal character to wise storyteller and tells her own life story in the form of a fable (79). The importance of this final movement cannot be overstated. First, Devlin plainly figures her protagonist as the traditional Irish storyteller, or *seanachie*, through her stage directions: "*The traditional empty chair is placed near the storyteller*" (Ibid). In other words, the dead, ghostly Greta has been given back her speech, her voice, by the playwright, and *that* movement is the final, sweeping development of this play.

In this scene, she tells her youngest child a fable about a frightening stag that "wanted to kiss" her (79). If she were to let it, Greta says, she "would have died of cold" (Ibid); that is to say, she would have died of *deathliness*. Instead she feeds the stag, which causes it to magically become human: "its face was transformed and it began to take on human features" (Ibid). Once she feeds the beast, it metamorphoses from fearful enemy to fellow traveler: "So I got on the stag's back and flew with it to the top of the world" (Ibid). This moment reverses the analogous scene in which Finn is dragged by the ghost of her dead grandmother to the other side where she "dies" (1986 115 – 16). Greta does *not* come to Finn's fate: as in Scene Seven, she does not die and learns instead how to live in a cold, "dead," small place. The narrative of the stag allegorizes the condition of the people of Northern Ireland—they are starved for life and always about to expire. Eating berries causes this animal to become human, however, and the food brings it back to life, an event which "filled [Greta's] years with a tremendous sound (Pause)" (1994 79). The story seems to imply that even in this dead zone where residents “starve” and “freeze,” one has the agency to choose between the roles of life-giver or death-bringer. Cousin takes a similar view of the play, saying: “Greta’s response to the killings is to attempt to become a ‘harvester’, not of souls but of lives. In obedience to the commanding voice in her head, she steals a chalice full of communion wafers and distributes the wafers to people in the streets, believing that in this way she is helping to stop the killings. As in a dream, her actions give physical form to an idea: the relocation of ‘communion’ from the divided and divisive world of the churches into the community” (193). The doubled ending transforms the subject, in literal and symbolic forms, into a life force, a “Lady of Perpetual Succour” as Cousin has it, rather, precisely, than nationalizing her (188). Greta must “make the transition from the language of the hearth to the language of the heart,” the hearth symbolizing the nation of course (Cousin 200). It is also significant that Greta tells this tale to her child such that she is figured not merely as a *seanachie* but as a *mother-seanachie*. As Elish tells Greta earlier in the play, “Mothers – they are the real harvesters of souls. You can be one of those” (34). Unlike Finn, Greta makes that kind of choice. In other works, the lead character metaphorically “kisses” the deathly stag and dies.

What Greta finds, finally, is not just “the voice she has been seeking” (Cousin 198) but the place she has been seeking, a location symbolizing the nation. Greta rides the stag to “the place where you come from” (79): a national place of birth and heritage that is *livable*. This effect is developed only in *After Easter,* a difference which makes the play her most important and one of the most critically significant dramas representing the Troubles. Devlin’s play provides an important commentary on the partitioned nation that addresses not only the deathliness of membership there but also how one might manage to “live” in that place in spite of the “cold,” and how speech might be returned to its ghost-citizens. Importantly, there are two ways to interpret the conclusion of this play. Greta's fable ends happily: she flies off, carried by the stag to the place of desire. And so, the dramatic *aisling* that closes *After Easter* might be seen as articulating an ambivalent, syncretic Northern Irishness. Devlin lends credence to this view, describing it as a "quest play," a journey whereby "in leaving…the North of Ireland [Greta] has turned away from everything that once could have been called her identity, including her religion" (quoted in Arrowsmith 136). The fable orated in Scene Eight could, at the same time, be interpreted as the culminating metaphor for the irresolvable problem executed across the play: the deep contradictoriness that leads to spectrality in partitionist conditions. If seen as allegory of a state run through with fractiousness and trauma and not of closure or subject formation, one might note, for example, that Scene Seven is not set in Northern Ireland but in the colonial motherland; their father's ashes are spread not in an emblematic Irish river but in the Thames—England's most evocative tributary. It is also important, perhaps more so, that Greta's final monologue comes after the action proper. The scene in which she achieves closure, groundedness and arrives at a *frontera* stands dislocated from the play it "belongs" to. It is "only" a dream, and thus exogenous to the action of the play—a narrative in exile, the story Greta *would* tell, the self she *would* become if she could—that is, if she were not the citizen of a broken nation-in-exile.

This final narrative represents a third space that ought to exist but does not, a subject for whom there ought to be articulacy but who cannot ultimately be captured by language. As a Northern Irish subject, she may *dream* life, but she cannot *live* life. *After Easter* can be seen as a play that can only dream and cannot enact its goal: in the dream, "the place we came to after Easter" is a location of birth and life that can be faced and lived in, where choices can be made, where a future is "thinkable," constructible. In the reality, that place—represented through the realist narrative of Greta's odyssey, beginning in Scene One and culminating in Scene *Seven*—is a location of irresolvable self- and state-estrangement. It is unclear to me whether *After Easter* is a narrative that finds what it searches for. The answer changes from time to time, and so it seems that ethic of internal conflict pervades even this critical response. But, of course, what is important about this play is not located, ultimately, in the question of which reading is most appropriate. Its final significance is in the enunciation of the critical implications of Derrida's work: haunted by colonialism, partitionism and anti-colonial nationalism, the Northern Irish subject has not learned to live. But, by dying—that is, in recognizing, contemplating or attending a dramatic spectacle in which a preexisting "death" is performed—the subject may be learning to live *in* her Northern Irishness. Ultimately, what we learn through Devlin's work is that the situation of the Northern Irish subject is "a matter of trying to live that dialectic… in all of its elusive impossibility" (Eagleton 38). In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida says that "being-with specters would also be…a politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations" (1994 xix). The ghost is, therefore, "representative" of these things—of memory, of inheritance and of generations—and Greta signifies, like the stag, the history that has led to the present moment and constitutes the subject. *After Easter* thus comprises a politics of memory in the ways Derrida and Cleary theorize: a historical text that does not obfuscate the split, spectral state in the constitution of the split, spectral subject, that remembers where politics "lives" and what politics "has done."

Thus, perhaps Devlin would revise Derrida after all, for, rather than learning to live *with* ghosts, Devlin's need may be to discover how to live *as* a ghost in the North of Ireland: to come to an understanding of how to live in, with and as "contradiction" in other words. This narrative of learning to live not with but as a ghost develops of necessity as a politics of memory because the impossibility of being truly alive is the specific effect of state and para-state structures such that the state is “remembered” in the condition of ontological spectrality. Greta, Frieda, Josie, Finn and the Helens are Derrida’s (almost) “dead” others, the “other at the edge of life” (xviii). Her characters and stories dwell in the liminal, deconstructive space articulated by Derrida: *la frontera* where the dead and the living meet, a place of irresolvable coexistence, of others at the edges of life and death and where insight, and maybe something like living, comes. Devlin says,

> [b]ecause of the violence… you got a real sense of responsibility. I do not think history is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake, …it is part of what I call memory and forgetting: before I can forget I have to remember and *before we can put down this particular burden that is our history we have to recall certain things that have not been visible* during a certain period… …that is why we are not finished with history: we have buried the body and we have seen the shape of their life, and now we have got to go back and explain. (Cerquoni 116 my italics).

Yes, making the absent present and the invisible visible is a politically critical act. And it is for that reason that we witness, in work after work, Devlin’s enactment and reenactment of dialogues with the dead.

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Chapter Four:[100]

Partition, Postcoloniality and the Postmodern:

Outlining Silence in the Poetry of Medbh McGuckian

It would demand the invention of a silence…
~Jamaica Kincaid, A Small Place

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One of Ireland's most celebrated living poets, Medbh McGuckian was born in Belfast in 1950. She published her first collection, *The Flower Master*, in 1982. Since then, she has written ten additional volumes including, most recently, *My Love Has Fared Inland* (2010).[101] McGuckian was the student of Seamus Heaney at Queens University, Belfast, where she now teaches, and is a member of the celebrated Northern Irish poets group.[102] Her themes center on feminist and gender concerns, the political history of Ireland and the North, and questions of poetry and poetry-making. McGuckian is viewed as a writer of virtuosic, quite difficult poetry. Almost every treatment of her work, this one not excepted, addresses its enigmatic character. As Peter Sirr says, "no contemporary Irish poet is as cautiously celebrated…" (462). Critics seem to bestow praise and blame in equal measure, characterizing the poems in ways nearly as baffling as the poet's own metaphors. In the space of a single review, the work is described as "idiosyncratic" and "original," "solipsistic" and "brilliant" (Haberstroh 124). Despite frustrated or even hostile reviews, Medbh McGuckian is universally respected. Issues of the under-representation of Irish women writers notwithstanding, she is the sole female included in multiple poetry anthologies and the first to hold the position of poet-in-residence at Queens University, Belfast (Ibid 123).[103] But, while it is true that scholars have begun to embrace and
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theorize McGuckian's incomprehensibility, rather than reject it outright,[104] still, eleven books and twenty-nine years later, we continue to look for lucidity from her and to bemoan its dearth.

Gonzalez notes that McGuckian's work "is often discussed dismissively—especially by some male critics—with very few of her poems receiving anything even approaching full analysis" (1999 xv). John Drexel, for example, charges McGuckian with "whimsy" (188) and Alan Jenkins with both that and a "willful idiosyncrasy" (58). Add to these Patrick Williams' caustic anti-reading entitled "Spare that Tree!" or William Pratt's non-review of *Shelmalier* (1998) in which he states that the failed rising of 1798 was "clearer" in the contemporary *Irish Times* column commemorating the event than it was in McGuckian's poems. While, the column made it plain that "Irish Protestants and Catholics were united against the English rulers in a common cause for independence," the poems failed in not conveying these facts (745). It goes without saying, of course, that McGuckian's work wouldn't *be* poetry if it did what Pratt says it should have done. As Hufstader writes: "No good poem, not even a good political poem, succeeds by making statements, however obliquely" (3). And McGuckian reminded us of this when she said that a poem will never state "this is what happened" or lay bare the details of the historical moment it concerns (O'Connor 1995 606).

Uncharacteristically, the poet addressed these reviews with some amount of sarcasm in her *Comhrá* with Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill, recalling how she has been "called a wallpaper poet, a woman who writes about begonias" (O'Connor 1995 598). Other Belfast poets do not escape this treatment either, however. There has been a refusal by some critics to truly "read" the work of Northern Irish poets. John Carey considers Paul Muldoon a writer who refuses "to communicate" which is, for him, a conscious "political decision" (quoted in Murphy 77). In this way, Carey further asserts, Muldoon's work betrays a "cliquish nonchalance. The poems stand around smugly, knowing that academic annotators will come running" (Ibid). One wonders if such attacks would be leveled were this critic reviewing the writing by Yeats or Joyce, which easily earns the same response and has in any case borne out precisely this kind of enthusiastic critical attention historically. Then, there is Iain Sinclair's memorable diatribe against the whole of modern Irish poetry: he says that "contemporary verse arrives smirking on the page dressed up for the anthology audition. Pre-programmed and dead in the mouth" (Ibid 76). I can scarce recall reviews less in tune with the poets and poems they examine.[105] Scholarly trends like these do serve, however, to underscore how little we seem to grasp the vicissitudes of the Troubles and the condition of being Irish in the time since partition.

A critical elision of location has led critics to misread both the content and form of McGuckian's work. Having come of age with the onset of the Troubles, she is, without a doubt, a poet constituted by the material reality of that war and the wider Anglo-Irish conflict.[106] For a reviewer to accuse McGuckian of "unwarranted obscurity" (quoted in O'Brien 239) means they have either forgotten where she is from or have ignored the meaning of living and writing from such a place. Given that war is not only absurd and traumatizing but also involves power dynamics that silence and paralyze, to expect poetry produced from this site to "make sense" or be otherwise transparently political, along with being "truthful," is not only hopeless but misses the point. Doesn't war provoke the very speechlessness, the surreality and the puzzlements characterizing McGuckian's work which frustrate her readers—the seeming lack of "communication" in Muldoon's? Does any poet working with materials as explosive as the meeting place of war, traumatic memory and language merely desire to complicate the work, as aesthetic or representational "play"? Poetry written in a time of political conflict is always already poetry of witness—this being the very act that defamiliarization of the content would foreclose. Scholars have been too willing to disregard these machinations of location and what they may mean in terms of the writer's production. My analysis regards an uncharacteristic issue in Postcolonial Studies. Together with reading McGuckian's work through the more typical lens of colonial discourse theory, it is important to consider the situation and effects of national partition, specifically, in this case, a geopolitical reorganization in which colonial and de-colonized states concomitantly exist and the nation can no longer be what it was. Partition is a political phenomenon critics would do well to attend more closely to in reading the work of writers from places like Ireland, South Asia, Palestine and Israel where the event has spurred decades of conflict and created new, intractable (chronologically) "post"-colonial Troubles.

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~**Part I:** *"so many orange skies": Re-introducing Medbh McGuckian*

> *The thing I remember about the Ardoyne Road was the bloodstains there always seemed to be all over it. Nobody ever commented on them.*
> ~Anna Burns, "School of Terror and Tears"

My view of Medbh McGuckian's poetry works against the grain of some scholarly trends.[107] First, I intentionally steer clear of gender. Its predominance as a critical paradigm has meant, as Docherty notes, that "[i]t has become fashionable to read [her] as a poet whose language, grammar and syntax all serve to question masculinism" (191). Feminist analysis is the all-too-easy place to turn, and which, with few exceptions,[108] may not be the most productive. I do not mean to suggest that a gendered reading is of no value or that McGuckian's work ignores (or *can* ignore) the sex-gender crisis. As in any area of sustained conflict, in Belfast too we observe an excessive masculinization of the populace; an appropriation of women in support of patriarchal (colonial and anti-colonial) nationalisms; and, their dehumanization through nationalist iconographies that render women angelic and dumb. In Northern Ireland, these
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phenomena circulate with greater intensity owing to an enthusiastic anti-colonial Republicanism *and* equally vehement imperialist Loyalism. All this certainly does intervene in McGuckian's work. I do not, on the other side, mean to imply that her status as a female poet has not posed challenges to her life as a writer.[109] My issue is that her work simply does not engage gender as its singular interest, as some of the scholarship suggests. Peter Sirr maintains that McGuckian seems "at pains to reject" the view that "her poetry represents a female way of being in the world" (464). "Critics who reach…for 'womanliness,'" he says, "forget that her approach is as remarkable within the tradition of poetry produced by women as by men" (Ibid). The poems differ substantially, too, from those of all her female peers, including Eavan Boland, Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill, Mary O'Malley and Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin. To Sirr's point, when asked if she views her "poetry [as] a 'mimesis of a distinctly feminine experience of the world,'" McGuckian responded: "I would like to agree…," *like* being the operative word here (McCracken 163).

Indeed, the ways McGuckian's oeuvre intersects concerns of gender studies are many. But, I am at pains to locate a twentieth-century poet in the English tradition whose work has been gendered by critics as roundly as hers. My first concern is that this has come at the expense of neglecting the innovations in language and poetics the work patently offers. Other avant-garde Northern Irish poets, like Paul Muldoon and Thomas Kinsella, are read as precisely that: their radical poetics being central in critical responses to the work. Moreover, when other postmodern women, such as Gertrude Stein or Sylvia Plath, speak of the nation, history and other political matters, we *hear* them speaking on those things; whereas, when McGuckian speaks of the Northern Irish state or the Irish nation, we hear her speaking of parturition, mothering and gardening. I am also not greatly interested in taking the analysis to places common to postcolonial critique. Namely, the straightforwardly arguable position that her abomination, bastardization and reformation of English amounts to a simple refusal of British colonial dominance, or that McGuckian creates word traps (*OBB* 59) as a literary means of resistance to the history that incarcerated Catholic Ireland and conscripted its Protestant community into service as wardens of a colonial state. I likewise do not read her treatment of partition in the way one might interpret Saadat Hasan Manto or Bapsi Sidhwa's renderings of India's division which "look… at those who are victims or beneficiaries of change during an uncertain, transitional period" (Batten 2002 126)—that the silence "heard" reflects the mute powerlessness of the partitioned citizen in the face of a nation-state crafted by an exiting colonial power and a native elite working to consolidate *its* power rather than function as guardian of the nation *en bloc*.

I want to think about a particular struggle with language in the specific and unusually fraught political circumstance of a divided partitionist colonial state and "small place" at war (Kincaid, *passim*) and theorize the struggle whereby, as Meena Alexander implies (2003) and Veena Das explicitly states, language "is struck dumb" in response to terror and trauma (Das 184). I read McGuckian through a politics of location and determined awareness of the fact that, for this poet, the language that is her material is experienced as impotent to the task it must nevertheless perform: the verbalization of truths on the verge, simultaneously, of utterance and premature death in the cocoon of the larynx or inkwell. Relating the vicissitudes of this dialectic of the writing self in a world-at-war has been McGuckian's challenge—a form of literary labor that is ignored in much criticism. The work of writers coming out of colonial, nationally divided circumstances involves less the process of a literary means of anti-colonial resistance (though it may effectuate that) than a response to a partitionist (post)colonial war: the need to "art" truthfully when "truth" has been deemed unspeakable, when the political location dictates that "whatever you say, you say nothing," or *can* say nothing (Heaney 1975 53). That McGuckian writes from a partitioned war zone means the home for her *poesis* is, patently, one the poet does not belong to and defines her as legally and literally *not* Irish.

Danielle Sered's review of voice in McGuckian's poetry refreshingly acknowledges the trend to overly read the work through feminist lenses, asserting that the "tendency to answer each question in terms of gender... limit[s] the range of responses" that can be offered (276). But Sered continues the other problematic inclination, eliding the political content of the work. Arguing that McGuckian's poems imply a "self that seems to know no limits" and a "sense of excess as possibility," this otherwise excellent critique fails to read these observations within the socio-political context they regard (Sered 277). Whereas Sered insightfully claims that this poet's "inclination toward negative description reflects and facilitates [her] tendency to resist any definitional fixity" (277), she does not take into account how the work, in this way, echoes ontological negations of the partitioned state—a location described, in the poet's words, as an "unstructured, unmarried, unfinished" place (*MC* 103). Sered discusses "The Appropriate Moment," for example, a series of poems written for McGuckian's contemporary, Derek Mahon, suggesting that—in the lines "They say that I am not I, / but some kind of we, that I do not know / where I end" (*CL* 22)—she "recognizes her own multiplicity and utter lack of boundary" (275). The critic does not relate this boundary to the one introduced by partition, nor address the root problem for McGuckian's speaker: that she cannot *say* "I am" in Northern Ireland because of her status as excess of the state to which she always already does and does not belong. Any conceivable "I" is necessarily nationalized and partitionism thus renders this self utterly undecidable since it alienated McGuckian from the Irish nation. The political character of the central symbol in "Smoke" is ignored, the fact that the title regards the "excesses" of the tradition of bonfires associated with the July marching season:

> They *set the whins on fire* along the road.
> I wonder what controls it, can the wind hold
> That *snake of orange motion* to the hills,
> Away from the houses?
>
> They seem so sure what they can do.
> I am unable even
> To contain myself, *I run*
> *Till the fawn smoke settles* on the earth. (*TFM* 11, my emphases)

The speaker is located in the smolder of fires celebrating that long stretch of colonial history that eventually brought the Troubles to McGuckian's generation, the marching cycle that every summer spurs outbreaks of communal violence. The poem speaks of *political* smoke which the critic rightly suggests "not only crosses, but permeates the boundaries at hand" (277).

While this article unwittingly betrays problems associated with our apolitical tendency in reading McGuckian, it likewise signals how that same propensity has permitted her being identified as the postmodern poet she clearly is. The product of McGuckian's work with language bears an obvious postmodern sensibility, but that effect was, we note, not necessarily the object of the toil. Seen in political terms, we recognize the postmodernism of this poet's work as rooted in the nation, as an effect of histories that defined certain citizens as those "excesses" of the state mentioned earlier. The speaker can only declare a subjectivity in the nonsensical way McGuckian does in the poem cited earlier: "They say that I am not I, / but some kind of we, that I do not know / where I end." This piece not (only) manifests a postmodern subject, but also insinuates a postcolonial concern: the issue of "partitioned" subjectivity. Born in 1950 in County Antrim, being Catholic and thus certain that she is of the Troubles but positively unclear where her nation is located in that maelstrom—this is not merely a postmodernism; it is equally a political gesture and history under recounting. Thomas Docherty views the work as patently postmodern, saying that it reflects "the relation between the speaking Subject or 'I' and the

Object of its intention [as] mobile or fluid. It reads as if the space afforded the 'I' is vacant: instead of a stable persona, all we have is a potential of personality, a voice which cannot yet be identified" (192). The issue I have is that the question of the subject and speaker are discussed in a vacuum, separate from the poems' geographical, historical, political setting: the location always already renders the speaker unfixable as an "I" and to view that fluidity as *purely* postmodern is to escape its (other) critical point.

Docherty further suggests that "it is difficult to locate any single position from which the poem can be spoken" and that a "recurring feature of McGuckian is an 'untimeliness,' the sense of a gap between what is said and the voice which says it" (192). Yes, there is a silence *in* the utterance. But we remember that this poet is always clear about connecting issues of self and voice to those of place and nation. She habitually sets the "translocated" speaker down, as in "Smoke," within colors, symbols, metaphors and images which demarcate a politics location and gesture to national history. On this line, Charles O'Neill analyzes the houses in McGuckian's work, which he sees as "a refuge and a prison, a place of parturition and poetic activity, a space to be defended and one to be left vulnerable" (66). O'Neill offers a perceptive reading that stops short of interpreting the house as allegory of the nation—the fact that, in drawing them, the poet may be "Thinking of the Whole Island" (*TSYII* 58). Only when references to place or nation are transparent, as in the dwelling places of *Marconi's Cottage*, does he allow that they speak to partition: "resonat[ing] with the violence of Northern Ireland—a 'house divided'" (76). The critic sees this aspect of the work as a "social" rather than political echo, however, admitting that originally he was reluctant to write about McGuckian because of the "inexhaustible variety of images that located subjectivity in the domestic environment" (77). What gets lost in this "domestic" (read: gendered) explication is something McGuckian addressed in speaking of her early elegies for IRA leader, Member of Parliament and victim of the 1981 hunger strikes, Bobby Sands. Sands died, she says, “just after one of my babies was born. We moved into a house and I have a lot of moving-into-a-house poems around that time; but they’re all thinking about Bobby Sands” (Morris 68). It seems to me that, had similar house poems been authored by Yeats, Kavanagh or Heaney, especially at a politically pitched moment like the “Blanket” protests, readings of them as figures of the conflicted nation would have been prevalent.

Critics’ reluctance to contemplate the possibility of an inextricably *political* house in McGuckian explains their surprise to find that she doesn’t present the metaphor “as a principle of psychic integration” (O’Neill 66). No, indeed—when the “nation-house” is the still colonized limb of a small partitioned island in conflict, it will hardly signify integration of self, psyche or society. In McGuckian’s work, domestic spaces nearly always serve as metaphors for the partitioned nation and its segregations: “A house heals easily, blood shed / In the past loses its hue…” (*MC* 12). The work bears patent traces of the conflict in figuring the nation as a domestic space whose speakers are “born in little pieces, like specks of dust,” political stillborns which, as Devlin’s Greta in *After Easter*, “only an eye that looks in all directions can see” (*CL* 69). And it is precisely that they are sketched in this way makes McGuckian’s houses likewise “impossibly fragile, made / Of Cloth and glass,” why “the room floated freely / Within itself, and the bed was let into / A recess” (*MC* 37). The poet tells us that she writes from a “*mute* province we *call* home” (*CL* 22), that she is citizen of a “sealed-up, cloud-darkened country” (*CL* 30, my italics). Clair Wills’ reading, on the other hand, benefits from a critically robust politics of location. She asserts that, in McGuckian’s work, “the private sphere is not the place of truth and generalizable individual experience, but is continually displaced, found to be empty” (14). The poems function to question “the validity of established definitions of the public sphere—how poetry should speak for a community and thus how it can speak to a political situation” (Wills 15).

Psychological integration? No—not in Belfast, Northern Ireland circa Medbh McGuckian’s lifetime. The question is: how read this poet who writes from a place at war where subjects unavoidably and continuously struggle against ontological devolution and revolution, where the standard binary conception of public and private has been torn asunder by geopolitical rupture, and where there has been no private sphere to speak of, much less a sturdy bulwark functioning as sanctuary? What role does that fraught context play in the form, the language and the character of the work? Just as McGuckian’s poems constitute postmodern performances of undecidability, an accurate parallel reading argues for their status as representations of the silences and self-contradiction political circumstances provoke, her disintegrated shifting personas as metaphors for a dislocated partitionist subjectivity. The work is at once a “postmodern questioning of the real” (Docherty 193) *and* a postcolonial politics of (dis)location. This oeuvre defines itself in opposition to Docherty’s position: “…by its relation to… a place” (Ibid 192). Whereas he asserts McGuckian’s “writing offers a way of breaking away from the ‘place-logic’ which is central to the formulation of a national culture, tradition or lineage” (Ibid), I urge consideration of the precisely contrasting view, that the work is categorically and expressly grounded in an ungrounded place-logic and coheres as an always already dislocated body of work. This is a “partitioned” thus necessarily illogical place-logic. In McGuckian’s work, observe this illogic of the broken nation: a split, self-contradictory nationalism where location and subject are inevitably and internally at odds, fluid and shifting like the postmodern aesthetic Docherty and Sered read in them.

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That the Northern Irish partitionist place-logic is articulated in the form of a postmodern aesthetic raises a question about the valences of postmodernism. Can a postmodern "collective" voice be at once a private, lyrical speaking *and* a historically located, postcolonial, gendered, representative one? Can it be at once postmodern "play" and political efficacy? In his review of contemporary Northern Irish literature, McGuire writes: "Poetry is…a special form of utterance, capable of articulating a kind of truth that remains obscured, elided, and unsaid within other forms of discourse." It seems to me, too, that even as postmoderns, we do not escape that much maligned concept, "truth," used so often with the scare quotes contemporary thought necessitates. Poetry is the paradoxical postmodern form that does not forego truth as first principle. Poets truth-tell and the truth, Rukeyser insists, is the very *life* of the work of art: "The use of truth is [poetry's] communication" (27). And this view is as relevant now as ever—as pertinent for Rukeyser as it was for Dickinson, for Yeats as for McGuckian, Muldoon and Heaney. Even a poet as distinctly postmodern as John Ashbery tells the truth, if slant, positions "new awarenesses" (read: truths) as the promise of poetry:

> In the course of poetry's career, perhaps *new awarenesses* are discovered, really new awarenesses and not verbal combinations brought together in any old way. This rather unimportant novelty is sometimes a play of possibility and sometimes *a genuinely new insight*: like Tristram Shandy, they add something to this Fragment of Life. (146, my emphasis)

Clearly Ashbery does not view contemporary poetry as existing *outside* the rubric of truth, and neither does McGuckian, who came back to poetry, after a hiatus, because she had "some truth… to hand on" (O'Connor 1995 595 – 96).

Yes, even today, poems exist for and to truths' ends. We are prompted to consider the possibility of a politico-historical situation that dictates postmodern impenetrability if the national, historical poet is to reach the *truth* of it. And it is in part because of McGuckian's renowned impenetrability, the work is seen as part of English language poetry's contemporary avant-garde. She has been compared to poets spanning numerous locations, times, styles, many of whom are indeed postmodern—everyone from Dickinson to cummings, from Whitman to Ashbery. Peter Campion positions her as "one of the few writers for whom the word 'experimental' actually makes sense" (12). Sirr maintains she "reinvent[ed] the lyric and [sent] it spinning out of its normal orbit" (470) and Daniels seems to concur, comparing her to Ashbery and to Surrealist and L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E poets (395). Sirr argues for a view of Irish poetry as a conservative tradition in which few poets have been willing to "cede authority to the process of imagination, [and] let the poem write the poet" (450). He believes most "avoid formal experiment" (Ibid) whereas McGuckian, he says, consistently "abjur[es]… lyric clarity and control" (464).[110] He and Blakeman mutually recognize the "new poetry" she and Muldoon "littered," a radical Northern Irish avant-gardism that "works at the level of indeterminacy, ambiguity and polysemy" (Blakeman 66). McGuckian is self-conscious about this, perhaps at times "too aware of her uniqueness" (O'Brien 249). Indeed, in a Miltonian pronouncement, McGuckian once said: "People say to me, 'Why don't you rhyme at the end, the way men do, and the way the rules say?' I couldn't be bothered with that. I don't do it. The words do it. *The words collect themselves*" (Bohman 105 my emphasis).[111] In "The Time Before You," written to commemorate Paul Muldoon's emigration from Belfast to the United States,[112] she writes:

> I wish they could hear
>
> That we lived in one room
> And littered a new poetry

Long after both doors, up
And downstairs, shut. (*OBB* 46)

Although the poet wishes we could “hear” their speakers better than we do, what we gather is that the author sets herself apart from those following “lyric norms” (Sirr 450), sees herself as a writer lacking “an identifiable lyric centre, [and] an underlying controlling voice” (Ibid 462).

And that is, to a great extent, the point of the work. In McGuckian we observe a balance between, for example, Ashbery’s exaggerated disruption of sense and the safe, sensible domicile of Seamus Heaney’s. We could replace the Ashbery side of this opposition with Muldoon or Carson, and the Heaney half with Longley or Boland, perhaps MacNeice. But, whichever contrast is preferred, it is clear that, in the work’s location *between* formalism and ambiguity it expresses a beautiful conventionality as well as a reflective contemporary abstraction. McGuckian’s work is located between poetical order and chaos: the form of the poem being generally formalist; the content, wildly abstract, absurd—in a word, postmodern. Seamus Heaney is, in some respects, McGuckian’s superior. At the same time, he is “too much i‘th sun” of his mostly male forebears. Heaney does not experiment with language and form as McGuckian does. Like Boland, he works *with* the language, *with* inherited forms. Heaney thinks the war through; McGuckian expresses its emotional, phenomenological, bodily truth. Her rendering is phenomenological, his intellectual, certainly more accessible. Heaney has found an exquisite method to tell his truths without the slant of a McGuckian or an Ashbery or Muldoon. He is to McGuckian as Nelly Sachs is to Paul Celan: a poet friend who writes of similar issues with equal brilliance but more conventionally. Sachs, a gifted poet, cannot be said to have remade German poetry; Celan can. That McGuckian and Celan are *not* Nobel Laureates while Sachs and Heaney are seems unsurprising in the light of stylistic differences. It betrays a failure to hear or engage the “ugly” historical truths poets like Celan and McGuckian endeavor to relate.

They do *not* reach for aesthetic beauty (although they achieve it), they reach for *truth*—which, in a time and place of war or genocide, is not merely unpleasant but wholly grotesque. As McGuckian says, she has "no feeling" for "The Flitting," a poem written "to a code" for a competition won during her first pregnancy: "I see that it fits a pattern, but it is not my pattern. That is why I find the whole thing laughable—that the people who win the prizes are just conforming to the rules" (O'Connor 1995 594 – 95).

The poet has transformed English lyric poetry, as some suggest, and much of that ingenuity is located in her use of language. Hence, as to the question, *Wherefore McGuckian's inscrutability?*, the answer lies in the ways she has been challenged in calling a colonial or indeed obliging, in book after book, a colonial language to act against itself—to bend to her will and function as the vehicle to speak her radical anti-colonial, nationalist truths. The struggle has been in part to self-fashion in a language that, representationally, has always already foreclosed the ontological existence of author and (hence) speaker. And this "gravitational pull of the actual" bends the work back toward the material political world in whose scales poetry always rests (Heaney 1986 3 – 4). The voice of "Frost in Beaconsfield" is exiled "beyond a door that cuts off / The word was my coverless book to you, / Myself the price of it" (*OBB* 36). An exiled speaking is necessarily political; such utterance cannot be purely postmodern and does not come down solely to gender displacement. This poet habitually says she writes as political émigré, and the failure to connect that with the geopolitical, colonial circumstance of the writing is to be blind to its most defining aspect. All the silence and the stuttering in McGuckian—Heaney's "famous Northern reticence" (1975 53)—this is a *political* reticence predicated on her status as an Irish person who is (nonetheless) British in the time after (incomplete) Irish independence, a condition that interrupts the poets' forays into truth-telling. If poetry constitutes a sacrosanct preserve, as Heaney and McGuckian both seem to feel, if there is such a thing as “pure” truth, if poetry *is* poetry because it captures fragments thereof—still, the work *has* a political time-space. The poem must because the poet must. And if such an emplacement limits or enhances the capacity of the imagination to translate history and memory—whether truths of a unique self, a single nation, or some notion of universal humanity—into language, and if the one who remembers is nevertheless compelled to testify in spite of the muting bit of censorship or silencing, what emerges through the pen of this writer will be inescapably political and historical.

Perhaps what emerges are “inexplicable” poems that feel postmodern and apolitical, or “domesticated” and feminist, but are, indeed, political, if silently so. Apart from the problem of political blindness in the scholarship, there is an even thornier issue to be addressed: a number of critics address McGuckian’s political content by specifically insisting on its absence. In contrast, she has *always* written of the war, I argue, and the poems have been political from the first word—*literally*: “They set the whins on fire along the road / I wonder what controls it, can the wind hold / That snake of orange motion to the hills...” (*TFM* 11). McGuckian is the author of political—postcolonial and postmodern—poetry that addresses the war, the partitioned nation-state in which that theatre has played out, and the colonial legacy giving rise to both. I am aware that this suggestion will cause some readers to wince or even scoff (including, possibly, the poet herself). Surely this kind of broad politicization of McGuckian’s work would be more palatable if limited to the poems published after the ceasefires in 1994, as a number of critics grant. I insist, however, on its applicability to the oeuvre as a whole and differ with critics, like Hufstader, who claim that McGuckian did not “turn to political poetry” until “her fifth volume, *Captain Lavender*…” (7) or that before that time she “[kept] her back turned on history” (4). Her location was indeed transformed around the time of the profound poetical transformations perceptible in the 1995 volume. These poems are of a different character: they are longer, deeper, fussier, the threaded metaphors more brilliant and intense, crisper though still quite difficult to puzzle through. The poet reaches a level of precision, as a craftsperson, not previously attained. The form also turns more radical and the poet more creative; it is, for example, in this collection that she lets go, finally, of the convention of capitalizing each verse.

But, though the revolution in the 1995 collection *is* perceptible, the metamorphosis is one of poetics and form rather than content. My critics would have some justification for the negative response I anticipate, given that the idea of McGuckian as a poet who specifically sidesteps the Troubles is widely held. Moreover, it wasn't until after the ceasefires that she, herself, started acknowledging the political content of her work. Until 1995, she mostly denied having been a political poet,[113] saying, for example: "The 'Troubles' affect my life and enter my poetry that way, but I avoid them as a subject as I avoid taking arms against a sea. The crisis informs my work, naturally, but I can't confront it there." And adding: "I am not…a political animal" and "Poetry is not a servant of politics" (McCracken 168 - 69). These statements seem to me profoundly dissonant given the location from which they spring and the actual content of the poetry to which she refers. While poetry may not be the *servant* of politics, it has always served to "speak" the Irish nation, a country colonized for longer than poetry has been mass-printed. And if anyone understands this, it is Medbh McGuckian. If there is indeed any poet whose work clarifies its vicissitudes it is hers. What other cultural or literary form has been more committed to Irish politics than Irish *poetry*? Indeed, the tradition has *always* "carried" the Irish nation, and it is that heritage which compels readers and critics alike to *expect* McGuckian to be transparently nationalist or patently "political" in some other way, why they consistently complain that she is not. As a Catholic writer from Belfast, we assume that she will offer a

Northern Irish version of Yeats' nationalism, that her poems will pine for liberation of the six counties in the manner of an *aisling,* lamenting not Art O'Leary[114] but Bobby Sands—that, after Joyce's Parnell, they will otherwise mourn fallen post-partition nationalist icons.

The problem, here, is that the poems *do* lament Sands, and did from the start. It is just that we cannot *see* him in them, and this is an effect of methodological constraints and that McGuckian has tucked him away as the "silence" of the poem meant for him. I do not mean, on one hand, to imply that apolitical readings of her work "misinterpret" it. Rather, I want to broach the possibility that, along with the poet's particular craft, problematical assumptions operate in our thinking about and definitions of political poetry and understandings of the place of a poet like McGuckian that serve to hinder or entirely thwart other interpretations. I propose a revised and (I hope) more constructive definition and theory of political poetry—especially that written in times and places of war or conflict. McGuckian's early denials of the political content of her work, we must remember, are a sign of political "closetedness"[115] and the compulsory censorings attending that. The author's location is a place of marginalization, in terms of sect, gender and statehood, where issues of power cannot be plainly confronted. Such a political address can be neither straightforward nor painless. In warzones, political silencing applies to the art and to what the writer can say *about* it. When asked, in a 2001 interview, to account for differences discernible in the 1995 collection, including—in the interviewer's words—an "openly declared recommitment to country and the Irish cause," a view I do not concede, McGuckian explains:

> It was obviously the date. The present Troubles, alas, began in 1968, when I was eighteen. It's now been a thirty-year war. *I was able to come out in Captain Lavender as what I was,* merely because British and Unionist domination was ending, in so far as it could end. *It was basically just slightly safer to be clear*

> *about where you stood*. You were not seeing soldiers and armored cars every other minute. Understand, you'd be thrown in jail for saying 'Up the Rebels' until recently. (Morris 69 - 70)

For those on the other side of the Atlantic, the enormity of this statement may be hard to grasp: she means, I think, that being Northern Irish *and* Catholic, or a nationalist of any religion, meant being barred from expressions of that political affiliation, whether in the art itself or in the interview about it. The nationalist identification was so dangerous it could get one quickly labeled a terrorist and incarcerated. Knowing that to have "outed" herself in this way may have met with such consequences, for the poet or her family, we understand why, in the time before the ceasefires, she avoided political content—or, more precisely, and this is a critical distinction—why she *claimed* to have avoided political content.

It is unsurprising that the tenor of McGuckian's comments on her work started to change after 1994, that she becomes more direct in explaining meaning and intent. Only now does the poet feel free to "out" the trope of snow as signifier of the Troubles or acknowledge the *political* meaning of the "North window" in "The Sofa" (25). In 2001, she said that, writing this poem

> …was the first time I began to think about where I lived, and where I was in Ireland relative to England. I was using the word 'north' to define my identity. This is where I am. It is a cold, chilly, bleak outlook. This was in the seventies when we moved our furniture away from the windows a lot because the windows were always coming in. (Morris 71)

"This was in the seventies"—that is to say, long before publication of even her first book she was thinking about, and writing about, the Troubles. Here is a poet who penned her work beside exploding windows and, as Devlin and Burns remind us in their work, in a situation where families hide under kitchen tables to avoid falling victim to gunfire and lit matchsticks outside. “The Sofa” was published in 1982 and, given her 2001 reflections on it, we see that even in this early work she addressed the disposition of the state. Moreover, it wasn’t until this time that McGuckian could admit that her first poem was written in remembrance of Bloody Sunday (1972),[116] or that some of her earliest pieces were in fact laments her Art O’Leary, Bobby Sands.

What comes into focus here is an epistemology of another kind of closet (Sedgwick *passim*): the poet is viewed as being silent on that which she has a perceived Catholic, “nationalist” *duty* to address—to which there are centuries of Irish poetry granting entrée—even as, in every endeavor to address it—poetically, truthfully, genuinely—she finds herself bitted by a location, the homeland has never and can never leave. McGuckian has lived with political silencing all her life, with territorialization and terror. She could not confront Northern Irish politics in a direct or more conventional way given the practical risks involved and the “border bit” noted (Heaney 1975 52)—those silencing predicates she and Heaney continually tell us constitute them and their speakers. This means the political content will be coded as Robert Brazeau suggests in saying that she “offers a response to public codes that is more resolute because it would appear to evade their demands for referential exactitude and mimetic reflection” (128). Of the series of early elegies written for Sands, he is an invisible presence lurking behind the poems: their true subject is present only as a palpable, spectral silence. This national icon is the specter haunting his unmarked tribute and that it is homage to him is cloaked—as is whatever political meaning(s) the poem contains.

Thus, while McGuckian’s poems may seem apolitical, they are often quite otherwise. In *On Ballycastle Beach* (1988), for example, Northern Ireland is metaphorized as France, a rebellious statelet within the island pulled into the continent through a continued colonial presence even as it defines itself against and cannot "be" England. We recognize political reference running through other early poems—like "Smoke" (quoted above), "The Hollywood Bed" and "Slips." The title of "Power-Cut" is a poetic sign for political trauma (*TFM* 56), and "Smoke" is the narrative of a petrified speaker running from the July bonfires, terrified of the marching bands and the symbolic meaning of the billowing residue (*TFM* 11). We understand the terror the subject experiences, the need to hide. Though her first collection, which "Smoke" opens, features the theme of gender prominently, nearly every piece is articulated within a political setting. As Wills suggests, the "intimate sphere is never separated from the public, political world, a linkage which is drawn formally as well as thematically" (18). Reminiscent of Celan, the erotic poems in this collection interweave domesticated lust with the historico-political public. In "The Hollywood Bed," for example, the speaker says,

> …while I lie crosswise,
> imperial as a favoured only child,
> calmed by sagas of how we lay like spoons
> in a drawer, till you blew open
> my tightened bud, my fully-buttoned housecoat,
> like some Columbus mastering
> the saw-toothed waves, the rows of letter *ms*. (*TFM* 19)

Patriarchy is torn asunder in the bedroom, but that space is set in a wider colonial swath. The poem marks the dawn of modern empire through reference to Columbus and splices the import of that with the marital honeymoon, "Hollywood" bed, where a woman's virginity is taken by a colonizer. *She* is the place Columbus conquers and populates, she is his "India."

Thus, even in McGuckian's first poems, the domestic realm, including and especially the bedroom, is set in an imperial frame. Casting a blind eye to political reference, we have preferred to read the poems otherwise. As with "The Hollywood Bed," the pre-1994 closetedness McGuckian speaks of meant that political reference would often be present as backdrop, like the scrim of a stage production or the orange thread offsetting the various blues in a tapestry. Certainly one of her decisive achievements has been the ability to lucidly capture the atmospheres and lived experiences of war without directly or explicitly revealing her subject. But there are different means by which a work of art can be "political." Merely to use language performatively, to deconstruct form and debstabilize meaning, is political. I cannot recall a time, however, when I was able to read McGuckian without seeing the Troubles and the wider Irish politic everywhere signified. Long before *Captain Lavender,* she had taught readers much about the meaning of war. Even with the level of difficulty her "Tower of Babel" poses, this object lesson is discernible. In order to see it, though, we must know *how* to read war, how to recognize political content in poetry written through and against the muting sway of a "border bit" (Heaney 1975 52). McGuckian teaches us, firstly, that war transforms every ordinary thing, that much of what is taken for granted in zones of peace—that snow is enjoyed, that windows are for loitering in and lingering over ontological queries—cannot be in locations like Belfast where snow echoes the cold fact of death and windows are rife with dangerous, splintering, bloody potential. The world according to this poet is one where "orange skies" (*MC* 18) continuously pour "snowdrop petals" (*MC* 34) all over her surreal landscapes: leaves, flower petals, flaking skin, raindrops, ash, dust, and, more often than not, literal snowflakes. The war *is* that snow, and it is mirrored, too, in a trio of conceits: dreams, darkness and stairs, the movements up and down, in and out of corporeal or psychological havens, the way sleep is a stairway to the "safe house" of dreams. The winter frost, the gauntness, the colors (orange and brown, not the blue, not the green), all signifiers of the war. It is the protracted conflict which prompts the poems' anticipation of Autumn and August, their anxiety around June and July. It is in and through windows that we know we are at war in McGuckian's poetical universe. But, most of all, it is in the aura of silence surrounding each small lyric: through windows we feel the dumb terror of war; through haunted houses we sense the mute, spectral presences, the blood stains now faded.

Yes, we must know how to read political poetry in order to read this poet. And we will not and indeed cannot find what is important about war in literary works that conform to standard conceptions of "political" or ideological writing. War poetry relates not its material *facts* but its lived *effects*, its lived *affect*. The war isn't actually *in* the popular "war" ballad Frieda sings at the opening of Devlin's *Ourselves Alone*—"Armoured cars and tanks and guns / come to take away our sons…" (13). Rather, it is in her undiscovered making, her raging lust, her final exile—it is in the falling leaves ("snow") she attempts catching before being assailed by an RUC officer. If by "political" we infer a work that expresses an ideological position, then McGuckian is not now, not post-1994, and neither has she ever been a political writer. But, if, in using the term, we indicate the (more vital, more radical) endeavor to produce an art that thinks through political processes—like partition, genocide, occupation and, indeed, war—then she has always been and continues to be a resolutely political poet. McGuckian's work does not take an obvious *position* or patently embody an ideology—these are not Loyalist or Republican poems, even as they contain a strongly historical, political essence. Poetry, Ashbery urges, tells us something we *don't* already know, takes us somewhere altogether new epistemologically (146). Readers do not need the verses to speak of bullets, tanks and guns—for they already "know" that. They do not need a poem that does what Frieda's ballad does, allying its singers with the Republican cause by casting its "volunteers" in the shape of their sons. Such verses boil down the complexities of history, nation and the political so as to serve as rallying cries for organizations and parties. In keeping with Ashbery, Heaney reminds us that poetry doesn't promote a political viewpoint. Rather, it *makes us think*: poems face complex realities rather than simplifying them (1986 3). Ideologies always abridge—they can only do so. McGuckian works according to this poetical paradigm: “I just don’t think it makes good poetry, just condemning the things around you. So I try not to condemn in my poems” (O’Connor 1996 155 - 56). Her sense is, like Heaney’s, that good poetry doesn’t trim or soften its truths, it thinks them through. Poets, Heaney explains, “place a counter-reality in the scales—a reality which may be only imagined but which nevertheless has weight because it is imagined within the gravitational pull of the actual and can therefore… balance out against the historical situation” (1986 3 – 4). McGuckian imagines counter-realities within the reach of war, “paints” pictures that call us to contemplate and sketch her historico-political place across the canvas of our reading mind.

The poetry of Medbh McGuckian does what Ashbery and Heaney say poetry ought to do: it is the means by which the reader knows something *new* and it is that which makes her *think*. Ashbery and Heaney remind us that what we need are poems that say, for example, what McGuckian’s “Poem Without Words” says: “The smallest bare twig still / everywhere a foreboding of resurrection” (*BA* 18). The image is another name for death, another way to speak of silence. Here, then, is a battlefield after the fight. Here is waiting, watching, sensing, listening out for rumblings of disappearing stones and other momentous metamorphoses. This is war—or, better yet, it is *what war means*: an extreme need for quiet listening, for mimicking deathliness, for a brutal awareness of space and of the desire for intervals in which nothing at all happens—and in which nothing is going to happen. “Partly Dedicated to a House” reads:

> Afraid of the window’s glance all blue
> And despairing, I press home the crisis
> It imposes; and the taste I’d like you
> To have found there turns our love
> Into the same thirsty act of contemplation.
>
> Not so long ago, words, spoken too soon,
> Such as ‘It really is over’, prolonged

> Themselves in prearranged silences
> Like inert stations on a line. And
> Though it was in essence anything but over,
> These are the places I now prefer.... (*VR* 51)

To our surprise, perhaps, the "inert stations" along the railway line are spaces of desire here: one doesn't have to listen for approaching trains (or shattering windows) there, one contemplates thirstily, imagines "it" being over, really, finally. In these quiet, "dead," sleeping places, one *can* say or dream or muse, *It really is over*. And that is the point of the poem: to sculpt a politics of location where the speaker says: "It really is over," when, really, it never is, and may never be.

This is the meaning of "Whatever You Say, You Say Nothing," the question, in a critical frame, being, what "it" can the subject be if not the Troubles or wider colonial conflict or elongated insult of imperialist criminality on the island? In our "Confinement," the poet suggests, we are not walled-in by the structure of the house but "glassed-in" by its North windows, which open *and* close and are "always coming in" (Morris 73)—through which snow enters in an "epidemic / Of leaves in the hall" (*VR* 43). In this poet's work, windows mean what they mean to Anne Devlin: like our interiority, they open, close and explode. Thus one does not linger long there: Belfast windows are paradoxes, dangerous places one exits and hovers closely to for the very same reason. Like the collapse of inside and outside posed by this structure, the self is always insecure and porous in McGuckian's panoramas. Absurdly, inwardness is always almost outwardness: the speaker "drew the damp from walls / And coaxed our neighbor, the forest, into this / Sorority" (*VR* 43); "The upper half of the house made fast, // we try to batten the door-windows, / but one won't fasten…" (*CL* 15).[117] Board up the windows, in other words, for they are permeable passageways. Readers listen and learn from this poet: war is another name for the dream of windowlessness. Without windows there is greater safety; with them one listens, anticipates, falls apart. In the place of conflict, windows are always too big and too "door-like" and whatever pleasantries may be seen through them are soon recognizably unpleasant:

> In the bright July
> My window seemed too big, all day
> Long to insult me, with its pale heaven,
> Putting supple hands around my throat. (*MC* 17)

"The Book Room" further elucidates McGuckian's acclimatization to war: "I lie on my right side / And put my hand up to my forehead / While he looks out of his window / And I look out mine" (*MC* 47). As in "The Hollywood Bed," the conflict is extemporaneously present in the intimate sanctum. But here, we are not deflowered by a power-mongering conqueror; instead, we keep an eye on the windows and pray hard; boy and girl are posted like petrified guardians staring in opposite directions rather than as lustful lovers face-to-face, body-to-body. In war, there is no pause for lust, consensual or colonial. When home doubles as a battlefield, listening is a life or death enterprise: speakers observe long silences, they do not sex or sleep: "Keeping close to the walls, listening / With outstretched fingers" (*MC* 17). There, the "narrow" houses are "propped up window / After window, while the light sank and sank" (*MC* 40). These are residences in which "the whole depth of the house" is "[l]ike a secret tie between a wound and its weapon" (*MC* 35). This dwelling—a painfully obvious allegory of nation—is likewise "two-rooms at the corner / Of Gendarme and Prison Street, where / Even the smallest stone like an overfull / Heart can refuse to do its job" (*MC* 29). Because McGuckian's exceptionally politicized meta-house is located at *that* intersection, her "roof leaks / around the nine bomb-holes" (*CL* 78). Most of these evocative, elucidatory, symbolic structures were published before McGuckian emerged from her "closet" of silence and circumlocution and code. Just as we need those windows in order to grasp the "new awarenesses" (Ashbery) of the Troubles, other people's windows are unintelligible to this poet: "Pain opens your hands like a book / or a twosyllable word I find as unintelligible / as the windows of other people" (*CL* 18). And as she says in "Querencia," "A window *should be* a wide-eaved colour beyond anything" (*OBB* 25, my emphasis). Outside the reach of political conflict, one stands before a window without obstruction or anxiety. In Belfast, one does not stand at an open window at all, curtains and shades thrown wide. Here is "Spring," also from McGuckian's first book:

> …The curtains slit at my hand,
> My breathing marbled the pane:
> There was my face in the window,
> Frosted, so hard to see through. (13)

It is a chilling, profound poem in which the speaker does not stand, restful and contemplative, before an unobstructed, self-illuminating pane; rather she peers through a "slit" in the curtain veiling a frost-covered window doubling as mirror for the self. The speaker does not gain greater self-awareness thereby but falls more deeply into self-stupefaction: studying her own frosted, hazy image, she is "marbled," refracted through a shadowy, smoke-filled world at war.

McGuckian does indeed answer the long-standing "political" expectations of the Irish poet. Nevertheless, we seem to have overlooked the fact that, in 1992, this poet characterized Northern Ireland as "the most closely-watched place / In the Empire" (29) and told us she could "never get halfway to orange" in her "doorless, stepless dreams" (44). She wrote nonsensical murmurings about "The Sun Trap" in 1982 and "Confinement" in '84, of a snowy "grey north door" in 1988 and of "something / Sand-ribbed and troubled, a desolation / That could erase all memory of warmth" in 1992. A political awareness is essential to understanding this poet's seasons and her world, where if "there were no autumn" marching season would never end (*MC* 45)—an unwelcoming place to a writer of McGuckian's background. And that is why the speaker of "The Sun-Moon Child" dreams she "could make from the summer / A winter childbirth" (*MC* 37). Wills recognizes the political modulations of the work in her assertion that the “instability of poetic reference ensures that the lyric is open to public and political meanings” (15). I, however, remain uncertain why we have not more often developed these “public and political meanings” into sustained critique. For instance, how has it been possible to read a poem like “On Ballycastle Beach” as apolitical? The poem, Guinn Batten suggests, “concerns ‘delivery’ at the level of political, as well as familial, bodily, and linguistic meaning,” and, reminiscent of Yeats, it addresses “how a parent’s destruction of his child at the margin of land and sea may be likened to an empire’s miscarriage of justice in its relations with a colony that is seeking to be reborn as a nation” (1997 226). To dismiss the political reference in “To Call Paula Paul” is to perform, as critics, the same denials that were, for the poet, compulsory before ‘94:

> So many orange skies have smashed
> The light bulbs of the weather,
> I look critically at the completely
> Missing week. If you are changing
> Trains by starlight, darling,
> Wear a white tie deluded by
> A white shirt, for when I called
> Him, ‘bought’, I only wounded him;
> They’re *his* soldiers, *his* lorries,
> Recruiting ghosts in your street tonight. (*MC* 18 – 19)

A white tie wafted like a white flag, a universal symbol for truce; the hunt for human prey; politically orange skies destroy the light of the nation. This address to the beloved is necessitated by the location: a war zone in a broken place. The poem is a lesson in war: it teaches us about love amid such a conflict. It is set in “the bright July” (Ibid) when, it goes without saying, marching season is on and the bonfires are ablaze and, as always, the violence erupts again.

Medbh McGuckian, the so-called, self-described apolitical Irish poet, has, since 1982, taught us all this about war, partition and political life in the North. As readers, it is important to remember that the sky blanketing Belfast in snow is *orange*—to understand that the snowfall is an invisible mantle of silence blanketing a partitioned nation at war. We have missed this, in all its bright orange blatancy, for four decades. We must, however, ask the political questions of McGuckian, call the poems to account for the density of political reference by which they are loaded: what does it mean for the speaker of a Northern Irish poem to be incapable of getting "halfway to orange," to have "doorless…dreams," to live under "orange skies" that incessantly fill the space of the nation with snow and the silencing it brings? What does it mean for an entire week to be "completely missing" (*MC* 18)? I argue that, if we understand McGuckian's windows, we understand the Troubles; if we understand her speakers' fractured voices, we understand partition. If understand the poems, we understand the *meaning*—not the trappings—of the Troubles. And if these things are true, it cannot *also* be that McGuckian had "her back turned on history" before 1995 (Hufstader 4). How could she have, when political history placed itself directly, monumentally, in her life, in her home, through her "north" windows (Morris 71)? We must know how to read poetry of war in order to read this poet, which, more than anything else, means listening to and looking for its silences.

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~Part II: *Elaborate Circumlocutions: Outlining Silence, Reinventing Poetry*

Ut pictura poesis...
~Horace, Ars Poetica

In this chapter, I query Medbh McGuckian's work to ask why she expresses her truths in the highly slanted Dickinsonian manner that leaves the work open to such fraught reading, even as she desires to be understood. McGuckian's struggle is, at a certain level, the same as any poet's: locating the precise words to convey the thought behind the poem, and, in what arrangement, what meter and pitch (Ashbery 2). As Kate Daniels asks: "When was it ever simple to be a poet?" (398). True—but that already challenging work is far pricklier when the subject is extreme, traumatic history and there is little distance—temporally or geographically—from it. As
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the citizen of a partitionist state in conflict, McGuckian's location is edged by multifarious borders, literal and conceptual. And as the limits of language and form are stretched and blurred, the political history scrambled, the poems feel on the verge, too—of the bearable and the intolerably agonizing, the real and the unreal, the visible and the unseen, the witnessed and the (merely) dreamt. Irish colonial history has insured this poet's relationship to language will be characterized by Joycean fretting: she will "[fret] in the shadow" of English," as Stephen Dedalus did, but with a louder intensity (205). These struggles are palpable in the work of writers who modify language and form in process of addressing the political conflicts that define them. Authors who live and write from hermetical political locations, "small [places]" riddled with silences (Kincaid, *passim*), all betray this kind of anxiety in their work.

Phenomena of censorship and silencing attending political conflict—like the closeting of McGuckian prior to 1994—are critical to understanding the work. To address the Troubles is yet more difficult because the poet is closeted by both political realities of the nation-state *and* the sexual politics designating her invisible, passive and, most damningly, silent. As her many "meta-poems" remind us—that is, the "self-conscious poem[s] [in which] the poetic endeavor becomes its own subject" (Nieblyski 5)—the political dysfunctions surrounding the work of art predetermine an arranged-marriage to the nation. In "For a Young Matron" McGuckian writes:

> Why not forget this word,
> He asks. It's edgeless,
> Echoless, it is stretched so
> You cannot become its passenger. (*OBB* 41)

The poem comments on the defamiliarization of language: the work reads, looks and feels the way it does because of dynamics of silence and silencing surrounding it. Sustained conflict means the writing occurs not only within a crisis but *as* a crisis. It isn't simply that McGuckian wants to give the reader something they "can't have" or she can't give—words and a syntax that will carry them, like a passenger, toward the poem's truth—it is that the work is produced within the throes of a political crisis that gives birth in turn to crises of speech, language and form.

Language falters in the face of trauma and would seem inevitably to abominate, water-down, misstate or misrepresent that which demands voice and calls for testimony. If language fails at the frontier of sense, just before the necessary words are reached, it functions as both an incarceration and the only means by which the utterance might be liberated. What does the poet do who cleaves toward and away from language, pitching back and forth between the will to speak and the urge not to? How does an author bear witness to the history of war, occupation or genocide when, time and again, the needed signifier is absent and English seems a maelstrom offering little signifying potential? For poets from conflict zones, language seems powerless to meet its subject, to offer words, phrases and a grammar that can capture histories of flying petrol bombs, choruses of bin lids, burning homes, rampant internment and the atmosphere with only two registers: panic and grief. Fluency in English does not grant readers entry into the meanings McGuckian's poems hope to signify: they can be unfathomable in the extreme, conveying only traces of an idea, fragments of emotion, the thought or image under development arrested, followed swiftly by new meanings or new visuals that are likewise fractional or fussy.

Analyzing Heaney's poem "North," Joe Cleary explains that the "various modes of censorship, including self-censorship, have generated elaborate circumlocutions that signal positions on the partition question even when they appear to side-step that controversial topic altogether" (97). Manifestly a poet of her place, McGuckian's poetic utterance is always circuitous in this way: while the poems may "[appear] to side-step" partition and its aftermaths in Ireland, they do not—and, importantly, they never have. This notion of the elaborate circumlocutions that become necessary in the North elucidates McGuckian's work demonstrably and “lend[s] to these poems a quality of national stocktaking” (Mufti 225). Cleary reminds us of both the new dialects which must be conjured in situations of partition, war or genocide and how their meanings must be signaled through silences—by what goes *evidently* unsaid. The crisis comes, for the poet, in her endeavor to speak *through* a silencing bit, to express her truths through the “border bit” of a language that is at once mother tongue and colonial silencer (Heaney 1975 52). McGuckian’s poems speak with great profundity even as they often seem, in Heaney’s phrase, to “say nothing”—or at least nothing political (1975 53). What Satris says of Catherine Walsh is likewise true of McGuckian: “This quality of the unspoken… is not just the province of experimental writers, but of any poet who approaches language with curiosity about the very tool he or she is using, and finds that it cannot be compassed textually.” McGuckian does not confront the words with mere curiosity: her problem is that the (colonial) language necessary to her *poesis* also functions to close it down. Meena Alexander muses on writing poetry from hostile locations and outlines an issue central to McGuckian’s work. Alexander writes: “It seems to me that the lyric poem is a form of extreme silence which is protected from the world” (2003 284). She suggests here that poems written in times and places of war are constituted by speechlessness—are themselves a kind of silence. Alexander implies that language art, as speech act, can (also) constitute a non-speaking, can perform the dual functions of speaking *and* maintaining a silence. She also says, “[i]nside the shelter [of the lyric poem] we turn from the violence of history, to the lyric measures of poetry, so that we can see again, eyes wiped free of blood; so that we can hear again, the voices that allow us to be human” (2009 79).

This notion of poetry as silence is analogous to Devlin and McGuckian’s conceptualization of the dreamscape as haven from a world where bombs explode and windows shatter. McGuckian’s poetry enacts a double movement of speaking and not speaking, gestures continuously toward the unsaid or unsayable. She finds herself in the unfortunate and inexorable predicament outlined by Alexander: she must write through Heaney's "border bit," and, in a way that does not violate the proscriptions on speech (1975 52). Hers is a poetry of elaborate circumlocution where the work's function is not to make meaning—as language does or as poetry does in the conventional sense—rather, it is to elucidate the vicissitudes of Being in a location where the utterance necessary to "be" is forbidden. This speaking silence reflects the fundamental proviso of partition: a nihilistic place of internal paradox that never subsides or settles into a shape or the sense of an existing, constituted self. This specter—the unachieved utterance—is the poem's failing and its "fragment" and yet the only way to reach toward unspeakable truth. An instance of speech may indeed be precisely, as Alexander theorizes, the *withholding* of (another) speaking, or, as Theresa Hak Kyung Cha once expressed it, to "mimick the speaking. That might resemble speech" (3). Succumbing to the speechless half of the dialectic of trauma, composing unintelligible poetry, is a way of holding a silence even as it would appear to have been broken, performing a speech "mimicry," miming *and* mocking utterance through an articulated poem that does not directly signify.[118] Rather than expressly communicating "present" or "knowable" meanings and objects, the poems are contouring devices "outlin[ing] disregarded things" (Naipaul 6), silhouettes of silenced fragments of history that both obscure and limn, that *convey* through *veiling*. Poetry's circuitousness, observed by Cleary and Alexander, and performed by McGuckian, teaches us something important about the problem of self-contradiction in a small place elaborated in Chapter 3 on Anne Devlin.

Tethered to the unsaid and unspeakable, McGuckian inevitably writes "silent" poetry, speaks most invitingly and yet says "nothing." In "Hotel," McGuckian writes: "I would bestow on her a name / With a hundred meanings, all of them / Secret…" (*VR* 37). This unnamed daughter—a poem—is unlocatable and undecidable. Other lines read: “yes on its own can be a sign for silence, / Even from that all-too-inviting mouth” (Ibid). This poet responds to crises of place and language with a sustained attempt to devolve and restore English poetry. McGuckian’s language is like the title of a poem in *Marconi’s Cottage*, “A Different Same”: an English that is and is not English (49), or that, in Homi Bhabha’s sense, is “almost the same but not” *English* (89). And that is because all she has are “words that are the wrong ones” (*TSYII* 17): she is from Northern Ireland where places go by “wrong,” colonial names. Belfast is a city divided by walls “wrongly” named a “peace line.” In order to say something beautiful, McGuckian must say something ugly, to utter something truthful, she uses “wrong” words “wrongly,” makes them “right” by estranging and converting them. Blakeman maintains the poetry betrays an enthusiastic “grammatical [deviancy]” (62) and Wills that “words such as ‘like’ and ‘as’ take on an almost parodic role,” the poet uses “[s]trange shifting metaphors and [a] circular syntax” (17). Sered claims, too, that this poet “regard[s] the breakdown of language and all its attendant breaches as a source, rather than a limit” (273).

Far more than “a source,” deconstructing English is the starting point for the work. McGuckian explained something about the need to transmogrify and repurpose English in her *Comhrá* with Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill:

> …although it’s my mother tongue and my only way of communicating, I’m fighting with it all the time. …I’m saying get out of my country… Get out of me. …give me these O’Rathailles and all these [Irish] people I’ve no immediate intercourse with. And yet… I’m lying like a corpse under it all. And so every time I use a word I’m shoveling off, and maybe at the end of my life I’ll be writing in Irish. Myself. But, no … no, no, that would never happen but…”

And Nuala responds: "…But in an English that would be in Irish, a recreation of something," and McGuckian: "Yes, to reach an English that would be so purified of English that it would be Irish" (O'Connor 1995 605 - 06). This morbid image of the poet as corpse, buried under the "dirt" of a colonial language, explains much about the depth of her angst: beyond mere fretting, her voice, her truth lay dead and buried beneath the weight and the discourse of imperial history. It explains much about McGuckian's English, such as the meta-poem "Mantilla," where she refers to the verses as "resurrective" (*Shel* 119). McGuckian's struggle, we see, is to make English Irish—symbolically, that is, to decolonize the colonial language that constitutes her and is her first and only true language. Her work must therefore be "resurrective" (*Shel* 119) and her English must transcend *itself* in and as itself, function as resurrection and reconstitution of *Irish*.

McGuckian's are historical poems that, in Alexander's words, "catch the edginess of things, the sharp nervosity, the flaming, falling buildings" that define conflict zones (2003 284). Alexander says lyric poetry representing violence "pick[s] up the multitudinous cries of the world that we are" (2003 287). For her, capturing that kind of materiality entails devising an onomatopoeia of war through word, meter and sound:

> …in its rhythms the poem…can incorporate scansion of the actual, the broken steps, the pauses, the blunt silences, the brutal explosions. So that what is pieced together is a work that exists as an object in the world but also, in its fearful consonance, its shimmering stretch, allows the world entry. (2003 289)

Alexander's conception of a lyric of violence is a process of digging into and sculpting the language into a shape that can bear extreme content, that sounds like and can recollect the troubling circumstances it regards. McGuckian holds a similar view: her "system of signification" (O'Connor 1996 158) is a version of this "scansion of the actual." We see this in the torrential repetition and time signatures, the abundant use of enjambment and caesura, redundancies that become a kind of traumatic repetition or stammering: “My own first lesson was on the wrist, / The china cupboard of its tendons where / One cup arranged for every woman who ever loved / The stammerer, to stammer in her speech” (*MC* 48). All the repetition and interruption in the work—the multiple times Devlin repeats her story in the guises of several female protagonists, the profuse literal repetitions of words, colors and images in McGuckian’s—this is a poetic self-fashioning with a partitionist “stutter.”

Divining Alexander’s lyric “scansion of the actual” involves working against the grammar of the very language the art depends upon for its creation and employing the method Toni Morrison explains in her Nobel Lecture. McGuckian’s work intersects Alexander and Morrison’s literary and theoretical writing in important ways, especially in these women writers’ views of language, the role of the artist in colonial conditions and ideas about the political effects of “abusing” language. These writers provide theories of language and poetry that greatly illuminate the poetical “wordwork” of Medbh McGuckian (*BA* 11). In fact, McGuckian and Morrison use the same wording to signify their intrepid, avant-garde reinventions of English. The poet uses the term “wordwork” in “The Publisher of Inwardness”:

> I photograph asleep
> like the detachable soul of a child
> the final resting place of metals
>
> in the receiving waters,
> so mobile in soil,
> by my wordwork,
>
> by taking his lifetime
> into my mouth as a word
> to make a world. (*BA* 11)

The poem offers a beautiful metaphor for language and its reformative potential. Morrison also uses this neologism to describe a particular mode of using language that counters its linguistic deathliness and permits the emergence of the “new awarenesses” Ashbery and Heaney speak of (Ashbery 146). Just as McGuckian experiences her existence as buried beneath colonial English, according to Morrison, it is the language itself which must be resurrected. “Word work is sublime,” she says, “because it is generative” (2000 22). For her, this method will bring a dead, “set” thing back to life. Language is “dead” in the sense that it is “smitheried to sanction ignorance and preserve privilege” (14), “unyielding” and “content to admire its own paralysis,” “statist… censored and censoring,” and “[r]uthless in its policing duties,” in its potential to “[thwart] the intellect, [stall] conscience, [and] [suppress] human potential” (1994 13 - 14). It can function in opposition to the spirit of poetry as Heaney and Ashbery define it: “Unreceptive to interrogation, it cannot form or tolerate new ideas, shape other thoughts…” (Morrison 2000 14).

Morrison explains in the lecture that “the vitality of language lies in its ability to limn the actual, imagined and possible lives of its speakers, readers, writers” (20), using language in such a way that it “refuse[s] to encapsulate” or “[monumentalize],” “signal[s] deference to the uncapturability of the life it mourns,” and recognizes that its “force, its felicity is in its reach toward the ineffable” (20 - 21). “[U]nmolested language,” Morrison insists, “surges toward knowledge, not its destruction” (21). “Word work” is performative language—“interrogative,” “critical,” and “alternate” (Ibid). And poetry’s function is to expand and augment knowledge rather than limit or censor it. And the cornerstone of McGuckian’s poetics is that struggle to get language to function in the way Morrison, Heaney and Ashbery say it should: to be “generative” (Morrison 2000 22) and create “new awarenesses” (Ashbery 146) rather than codify or harness inspiration. Rather than seeing McGuckian’s work as hermetical or too difficult, we might consider Morrison's perspective, that it may be "full of vitamins" (2000 27). The poet has told us she must "reinvest language with meaning" (Sailer 116) because it "has been devitalized" (McCracken 161). In one of her most revealing interviews, McGuckian explains the issue another way. Speaking of English, she says: "…the language I have is not the ideal language. I would like a material that I could work with, like soil or leaves, or anything *to make a pattern that is not the words in themselves*. *Something that expresses my inability to speak…*" (Bohman 105 my emphasis). We see that the poet has endeavored to do precisely that: to express silence through, in and as language. Such a *poesis* is recognizable in the difficult, tentative poems "balance[d] on the brink of dysfunction" (O'Brien 247). McGuckian's innovative work is composed through a complex poetics involving, first and foremost, a reinvention of English and, secondly, an unusually heavy reliance on imagery and visuality. A generalized grammar of dysfunction, involving linguistic and visual syntaxes, characterizes the oeuvre. Through grammatical defamiliarization and an abnormally "visual" literary style, McGuckian has found a way to relate the politically, historically unspeakable in language. In what follows, I first look at McGuckian's "sublime" English and then analyze her pictorial poetics.

Indeed, the chief difficulty facing McGuckian's readers is the language play that is her constant ally. Yet another clue to the war in the poems, McGuckian's avant-gardism rests upon a self-conscious re-tooling of the English language. Though she has been thus engaged since 1982, it has only been in the time since the ceasefires that the poet has felt free to lay claim to it. The first law of her poetics is a linguistic defamiliarization whereby she misuses words, modifies and transposes meanings, employs frequent, often startling, non-sequiturs and disrupts voice and persona constantly by converting pronouns. Despite her status as an English language poet, McGuckian is "at war" with the lifeblood of her work:

> …The whole grammar of it is foreign to me. Some of the words repel me. Even a word like 'love' I know that it isn't the real word… It was the word I was taught, but it doesn't fit. It isn't adequate, none of the words are ever going to be adequate… All of the English language repels me. The only words that don't repel me are foreign words because I feel they give me a break from this other language which… gets on my nerves. (Bohman 98)

What does it mean to art in a language that "gets on [your] nerves"? McGuckian's words insinuate her as a postcolonial poet who is prisoner of a language she loves and hates. She continues: "…when I say the language repels me, I still love it. I love using it and I love being used by it. You're creating a music which is enjoyable to you and yet is relieving something" (Bohman 105). In a 1994 interview she reflected on this language predicament again: "There is no way I can express my experience in [English]" (Bohman 105). The position she occupies is, then, a tragic paradox: to make art with a material that rules out the possibility of its creation.

McGuckian responds to her paradoxical love-hate relationship with English by re-visioning the rules for and meanings of words, efforts stemming from the struggles with silencing and closetedness (discussed earlier); they are a response to the way colonialism constitutes her against the grain of her self. In order to persist in an otherwise "futile" endeavor, she must "modify, invert," and "make English sound like a foreign language to itself" (Bohman 105). McGuckian is obliged to alienate the language from itself because history has located her in a subject position that exiles her from herself. In estranging the colonial language, it becomes less alien to *her*: "I am listening in black and white / to what speaks to me in blue" (*TSYII* 103). The poet explains the political roots of this language trouble: "English is an imposed imperial language. I see it as a tyrannical force, the words themselves, so I take them, I squash them, I throw them back. There is an anger" (Morris 65). McGuckian chisels and shapes words so that they bend to her poetic will. "A Dream in Three Colours" reads: "I am velvet stroked the wrong way" (*OBB* 44), a textural metaphor figuring the love-hate relationship she has with English. Reverse brushed velvet is as much image of the self as of the difficulty of the poems.

The poet is alienated from herself; the poems are estranged from the language they "are." If the poet cannot speak but wishes (nevertheless) to speak about the conditions of speechlessness and silencing, she must imagine language anew, and craft a poetical Morse Code that reveals the "border bit" compressing and threatening the utterance (Heaney 1975 52). The incomprehensibility of some poems is the result of a political silencing that forces the poet to speak in code; this is one meaning of silent poetry. But there is much more to McGuckian's transformation of English. The poet reflects on how "[l]anguage has been devitalized…," and, as a consequence of this, "poetry must almost dismantle the letters" (McCracken 161), *almost* being the key word. Language must be deconstructed but not destroyed. She will use English in opposition to itself in every conceivable way short of curtailing its ability to function. She will devise a grammar of dysfunction in which "words [become] traps":

> …My words are traps
> Through which you pick your way
> From a damp March to an April date,
> Or a mid-August misstep; until enough winter
> Makes you throw your watch, the heartbeat
> Of everyone present, out into the snow. (*OBB* 59)

The words *look* as they should ("blue," "sleep," "dream," "snow") but do not *mean* what they should: the signified is changed, a secret the poet hopes her reader understands. The words look familiar but occupy the wrong *place* in an expected order—wrong *even* in poetry's syntactical machinations. The words appear to be those well known but they have been surreptitiously transposed: the signifier is used as another part of language, a noun as a verb, an adverb as a noun,[119] a pronoun as an adjective—again, modifications that are absurd even for poetry.

What results is silence rather than signification, or something between the two. In "View Without a Room," in which the title reverses subject and object, McGuckian elucidates another critical aspect of her general modification of English:

> …and it is
> Not downwards, from the light, but
> Slowly upwards, from the dark, before
> My five-minute dream can begin. (9)

Her strategy of compound defamiliarization re-codes the language such that what opposes snow is not warmth but the pleasure of blue (the color of "idealization, aspiration, [and] memory," O'Brien 245), that what opposes black is not white but the green of the garden, that what opposes speech is not silence but *not* having to listen so hard or so carefully or so long, that what opposes darkness is not light but the capacity for dreaming ("Dreaming is after I decline to sleep," *VR* 50). When one lives in a war zone, sleep is a haven. In dreams, one is radically free because protected from the conflict even if dreaming it. Devlin refers to the importance of the dreamscape for her, as has McGuckian: "…the dream is associated with freedom, and having your language back would be the greatest freedom, but this is an impossible dream. …Dreams were important, you're obsessed with it—with getting enough dreams so that you can survive the horror" (Bohman 99). When the poet speaks of sleeping and dreaming, we do well to read her through the surreal, twisted, traumatized lens of war. The opening lines of "Minus 18 Street" seem entirely new when we remember it: "I never loved you more / Than when I let you sleep another hour" (*OBB* 19). Now the dream of the poem is a sanctuary from the Troubles, and love means allowing the beloved a momentary "forgetting" of that all-encompassing circumstance.

In process of resurrecting one language inside another, we may recognize in McGuckian's work the divining and embodiment of Morrison's linguistic performativity and Alexander's "scansion of the actual" (2003 389). McGuckian's "words are traps": in reading the poem, the mind fills with a kind of television "snow," a buzzing fuzz rather than the clarity of insight the poem was "supposed" to provide (*OBB* 59). The fuzz effect is part of the poem's aura of silence. Her language is like the house in "Rose Shoes" which "turns / to control the seasons" (*BA* 27). This weird metaphor reminds us that we have to listen to her in the bizarre manner of a dwelling that shifts position in response to changes in the weather—as if a nation under siege turning to control an imperial overlord—in order that it is never too hot or too cold, that the wind will not make the cold more bitter and the sun is always best placed. Marjorie Perloff reminds us that McGuckian's work effectively demonstrates how "freed from their normal channels of reference, words can shed their natural and conventional associations" (quoted in Blakeman 70). In "Visiting Rainer Maria" she writes: "Because / The *it* of his translation may mean silence, / But the *she* of mine means Aphrodite" (*MC* 11). Liberated from "normal" reference, language becomes performative and we thus understand other confusing lines: from "Slips," "But I forget names, remembering them wrongly / Where they touch upon another name" (*TFM* 21), and "Pulsus Paradoxus" in which "a word has only an aroma of meaning" (*Shel* 40).

Aromas of meaning: change the syntax, change the line, change the "aroma" of a language. In McGuckian's poetic universe, language is airy, mutable, generative. The poet defamiliarizes words and syntax, enjambing the line when there is only one word remaining, following that word with a pause; the ideas and the time of the piece thus seem to dangle dangerously at a perimeter. Then there are McGuckian's intensely musical soundings: assonance, consonance and alliteration used like Plath, but more playfully and with greater recklessness, like

Ashbery. The poet combines words to create neologisms, as in the terms “wordwork,” “riddlesome” and “colourableness” (*Currach* 2, 19), “reloved” (*MC* 103), “doorless, [and] stepless” (*MC* 44), “resurrective” (*Shel* 119) and “overperfumed” (*VR* 41). In an interview, she recalls how Hopkins “got around” the fact that English lacked the signifiers he needed by “put[ting] many words together” to create new ones, like “’bird-speckled’ or ‘pearl-dropped’” (Bohman 99). McGuckian uses this strategy, we see, in words like “four-faced” (*Shel* 18) and “insect-loud,” a sound concept that regards the matter of quietude and only makes sense in a war zone. She says the neologism “Underloved,” for instance, means “underground as well as not loved enough or loved for being beneath,” loved because you are dead or inferior (Brandes 44).

Abetting, compounding all of these disturbances are McGuckian’s negative, halved and doubled objects. “Our half-unpeopled / Household” (*VR* 43) is a domicile in which half of the family members are *present*—it is “half peopled” too. This reference is a metaphor for the Northern statelet, an allegory for a partitioned nation where only half its citizens “exist” while the other half are “coffin-made bod[ies],” always already dying (*TSYII* 70). Many of McGuckian’s halves are symbolic of the oppressive state split down the middle, politically and religiously: half-Catholic, half-Protestant, half-Nationalist, half-Loyalist, the “religious divide” in “Poem Without Words” is not just religious, it is “religiously” maintained. Like a partitioned island, these signifiers are often hyphenated halves, as in the “half-world” (*TSYII* 26), “The Half-Marriage” (*TSYII* 39), “A forest of half-friends” (*OBB* 36), as well as “Half-killed on a seashore” (*OBB* 19) and “half-melted / in fire” (*TSYII* 52). Since there is almost always a hyphen between the word “half” and whatever it modifies, these are single objects that contradict themselves and, like a partitioned province, are always “split” in their signification. “Half-killed” is half alive, “half-melted” remains half frozen, “half-friends” are half enemies, etc. The words cannot stand on their own; in these hyphenated (read: partitionist, bordered) pairings, the poet's ideas resonate more effectively. We recognize bordered implications in the doubles as well—lines like "*Double* darkness of those *two* minutes" or "spider-enchanted / *double* star above a moon broad" from "English as a Foreign Language" (*TSYII* 70 – 71 my emphasis).

Each example functions as metaphor for Northern Irishness: *I am one, I am two, I am neither, I am both: I am (not) of Ireland.* This author considers nonsense a critical signifier of Irishness: "saying something nonsensical" that "means everything" is a characteristically Irish way of speaking (Morris 65). This nonsense is recognizable across the work, as in the line "Light is wider than time" from "Time-Words" (*CL* 106)—a poem in which the title itself is an absurd pairing—or "a pond without an echo" (*Shel* 17) and "a wide-eaved colour beyond anything" (*OBB* 25). Most poets use bizarre subject/verb and adjective/noun pairings, but McGuckian overwhelms readers by constructing them as long chains, as in "The Long Engagement" (*TFM* 18) or "Slips" (*TFM* 21). "Head of a Woman" is tricky in this way too with lines like: "The tendon of the day is strained…" or "It was / A face that grew under his hand, / His hand waits to give the movement / Completing my head…" (*OBB* 56). (It is only in thinking of the speaker of this poem as the subject of a painting, and the time of the poem as a painting-in-progress, that "Head of a Woman" begins to make sense.) Additionally, McGuckian turns the subject uncanny through strange adjective and verb combinations from which meaning has been displaced through incongruous juxtaposition. We can make sense of something that sounds nonsensical but actually isn't, such as "the blue of my / Weather fights the cloud of your voice" (*MC* 25). (Read: My optimism struggles against your negativity.) But comprehending other examples is more challenging: for example, there is Ireland as "the field-size / soul of a scientist" (*OBB* 36), or, McGuckian's cherished metaphor of the moon rendered as "the satiny moons of honesty" (*TFM*

31), the very Greek and Yeatsian "goat's milk stars" (*TFM* 34), or "moral pleats" (*VR* 42) and "signs of overtalk / On the laprobe that covered my knees" (*MC* 56). What does it mean to speak of "A rope of female imagery," a braid, yes, but one that "presses / A below-zero nerve, till her hair springs / In twenty parallel partings, / The buds of black infibulated roses" (*MC* 48). "Parallel parting" is yet another figure of the post-1921 nation, but how do we make sense of "I came out of the photograph / With that year underneath this dream" and "Pierced by a sea as abstract and tough / As the infant around the next corner" (*MC* 49). Or, "a thin sunshine, a night within a night" (*MC* 69)? One way would be to apply the rules of mathematics and deduce that two nights equal one daytime but, then, what does *that* mean?

Traps indeed. For McGuckian, stripping language down involves "trapping" the reader in defamiliarized, perplexing aromas of meaning. Thus shorn of linguistic value, perhaps English can devolve to some primal form—"Like an emerald uncreating itself" (*MC* 106)—the way frost or snow returns to water under the right conditions. In "Visiting Rainer Maria" she writes:

> He said he was just leaving
> As I was just arriving, in my blue
> Smock, yesterday, without meaning to.
> Though this first sentence would
> Have been equally suitable
> For the last, for a poem made
> From a kitchen conversation.
>
> The air was the way it always
> Is in a room; books lay in ruins
> On the snow-cold bed… (*MC* 10)

Notably, the speaker enters this poem in a painter's smock; I come back to this later. Important for now is that in arriving at that "snow-cold bed," we begin to make out how McGuckian's "wordwork" is also "snow work." "Leaving" here can mean exiting but she often uses this verb as a pun, referring to the "snow" of falling leaves: to "leave" meaning "to let your leaves fall," as in: “I remove my hand / And order it to leave” (*MC* 82). This might mean: I order my hand to exit writing, and, I take my hand “out” and order it to write, to let words fall like leaves from a tree. The poet’s words fall like snow or leaves, and McGuckian’s “wordwork” is thus “snow work”: melting down a cold, calcified language to become an English one can rightly call “A Different Same,” one that becomes the Irish McGuckian lost through empire.

If the poet views language the way Morrison does—as oppressively frozen, difficult as stone to manipulate—her desire may be to dig through its layers and uncover the historical palimpsest that constitutes it, the way an archaeologist reforests a deforested cultural history. In “Miss Twelves” McGuckian writes: “…It seemed / To me that nothing had been dusted / Since our house was built” (*VR* 55). A thick layer of dust covers the house, suggesting deathliness, disuse or neglect. It immediately prompts the thought of wiping away this layer, clearing it like a blanket of snow. If snow (frozen water) is a metaphor for language, then it intimates an English frozen and fossilized, that must “thaw” if it is to be usable. The language has “died” and must be resurrected in order to “speak” the truths of the poet. This desire is rooted in the situation of the art: the nation, the history and the writer’s location in them. In the poem dedicated to Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill, “Springwater,” snow unquestionably symbolizes language: “…Till her throat whitens / And ovarian fountains // Gush out of openings / They have made for themselves” (*MC* 20 - 21). Here we have a frozen language filled with the snow of silence: the water thaws, the words flow—in fact they “gush.” Or, consider this section of McGuckian’s “Black Note Study”:

> …The mouth I have always felt as world
> is itself already a fraction
> in a family of sounds, a sleep nest
> of frozen music, not into the winter.
>
> Such a violent return
> to your unfrozen self, it is still possible
> to change the names of your addressless

villages. (*CL* 39)

Language is a frozen music, even in summer—frozen music, selves, names. The piece is reminiscent of Friel's *Translations* in terms of finding true names buried under colonial translations. This problem is imagined here as a a freezing solved by unfreezing, like melting snow. In "The Soldiers of Year II," title poem of the 2002 collection, McGuckian writes:

> Clad in air, the ring on your foot
> stands a glass theme in my being:
>
> a stained-glass window half-melted
> in fire. I struggle to prolong
> its death agony, my birth-language,
> that sees in armour the perfect layette. (52)

Not only does the poem symbolize the transmutation of something set and dried, it also connects that process directly *to* language. In this brilliantly disturbing moment, McGuckian offers yet another metaphor for the idea of "wordwork": "half-melting" language is a compulsory transformation because, as the final lines imply, an Irish-person born into English is overburdened, born into "war"—with the self, with the nation, with history.

If only one could effectively destabilize and reconstitute English, one might find a buried Irish. "The She-Eagles," another meta-poem, deliberates on the need to liquefy a hardened language in order to get the medium to do its proper and politically necessary work. The first four stanzas present the more direct content of the final four in allegorical form through the "she-eagles," a flock of "War-bred birds." She writes:

> A breeze with a developed voice in it
> utters smoothly,
> speaks to its unshaded,
> snowy self.
>
> They take the words up
> as from lips,
> pouring off at intervals

> the outer rings of blood
> in the manner of snow freezing blue
> on a war Christmas.
>
> But the English words refuse to breathe
> and two spread hands
> make the cell-learned Irish
> a semi-jail at prayer.
>
> There's a white silk gap
> in the given language
> where close-packed graves
> and their slow-waved sleep
> set in glimpsed bronze the sister words
> so willed they become a food. (*Shel* 84 – 5)

This stunning movement—the butchering of language and draining of its blood—is yet one more metaphorization of the linguistic meltdown theorized. The poet is symbolized by the she-eagles, these "half tender wolves." Her approach to language is as a scavenger that butchers a dead language. McGuckian's speaker finds in this "breathless" language "silk gap[s]," graves marked with dead "sister words" the speaker and the she-eagles "feed" on. In search of food, they "take the words up" out of the water and, as a beast is slaughtered, pour off the "outer rings of blood." Here, the blood symbolizes the violence the poet inflicts on language through the "wordwork" that will bring it back from the dead and the poet's voice to aural, speaking life.

"The She-Eagles" is a stunning, brutal piece. In this and other meta-poems, McGuckian contemplates her relationship to and desire to transform language. In the movements of this piece, the two major aspects of the poetics meet: the wordwork she does and the importance of the images those defamiliarized words conjure. I want to consider the second part now, looking at how the poems are linguistically unhinged and the form distorted, how the collective of signifiers comprising each poem is not actually offered as a literary work that "means" but as a visual work that "pictures." The meaning of Horace's adage, "ut pictura poesis" or "as is painting, so is poetry," is renewed when set against this oeuvre, its meaning no longer regards how literary art is viewed or whether and to what extent these sister arts function mimetically. Rather, in her work, we encounter an art for which the idea that a painting is "as" a poem, or a poem "as" a painting, is a literal concept: McGuckian's work reaches the limits of language and then stretches them such that one medium (the literary) bends toward another (the visual). She offers a linguistic reformation that uses language in such a way that it may function as a surreal "painting-in-words." The poet fashions herself a "trans-genre" artist or "painter-poet." In opening up the language, so as to transpose and indeed liquefy a set language. This way, it might "speak" the poem visually. McGuckian English is utterly defamiliarized and "ungrammared," becoming a strangely surreal "Irish-English" used to draw absurd visual constellations.

This is, in fact, the most precise exemplification possible for the meaning of the Northern Irish territory. And the inscrutable answer to the question of why this difficult poet is yet so profoundly beloved is located, I argue, in the affect and in a kind of subconscious awareness, on the part of readers, of the profundity of her representation as regards the true, lived significance of the partition of Ireland. That, as Gerry Adams recently said, partition is "awful wound"[120] in the nation is said indirectly by McGuckian: she says, through her art, look and see how I persist in beating my head against the wall of a colonial language I cannot escape in order to speak of that which cannot and yet must be spoken and so I turn to magic within the poesis—a magic that might transform one language (colonial) into another (Irish) or transmogrify words and pen to paint and brush, alas. …This is poetry in the impossible nation.

McGuckian has always been regarded as a maker of luminous, elegant images. What distinguishes her work is the fact that it has a fuller existence in images than in what the words (literally) signify. A poem may indeed be, as McGuckian wrote, "a picture without a frame, a frame / Without a picture" (*MC* 25). Rather than merely a postcolonial, feminist or postmodern poet, she is one for whom there is no idea of greater consequence than the issue cited earlier: "I would like a material that I could work with, like soil or leaves, or anything to make a *pattern* that is not the words in themselves. Something that expresses my inability to speak…" (Bohman 105, my italics). McGuckian requires an embodied language that, as suggested in the lines quoted earlier, is "so mobile in soil, / by my wordwork..." (*BA* 11). The lines allegorize a resurrection: something dead and buried has started to show signs of life from underground, and the "wordwork" will raise it up, effectuate a rebirth of the language. Each poem is as "a leaf detaching itself / from the narrative 'tree'" which "attempts to seal its meaning" anew (*CL* 34). Again, another meaning of the verb to leave is offered. But this is not only a commentary on the lack of coherence ("narrative") in poetry; it is about a literary form whose language diverges from the official (national, historical) "narrative" and becomes generative in Morrison's sense. To write, McGuckian pushes the boundaries of form, reinvents them, creating new borders that better match her (political, historical) reality. Sirr says that "[w]hat we get in McGuckian's best work is an extraordinarily suggestive imagination operating on the language in ways that extend our notion of what a poem can do" (470). Yes, and what language can do. As she says in "Venus and the Sea": "I was shorn / Of all words, and hummed him with my eyes / And mouth" (81).

This movement toward the aural and the visual in language is a response to the silencing "bit" McGuckian, Heaney and their fellow citizens experience (Heaney 1975 52). I can't help but see this as the swarm in a poem like "Dividing the Political Temperature": "you are fragile as paper or fossilised seaweed," or "…a mirror-script of loan words I can finger / into small rooms" (*CL* 82 – 83), or where she imagines using language to "finger paint." Earlier, in the same poem:

> Like two stones in Tuscan water, we intersect
> without meeting, without the water breaking;

> its little wounds open and close like a mouth
> to feed, over a furrowed throat; like a transparent
> vase into the single deep black: like the opposite
> of water… (82)

Water breaking, wounds, hunger, furrowed throats, the opposite of water—snow perhaps? Or maybe language? A shapeless wall—a wall that melted down into the materials out of which it was constructed, like snow returning to its primordial form. If we conceive of a prose-poem, then we ought to be able to imagine a picture-poem, one that comes together as a *meaningful* image rather than a collection of signifiers. So, we think of Mallarmé and Stein, here, of Breton and the other Surrealists, of Adnan's use of blank space as moments of speechless searching or dumbfounded shock. We likewise recall Satris' analysis of Catherine Walsh, where she speaks of "silence in typography," of white space as moments of silence. Where this comparative thinking starts to fizzle, however, is when we recall that McGuckian *doesn't* play with white-space or format in the way these poets do. Much like Heaney and Boland's, the form and shape of the poem are controlled, even unsurprising. The language is conventionally smooth and elegant, "heightened" in the manner of Aristotle. This poet only dropped the convention of capitalizing the first word of each verse in 1995. We understand that when McGuckian speaks of the desire to make a "pattern" with words, she does not mean drawing a *visual configuration* on the page. And neither does she imply shattering the traditional pictorial arrangements of English poems—in terms of line and stanza length or spacing. Her aspiration is to draw conceptual images and make the poem unusually reliant on them. In reading the poem, the visuals come together more vividly, more profoundly while the content remains foggy or is downright foiled. Readers cannot rely on the meanings of words and must look elsewhere for the poem's truth. The visuals "trump" the signification and in this way the poet strains and shakes the boundaries of the art of poetry.

McGuckian works on the verge, then, of the literary-linguistic and the pictorial. When Sirr says her work is "characterized by an unexpected connectedness between images" (464), I think he means that, while it is true that imagery always plays an important role in understanding poetry, McGuckian writes in such a way that the sway of the image is exponentially heightened, exaggerated in a way that stretches the form and blurs the distinction between the literary and the visual. The "literary brinkmanship" discussed earlier is evident in a trans-genre literary art whereby, from within a linguistic palette, McGuckian desires to radically push the form toward another, transpose linguistic units as color, force them to act as those a painter creates with color and line. The poet will make a "Poem Without Words," unhinged from its linguistic moorings, and dare us to see a collection of words as a "wordless" picture. McGuckian wants to produce image-work but finds herself "regrettably" bound to words: "I am listening in black and white / to what speaks to me in blue" (*TSYII* 103). Her struggle with language is reminiscent of Joyce's desire to write an anti-novel or Beckett's aim to create anti-dramatic theatre; his transition from English to French is perhaps born of the very language anxiety McGuckian faces, though solved differently. Political history and the concomitant loadedness of all forms of expression cause these Irish authors to struggle against the genres and forms they are obligated to. English is, in McGuckian's words, "an imposed imperial language" (Morris 65): the tragic noose of the artist of political conflict who wishes to render war, occupation and genocide in artistic form is that the language that frees *also* constitutes a bondage threatening its fulfillment, bits and frees the voice.

As with the consumption of visual art, in this oeuvre "[the] sibilance and reversed repetition of 'sounds' and 'shapes' evokes a feeling or sensation rather than any clear meaning or narrative" (Blakeman 68). Sirr reads the addressee of "Aviary" and "Painter and Poet" as a painter (468): in McGuckian's images, "A different purpose is being served: the images are not there to elucidate but to detonate and resonate in all their weird energy" (464). Likewise, Daniels urges us to see her work not as "difficult" but as "akin to Dickinson's stripping-down of sentence structure, her radical displacements for the sake of *a new way of seeing*" (396, my emphasis). A new way of seeing *poetry,* that is. Blakeman further notes how McGuckian's "metaphors and similes generally propel the poem even deeper into a web of linguistic complexity" (64), a complexity that is, in my view, largely image-based. Peggy O'Brien maintains that color is an aspect of her work that actually "offers itself" to "decoding" (244), her unique achievement being "to transform the manifold obscurity of subjective experience by separating it into discrete meanings, colors" (245). In some poems, O'Brien says, this poet "speaks mainly through the medium of color and pictorial art" (Ibid). Poetical aims like these are apparent in pieces like "A Different Same" where through "her gaze" the speaker sees "A ceiling of translucent planes / With paintings of fruit in each" (*MC* 49), the "retouching" of "Pain Tells You What to Wear" (*VR* 41) and the opening stanza of "Marconi's Cottage" in which words dry like paint:

> Small and watchful as a lighthouse,
> A pure clear place of no particular childhood,
> It is as if the sea had spoken in you
> And then the words had dried. (*MC* 103)

The speaking begins fluid, wet. Like paint, it dries, perhaps in memory, or in the outcomes and byways of the spoken words, or in their work as discourse, as agency. "A Test Winter" opens *as* a painting: "Spring skims the gardens with his wintry eyes, / Their electric-blue centres stained / with a little pale blood / So they look brown in photographs" and continues by setting the speaker in a frame, the way a painter frames his work: "Framed in a doorway, she makes herself / A serving-hatch, one hip upswept / And jutted out" (*MC* 48). Sometimes, the poem is imagined as a photograph. "Angel's Eye View of the Bridge of Sighs," yet another window poem, reads:

> This photograph has a much more gentle feel,

> the weather anything but serene, the green leaves
> even higher, wavering along one edge.
>
> Some unevenness in the sky, the last four days
> of September meant that all the sun could do
> was make the image of the window as visible as it ever would be. (*BA* 60)

McGuckian forces the poem into silence by using a heavily visual language where imagery trumps content. The poem “The Man With Two Women”[121] is positively overwhelmed by an crushing metaphor of a piano suspended above the body of the speaker:

> He entered as he
> would his own home
> Placing himself
> there in the square
> Like a monument…
> …he turned his yard-wide
> Shoulders as if
> harnessed, like a
> Grand piano,
> Suspended upside-
> Down, over
> my head…. (*MC* 14 – 15)

All this is a way of asking: do you see that the poet is silent even as she uses words, that hers is a speaking that only “resemble[s] speech” (Cha 3)?

Dali melted time; McGuckian melts language. What readers are effectively given is color, perspective, a word-picture—“A Still Life of Eggs,” one of several poems titled as a painting. In this poem, writing is figured as a “coloring” process:

> And if the weather could fling its reds,
> greens, blues, and purples across table-tops
> (thought upon the unthinking) the blue might stay
> a river or a lake, the fraying edges fog. (*CL* 33)

The tabletop is metaphor for a painter’s canvas and a poet’s writing pad. The weather is not only a god “painting” the colors of nature in the world but a poet with a pen writing words that visualize them. (If language could act like color, it might be possible for some Irish essence, the pre-colonial, untainted truth of us, to be captured.) As such, the poems are "viewed" more than (precisely) "thought," as implied in a later line of this piece: "Like the beginning of a painting you have been / so watched..." (Ibid). Political circumstances being indistinguishable from the art there produced, the poet is watched by a colonial state and the poem is "watched" (rather than "read") by a reader. Because this poet has "been / so watched," she is crippled by a language that panoptically controls her, rather than her it. Her only option is to transform it: force English to act as paint does, transcend its linguistic constitution and become color—radically "fling its reds," like flinging dirt in emerging from the grave of a colonial language.

If poems are studied like paintings they are certainly elaborate circumlocutions, speaking the silence of Northern Ireland pictorially, showing the place blanketed by an invisible muting snowfall. In this, the poetry teaches much about the true meaning of war and the location where that theatre played out. (That is, a warzone is a place of endless winter where snow falls endlessly.) Always in a process of renewing and revitatlizing English, McGuckian sees herself as a poet who is, sadly, "talk-dried" and works—in a reference both to the medium itself and to the nation—in a "*drawing*-room where all the *colours* are wrong" (*MC* 39, my italics), where:

> …A stone
> From my soul marks the first day
> Of change: the desk, that is a table,
> At which I am sewing gold stars
> Into a skirt… (*MC* 30)

Another metaphor for the *poesis*: composing the poem is like affixing gold stars to cloth. Instead of signifying through meaning, perhaps a poem can make a pattern that glitters like stars set against the background of a cloth canvas. Here, we see the effort to use language as a "material" that *visually* conveys an experience of muteness: because it is visual, the language does not "speak," it "shines" like gold stars, it is "seen" as clothing is seen, it is worn as clothing is worn that veils the truth of the self, the silent truth of poem. Poetry can be a "sign" language, then, whose words hint at meanings rather than signifying through the linguistic value of the signifier.

In her poem for Anne Devlin, McGuckian writes: "I have lived on a war-footing and slept / On the blue revolution of my sword" (*MC* 59). The poetry is McGuckian's "blue revolution," the sword her pen—one she must imagine as a paintbrush, its ink as paint, in order to write. Let us consider that, just as Morrison writes from the image to the words in her narrative work (1998 192), McGuckian enters the poem *as* a painter, clad in a Picasso-esque "blue / Smock" (*MC* 10), intent on "painting" rather than "writing" a literary art. McGuckian's work is "blue," like Picasso's, whose art informs her own. "The Seed-Picture" is an early poem that announces itself as a painting in the opening line: "This is my portrait of Joanna—" (*TFM* 28). Although poems named as paintings are everywhere: "Impressionist House" in *Shelmalier*, "Drawing in Red Chalk at a Death Sale" in *Captain Lavender*, "Black Raven on Cream-Coloured Background" in *The Soldiers of Year II* or "Landscape: Noon" in *The Currach Requires No Harbours.* Peter Denman recognizes this trend too, referring to these as McGuckian's "painterly poems" (172). Among these is "Self-Portrait in the Act of Painting a Self-Portrait" which reads:

> The striped gown she lifts
> without the painting looking
> is the edgeless gunboat surface
> on which we all exist. (*Shel* 65)

I agree with Murphy, who says "the answer" to McGuckian's "poetic DNA pattern" is "in the image" (86). This poet wishes to create a literary work experienced more the way a painting is—to make a series of interconnected images rather than specifically derive meaning through the significations of words. Let the words draw a series of pictures, then ask: what do they mean? In "Catching Geese," another meta-poem, this notion of paint-writing is likewise observable:

> …Even the sun should be as different

> As my soon-to-be famous blue style from
> My letter-perfect rose, a period of wood
> Marbelized to promise stone—hot as the close
> Of summer's complete scheme in lace-trimmed
> White, which, if I wanted to write about,
> All I had to do to hold the sentence still
> Was paint it on the circumference of a plate,
> And every sound of you crying could be heard. (*VR* 50)

Here not only does McGuckian return to Dickinson's "circumference," she uses it to transmogrify language from sentences and words into a picture drawn along the rim of a plate.

McGuckian's language is always running away from itself. Other poets live "in" the language with greater ease. The words carry meaning for them and have the "value" they gain in relation to one another in the Saussurian sense the content plays the key role. Not so with McGuckian. In the way her words struggle against themselves, we understand why she asserts, in "The Finder has Become the Seeker," that she doesn't use language:

> You jangle the keys of *the language*
> *you are not using, your understanding*
> *of sunlight is more language than that,*
> *your outcast sounds scatter their fluid carpet*.
>
> Your mouth works beyond desolation and glass.
> Your mask draws nearer to the other mask.
> Your tongue, layered with air, presses a triple breath.
> Your thinking fingers possess the acoustic earth:
> oh do not heal, dip your traveling eye
> the length of my so tightly conceived journey! (*CL* 41, my emphasis)

"[O]utcast sounds," "fluid carpet," "desolation and glass," "the other mask," "a tongue, layered with air," "a triple breath," all are answers to why, when McGuckian writes a poem, it is as if each letter is a drop of paint on the tip of a brush. She feels constrained to write in English and at the same time senses herself ever on the verge of failure. This is a "death" particular to poets. Many write in a space like Anzaldúa's *la frontera*: between survival and death (*passim*). The language functions as credible, critical, object lesson: in order to succeed, she must imagine that the lead tip is a paint drop, that she has the freedom of the brush stroke, that she can abstractly express her truths in English. When the context out of which the poet writes is as encumbered as Ireland and her Troubles, reading that poet will be equally so—especially when, as with Celan, she refuses to speak anything less than (her) human truth in all its ferocious sublimity.

McGuckian's experience of speechlessness is registered, too, in the way "Lime Trees in Winter, Retouched" imagines itself a painting. Here is a poem that would be a painting, if only it could. The poem's voice is the voice of a non-existent image. It speaks of a painting titled "Lime Trees in Winter" that doubles as the title of the poem and fashions a "self"—the image is "Retouched," in other words, by its own hand:

> Black is my continuum, my black wheat ripens
> From peach black, vine black, to the resins
> Of darkness. That is how good a picture
> Should be, oil abetting, light disturbing,
> Hoisted between two windows like the soul
> Of modesty, constantly straightening against them.
>
> But I am agitated less by glass or apertures
> Than moisture trapped like a stain or white
> Secretion, an old swab I was confident
> Had broken down to paste, or was ingrained
> In the next meconium, my intent and cherished waste. (*VR* 49)

In this clever, erotic poem, we see the trans-genre space where forms overlap in the space occupied by a painting "hoisted between two windows," the front and back of the frame. Likewise evident is the paradoxical need for an impossible poetic structure that will never culminate: the painting is "constantly straightening against" the forms and frames it finds itself nestled between. McGuckian "constantly straightens against" and between word and image as she does ontologically between and against English and Irish. The painting's waste has gotten caught inside its body, much as words never uttered remain inside the poet's body and mind. Mary O'Connor argues that the metaphor of "intent and cherished waste" in this poem "constitutes intentional containment" (1996 164). I think we may read this containment as the compression of the poet within the language she struggles against and between.

McGuckian's intense visuality is observable in still more ways. Not only does she use a poetics of doubling in defamiliarizing the language, she also employs the device to build images. The poet often presents allied images or amasses them as cumulative groups and figurative palimpsests. Not only does she "fold [words] into sentences like puff pastry layers" (McGuckian in interview with Staples), but images too, layering them so that they convene and unfold as contingent, bordered, amalgamated metaphors. These image doubles conveys the doubleness natural to colonialism and which defines the poet's small partitioned place. They can be found across the work: "the antiworld / that surrounds the world" (*BA* 13), "the double-skinned / water three times" (*Currach* 6), "gold over powdered shell gold" (Ibid 3). In "Poem Without Words," McGuckian works with an overabundance of doubles in a piece about impossible language:

> …as architectural forms
> migrated across the religious divide,
>
> their cool tensions
> and tinted responses
> like *waterborne pieces of sea*.
>
> My *purse* as full of patience
> as Christ's open *mouth*
> whose blue we both loved
> rose up and fell
>
> *in the pictured moon with white edge,*
> *old picture of the new spring*
> ring with a moorish setting
> or a heathenish dress. (*BA* 18)

Here we have two pictures, two mouths and an image of waterborne water. As with the hyphenated neologisms and halves discussed, each major image is paired with another. There is this constant movement in the work to create juxtaposition and analogue, as if images and ideas are always inadequate or incomplete on their own. Likewise, the third stanza of “Eye With Clouds,” yet another window image, reads: “The thin iron shutters / loosed in an inner verdant space / between a second set of lower walls / where a second angel hovered” (*BA* 49). Shutters are already a “stuttering” image (of many slats lined up in “repetition”) but these are “loosed” between additional doubles, a wall and an angel.

The dramatic closing stanza of “Minus 18 Street” also uses the image of the sky repetitively, but in a new way each time so that it is constantly recalibrated: “Sky of blue water, blue-water sky, / I sleep with the dubious kiss / Of my sky-blue portfolio” (*OBB* 19). A variation on this scheme is seen in “The Finder has Become the Seeker,” where McGuckian writes: “You desire to exist through me; I want to disappear exhausted in you” (*CL* 41). The poem that opens *Shelmalier*, “Script for an Unchanging Voice,” offers a flurry of doubles of different kinds that interlock to represent casualties of colonialism: history and language. Two stanzas read:

> Here is a stone with a stone’s mouth inside,
> a shell in which a lighter shell has died,
>
> one with a honey bullet in its heart,
> one that has lain full length from the start…. (16)

A stone with a stone’s mouth, a shell (which is a mouth) containing yet another shell (another mouth) as well as a bullet. These image doubles are one more way McGuckian signifies partition. She lives in a small place made up of two distinct worlds. Their distinctiveness is reified by a physical wall. These locations are abutted by another double: the island split into two worlds, likewise reified by the geopolitical border that created them. This partitioned, island world is proximate to another that it distinctly opposes: the island of England. And so, the poet writes: “a stone with a stone’s mouth inside, / a shell in which a lighter shell has died.”

Along with these pictorial doubles, McGuckian often presents images in swift succession, collectives of figures that "proliferate with startling speed" (Batten 2002 125) and "frightening fertility and velocity, like a time-compressed film of a flower blooming" (O'Brien 241). Welch sees the "accumulation of images, often a string of Frida Kahlo-esque grotesqueries" is McGuckian's "signature" (17). "The Cutting-Out Room" is a fine example of the tactic:

> I had on my youngest, speedwell blouse—
> The sleeves are full at the top,
> Caught in at the elbow, then
> Full again—like a belt slackened
> Around your head, or being emptied
>
> From bottle to bottle. (*MC* 33)

The blouse, belt and bottles are each used to "speak" of the same issue or idea. In a way, the poem *is* this image of the blouse that is then likened to a belt and to the bottles. Satris also observes this device, which she describes as "concentric similes." McGuckian often follows one simile by "three alternatives, given without any disjunctive or preference between them" (Blakeman 62). She "strands" the metaphor without closing it off, and, not only do readers have to imagine a single, first picture, they must re-conceive of it repetitively in combination with two or three or four additional images. As we read across and down the line, we are overcome: through this knitting and grafting, multiple figures form a bizarre surreal meta-image. In order to derive *any* meaning, we must picture several sculpted similes in their singularity *and* as part of a mass, must think about the import of each individually and as a collective, all the while hoping not to have misread the *literal* meanings of words and the poet's radical grammar.

We see an example of this aspect of McGuckian's craft in "A Small Piece of Wood":

> On my left two rivers flowed
> Together without mingling,
> As though someone had unrolled
> Two different ribbons side by side,

> Or three-quarters of the sky, allowed
> To touch, but not to mix, with winter. (*MC* 30)

Here we are presented with two rivers, two "different" ribbons, a sky which touches them, and a season. The images are a challenge because they are incongruity and occur hastily and without development, one to the next. As Wills suggests, the "seeming chaos of the images … seems impossible to fix to a particular referent" (17). McGuckian writes "with a lap child's sense of chairs" (*VR* 44): the stuttering images that appear in quick succession are like the layering of two laps on a chair. This interplay of compound images overwhelms the reader, an effect Satris attributes to the complications of language as it is approached by this poet: "[m]aking up for [her] discomfort with English means…overwhelming the reader with strange metaphors and similes." Even in these few lines from "The Liontamer" there is much to grapple with visually:

> …she aged twenty years
> In the month, steep and ungrateful as the soil
> You drain around you like a tree? *You wipe*
> *A cup and then kiss where her signature*
> *Disappears from the paper*… (*MC* 24, my italics)

There is a strange way in which this final movement, with the kiss and the cup, brings to mind lipstick on a cup that is wiped away. The image is of a kind of finger print or signature which is used to identify an individual. Still, it is unclear precisely how to conceive of this sequence. The first stanza of "The Rising Out," from *Venus and the Rain*, is similarly intricate:

> My dream sister has gone into my blood
> To kill the poet in me before Easter. Such
> A tender visit, when I move my palaces,
> The roots of my shadow almost split in two,
> Like the heartbeat of my own child, a little
> Blue crocus in the middle of a book, or the hesitant
> Beginning of a song I knew, a stone-song
> Too small for me, awaiting a drier music. (36)

The central movement of the poem—the splitting or doubling of the speaker—already, in only this first stanza (and there are three *subsequent* stanzas) is speedily refracted through *five* succeeding metaphors: relocating palaces, a split shadow, a child's heartbeat which is in turn translated as a crocus in a book, and finally, the "hesitant / beginning of a song I knew." From the start, we are overwhelmed, struggling through a mass of ideas, emotions and pictures.

McGuckian's work with images is a poetics of contingency where, as with her frequent use of hyphenation, they cannot stand on their own but must be linked. "The Wake Sofa" reads:

> I have not spoken words with roots
> since I saw you;
> the light around my eyes
> from your transparent grass
> is the tightness around everyone's lips… (*CL* 30)

Here we have four distinct figures to wrestle with: eyes, the light around them, grass and lips. Does she mean to say that people's silence is what inspires her art, that "that famous Northern reticence" (Heaney 1975 53) is "the light around [her] eyes"? Whichever it is, and whatever the poem means, it comes together as a trans-image in four parts: we must understand the relationships between the eyes, the light, the grass and the tight lips which seem to be, with Heaney's speaker, bitted and speechless. We have to picture these visuals together and work through what they mean as a collective, in order to derive any insight. The words, themselves, do not "speak" as profoundly as the image-group does. Later in the poem, she writes:

> …In the turn of your book a cloud
> formed in my neck and laid my arm
> on your shoulder like some twisted necklace.
> The sea, as I go out of the door,
> Laps like a redness over the smoke-grey floor,
> a river under a river, underflowing. (Ibid)

Here, we have another doubled river, more doubled floors and a complex cooperative of figures that we must struggle through, as individual metaphors and as the collective they form.

Sirr recognizes the poetic I elaborate, saying that McGuckian's images often "proceed by unlikely analogy" and "[drift] down into a cloudy stream of succeeding, and seceding, conceits" such that "[by] the time one gets to the end of the chain the original referent no longer matters as much as it might in other poets" (464). In "English as a Foreign Language," McGuckian writes:

> War washing
> through one of the more merciful bays:
> cavity modelled as though by the use
> of our own coffin-made body; season
> richest in impossibilities, room espousing
> only the least refrangible, least refracted rays,
> unregistered, branded in the cheek,
> unraveling in its eye-treated way
> the empty sleeves of the day, the khaki
> accidents of the sky. (Ibid)

In this poem, she writes through repetition in negatives: refrangible and refracted are the same, but any meaning she desires to put across is nonetheless extremely difficult to surmise. The following stanza continues the use of long, obscure words and the "nonsense" of the previous:

> House without chimney or the grasp
> of the earth, all stove, all wilderness,
> all auscultation and maceration,
> centripetal and centrifugal
> as sea-robbed land: roped-off chamber
> last lain in by Swift in his suit
> of Irish poplin, glebely riding
> the common strand towards Howth. (Ibid)

The subject of this poem is chaotically raveled through a series of similes in painfully defamiliarized language. The chain overwhelms, and we feel as though we are listening to a gibberish that, though incoherent, remains urgent, continually calling our attention again.

So, words would be pictures: weird, tangled, absurd, surrealist, a poem would be a painting, and a poet would be Picasso's daughter. In much the way we read a painting, the feverish proliferation of figures in the poems forces us to accept their "fluid interdependence"

(O'Brien 242). What we have in this trans-genre poetics of simultaneity is a literary art in which images, meanings and voices do not stand on their own, where there is always at least a "twoness" if not a "three-" or "fourness." McGuckian's "twoness" is partitionist: a single idea is divided by a hyphen, the border between individual signifiers the poet has placed together inseparably because they are like the "halves" of Ireland on either side of the partition, or the halves of Belfast on either side of the peace line.[122] Her twoness is complicated, however, by the memory of previous nation-state arrangements. We see this in a poem like "A Dream in Three Colours" which offers a complex weave of visual objects:

> Every hour the voices of nouns
> Wind me up from their scattered rooms,
> Where they sit for years, unable to meet,
> Like pearls that have lost their clasp,
>
> Or boards snapped by sea-water
> That slither toward a shore… (*OBB* 44)

In this excerpt, McGuckian uses the scattered remnants of a wood vessel "snapped" by ocean waves, and pearls (which have their existence first in water) which likewise scatter when the string used to form the necklace breaks. Before the break, these organic materials form an object that is knowable and has a body, that can be seen and held in the way nouns comprise the concrete objects of a poem. Just as the wood and the pearls were gathered in an earlier time (to create the boat and the necklace), words are gathered from scattered areas of the poet's mind to form a poem. Formerly unable to "meet," now the nouns intersect. The "line" of the poem is like the string through the pearl necklace, and the intact necklace in turn a metaphor for the piece. In this meta-poem are three analogous metaphors: nouns which gather into verses; pearls which form into a necklace; wood planks that tether to make a boat or raft. These simultaneous symbols "speak" together. McGuckian is almost never satisfied with the pearls alone; she must put them together with the wood shards in order to speak about her subject, the pearls that symbolize the language. The meaning is represented contiguously multiple times: she moves without pause or development from the pearls to the boards. We must find the threads that connect the objects through a spatialized simultaneity: whatever they may mean, that meaning is built through an artifice of contingent images that signify as a collective. In a few small lines this collection of objects—the pearls, the wood, the nouns—blossom into a weighty poignant complex of images.

In this way, the poet presents an elaborate circumlocution: she reveals in this poem how she cannot travel straight like an arrow but must follow a crooked path, must pull together a collection of objects in order to convey an indirect idea or truth. In this way, she tells us over and over that whatever is to be said cannot; hence, in order to "say" we must construct this circuitous convolution. Medbh McGuckian creates absurd, abstract images as *modus operandi*. The poem is a picture crafted with the words of "A Different Same" English. Given her poetical aims, that McGuckian enters "Visiting Rainer Maria" in a painter's smock is completely appropriate. She turns to surreal imagery as a primary mode in order to speak of and think about the experiences of life amid war. She has divined a contemporary form of surrealist poetry that leaves readers and critics at a loss to understand or explain the work. Reading McGuckian requires a constant awareness of her exaggerated reliance on visuals as a response to a powerlessness to rely on language to carry her postmodern, postcolonial, political truths. The visual poem is a response to postcoloniality, geopolitics and gender. English is, we must remember, an "imposed imperial language" (Morris 65), and like Joyce, but more intensely, she "frets" in it.[123] The defamiliarized language (grammar, syntax, signification), the image doubles, the chain-linked images and metaphors, and stuttering similes, these are not just artful, they are forms of fretting that signify the silences constitutive of the North. A strange syntax and absurd objects speak not merely of the grotesque, traumatizing realities of a world at war, they signal its speechlessness, a lack within the symbolic gesture, a loss of the capacity for declaration, mimesis, testimony. Through her image-work, we see how writing in a time and place of conflict means for her what it does for Alexander: a layering of "place… on place to make a palimpsest of sense" (2003 284). McGuckian's visual conundrums are a node through which her "inability to speak" is rendered sensible. She is a poet who feels herself bitted and unable to speak, even in her mother tongue.

A poem can be a hiding place, then, a form of self-fashioning in times of violence and partitioned places: the self protected, invisible and, above all, silent. McGuckian has given us the "house" she hides behind—a poem. In leaving Tatyana Tolstoy, Bobby Sands and Gerry Adams out of their tributes, McGuckian has left her "protagonists" unnamed. This secrecy allows the figure a universality as important to her as it was to Joyce. Just as surrealist painters took the image out of visual syntax in order to "art" truthfully in response to political injustices of their day, this poet "violates" and aggressively restructures language and form. In so doing, she founds a new English poem, a new Irish national poem, and a novel poetics for conveying the vicissitudes of the small, partitioned place. Some critics make grand claims about McGuckian's importance to English language poetry at large; and they are valid claims, by and large. Daniels maintains that McGuckian has divined a "unique conception of the poem" (395) and "linguistic brinkmanship" (399), as "one of the most challenging and unusual poetic oeuvres being produced in English today" (393). Sailer echoes Daniels, comparing McGuckian to Dickinson, designating her oeuvre one that "rebukes all that has come before it" (112). O'Neill regards her induction as a writer a crucial moment in Irish literary history, the publication of her first collection "a signal event in modern Irish poetry" (66). Positioning her as a poet "liberating the language of Northern Ireland from its old agonies," Daniels further asserts that "[if] there is a more audacious and important poetry being written today, I have not read it" (398).

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~Part III: *"double-stranded" "ghost words": Medbh McGuckian's Poetry of Silence*

McGuckian's "wordwork"—the complex defamiliarized language, the urgent eclipsing of the piece by its own imagery—is, ultimately, a complex poetics of silence. "The Dream-Language of Fergus" explains much about the poetics. In this meta-poem, McGuckian characterizes herself as a "threader / Of double-stranded words" (*OBB* 57). McGuckian's words are indeed stranded as puns with multiple "strands" of signification; they are stranded as Ireland is a "partitioned" landmass encircled by water; they are "double-stranded" in that they are of *Northern* Ireland, the marooned part of a larger "strand" and "whole" nation (Ibid), a partitioned partial-nation where, as she put it, words have "an Irish and an English strain in them" (Sailer 125). But though the portrayal has piqued the interest of critics, the partitionist anxieties underpinning it have gone mostly unnoticed. Docherty's depiction of its meaning works however as a perfect description of the condition of partition: "Reality in her writing constantly slips away… ….leaving a reader stranded in flight from multivalent realities" (209).

"Double-stranded" is used also in the formalist, linguistic sense of separating one grammatical element from all the others, stranding one word in the way "whose" is visually stranded in the line "Of double-stranded words, whose" (Ibid). "Stranding" the language from itself, stranding the imagery across a pictorial palimpsest: these are apt depictions of what Medbh McGuckian does as a "visual" artist who works with words. In this meta-poem, she addresses her method of chipping away at the rock that is the language, one that both bits her "tongue" and gives it life: "Your tongue has spent the night / In its dim sack as the shape of your
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foot / In its cave…” (*OBB* 57). The tongue that speaks lives in its sack the way feet are housed by shoes and the mind sheltered by dreams. Just as feet are dumb, this tongue is dumb: it speaks, like shoes, a cloddish gibberish that is nonsensical because a disremembered and colonized, “dream-language.” And then:

> So Latin sleeps, they say in Russian speech,
> So one river inserted into another
> Becomes a leaping, glistening, splashed
> And scattered alphabet
> Jutting out from the voice… (Ibid)

A dead, dream-language leaps, glistens, splashes, is scattered invisibly throughout a spoken, living language. Like the unconscious, it is the language “returned to” in dreams. And, like McGuckian’s poetry, it makes itself *felt* more than precisely *understood*:

> Till what began as a dog’s bark
> Ends with bronze, what began
> With honey ends with ice;
> As if an aeroplane in full flight
> Launched a second plane,
> The sky is stabbed by their exits
> And the mistaken meaning of each. (Ibid)

These material transformations (from a “bark” to “bronze,” from “honey” to “ice”) metaphorize both the evolution of language over time into a calcified, dead force as well as the work McGuckian does with English in order to make it carry and sing her truths. The surreal “dream language” is detectable in its “barks” and “honey,” which are transformed in time into “bronze” and “ice”: hard, pretty, sparkling things, now, set in stone, hard as rock. Although the language is thus housed, it is stood in juxtaposition to the language in which it has its fledgling existence. Ultimately, both languages are misunderstood; each one produces “mistaken meanings.”

A dream-language is a buried language, one that no longer makes sense, has no grammatical “shape,” is forgotten everywhere but in dreams. This issue brings us back to where we started: the problem of silencing, the way, as Veena Das says, language "is struck dumb" in the situation of war or other political conflict (184). In *Critical Events,* Das offers a compelling theory of silence and terror that helps explain McGuckian's dream language and the general character of her work. For Das, the creator of the character Toba Tek Singh, Saadat Hasan Manto, is the "only writer" of India's partition "who could convey the reality" of that moment.[124] His "characters and events," she claims, "bore the stamp of reality because they broke the unstated norms of plausibility, either by breaking all rules of syntax in the presentation, or by privileging the speech of mad men, or by registering the event from an off-centre position" (184). All this could have been said of McGuckian. Das refers to his nonsensical poetics as a "mutilation of language" that "testifies to an essential truth about the annihilating violence and terror that people experienced during those riots, namely that *as human understanding gives way, language is struck dumb*" (184, my emphasis). That mutilation applies not only to the words but also to the form, genre and style of the work. Das suggests further that "[a] relapse into a dumb condition is not only a sign of this period but is also a part of the terror itself… that violence annihilates language, that terror cannot be brought into the realm of the utterable" (Ibid).

If McGuckian uses a "dream" English to compose, then hers is a surrealist literature of dreams. Quoting Koselleck, Das writes, "we are compelled to rely not on articulate linguistic accounts…but on the dreams of terrorized victims *to understand what really happened*" (189, my italics). In other words, the best way to tell the history of war, occupation and genocide is to follow Freud and study the dreams of those affected by it. Das asks, "If… pain destroys one's capacity to communicate, how can it ever be brought into the sphere of public articulation?" (194) The conclusion she draws, albeit tentatively, is that "if a dumb condition is the signature of this terror, then *it is the silences that need to addressed*" (191, my emphasis). When McGuckian told Kimberly Bohman, “You shut off each moment of terror that we live through” (99), I hear her speaking of what Das theorizes: the experience of being “struck dumb” in response to trauma which may perhaps leads to a poetry of silence. Over time, the poet has found a way to articulate the “shut off” response and express her “inability to speak” (Bohman 105), a “dream” poetics realized in a modified English that reaches toward the visual, threatening to burst its own linguistic seams, twisting itself into bizarre, surreal pictures, thereby arriving at a “queer” place *between* the visual, the aural, the temporal and the linguistic.

Poetry is always already a literary place “between” writing, music and visual art. It stands, conceptually, at the intersection of several arts points. The work of McGuckian exaggerates its natural between-ness as it takes shape as a trans-genre literary art by leaning the work toward one intersectional direction: the diagrammatic. Instead of describing a mass of corpses she draws “word-pictures” of “dumplings”: “The first poem that I ever wrote that I thought was a poem was about one of the bombs. There was an image in it of the corpses being covered like dumplings… I think it was the beginning of doing that, of softening the blows, and covering things to shield myself from really cracking up” (Ibid). And so a way of speaking about the political dead is specifically to cover them up by calling them dumplings, by calling Gerry Adams “Mercury” and giving no reference that would signal him as subject.

One might ask, doesn’t all poetry enact this reach toward the visual given its common reliance on the image? Yes, it does. But the character and scope of this poet’s visuality is unique, so pronounced as to force us to see, understand and even “hear” the silence surrounding and resonating through the work. As McGuckian said in “Head of a Woman,” to her,

> …the dawn,
> Seeking the shared spirals of my mouth
> *Listens like a lost colour*
> And has not broken. (*OBB* 56)

Her muse offers *color* when what the poet needs are *words*. This scenario conveys the experience of language being “struck dumb”: McGuckian has placed herself, as a poet, squarely in the noose that constrains authors of political conflict: she recognizes the rupture haunting the work which causes muse and poet to mis-communicate, makes the poet mis-hear critical illuminations. Muse and poet speak different languages: precisely, because, as Das expressed it, “violence annihilates language” and “terror cannot be brought into the realm of the utterable” (184).

This poem and Das’s theory offer the same critical insight, one McGuckian articulated in “Condition Three”: “I am listening in black and white / to what speaks to me in blue” (*TSYII* 103). The language itself, the whole enterprise, is in this way “double-stranded”: it occupies a surreal place between the linguistic and the visual that draws inspiration from a source it cannot hear or follow. “Moon Script,” written fourteen years after “The Dream Language of Fergus,” regards the very same idea. “Moon Script” is a more petite lyric, clearer and more evolved in terms of craft. Through yet another series of doubles, the poem imagines an allegorical “snowed field.” It is a painting in words of a split, stranded Ireland, a vision of the island as seen in “that other time”: the dark wilderness of the dreamscape which is the time-space in which this poet works. Hers is a “moon” script, a night language spoken, heard only in the dream:

> The garden incarnates as if doubled;
> the wind settles in the two gardens;
> the hushed garden ushers in that other time.
>
> In the space between one shore and another,
> one powder-blue, lemon-breasted bird
> is barely moving water on a snowed field:
>
> a border searching night’s inner vision
> for ghost words after trees fall. (*BA* 68)

Ireland is figured as two hypothetical gardens. McGuckian's political location *is* two places and so "incarnates as if doubled": a partitioned nation is always "*as if* doubled," a place haunted by another time and space, the time before 1921 and the island's failed "doubling." The critical image in this poem is that of a bird which flies over the island and is reflected in a mirror of melting snow. Given the year of the poem's composition and McGuckian's extended endeavor to meltdown English so that it might become Irish, the significance of the snow as melting is critical. The bird is compared to a searchlight that crosses the water the way a spotlight scans the sky in search of fugitives. But it is the border *itself* that searches—a "border searching" evokes a checkpoint with searchlights and a person under search by guards—rather than pointing the searchlight toward the sky, the border tips it downward so that it lights up the "snowed field" of the nation, a place that thereby comes into focus as a prison yard. We must recall that this is the place of "the night-sights of sniper and marksman," one where, Heaney tells us, it was "just routine" to be driving along and "get a glimpse of a couple of youths with hands on their heads being frisked on the far side of the road" (2002 44 – 45).

Rather than probing for youthful would-be convicts or escapees, here the light—the reflection on melting snow of a flying bird—is searching for *language*: the bird is trying to locate silent, buried "ghost words." What are ghost words? Is it the stillborn language of "whatever you say, you say nothing"? Or dead words that cannot be seen or heard but are merely sensed, spectral, sighted fleetingly? A language that provides words which can be used to speak of an unrecognized, buried tragedy that occurred in the nation symbolized by the "as if doubled," "snowed field" of this poem? Whatever way we read it, the poet offers the image of a search for and specter of a lifeless language: a national poet seeks the dead, dream words with which she might speak of the nation from which she is exiled and in which she yet resides. Is this not what a Northern Irish poet is always *"doing"* with words: trying to reinvent them within a (colonial) frame until that search is thoroughly exhausted? The author represented in McGuckian's meta-poems works "in the dark" using "ghost words" to mark the machinations of an always doubled, stranded inspiration that is indirect, refracted through series of mirrors, colored and structured by colonial geopolitics. Her muse is a "border" and what might be found there. The question for her always: how is the poet to speak in *English* of what it has meant to be *of* Ireland *in* Belfast since 1968? Is it possible to express such a truth in that language or any language? As discussed in Chapter One, Padraig Pearse proclaimed: "I am of Ireland." As we know, this is not something Devlin or McGuckian can say, *sans* satire or fretting: from their Northern, partitionist perspective, Pearse used a "sun script" which has never been available to them because of partition. "I *am of* Ireland": it is like a god saying "I am who am." McGuckian means to convey something about how that kind of posture isn't possible for her as a poet of her small place.

In the same way the North is a spectral presence north-east of the living, "free" Ireland, all this poet has is a phantom script of "ghost words" that write dreams: inscrutable poems that only appear to have been written in English and only appear to "mean" what they "say." In fact, the poems were written in Irish, the only Irish possible for her: the dream language McGuckian has searched and "won" *inside*, and appearing as, English. Of course, it is in the dreamscape where English becomes Irish and that "moon script" McGuckian's "mother tongue." I can hardly think of a poetical design more closely aligned with André Breton's surrealism than the idea that the language "spoken" in and through dreams is the language of art. For all intents and purposes, that *is* surrealism. And McGuckian's "double-stranded-ness" is just one more method for making such a surrealist work of art. Literature representing terror, like Manto and McGuckian's, will often be so; some critics do in fact draw comparisons to surrealism in their analyses of

McGuckian. Kate Daniels refers to her as a “wielder of nonlinear, surrealistic pieces” (387) and Satris alludes to “the surreal nature of her poetry, living as it does in the world of disconnected dreams.” O’Neill, for his part, speaks of McGuckian’s “unexpected, always challenging… surreal imagery” as a “poetic signature” (65) and Thomas Docherty, though the idea is undeveloped, proposes that she works “through the contortions of surrealism” (193).

Readers have historically experienced much difficulty understanding McGuckian’s work, then, because each poem is a dream narrative composed, appropriately, in the language of the unconscious. Although this work of art has its existence as a constellation of words, it is used nevertheless to conjure pictures of silence: to make poems that imitate the soundless visuality of dreams, of snowfalls, of a life lived in the midst of a war. And why does she go to the dreamscape to find her language and craft her art? Because it is as it was for Nietzsche and Breton, a dream language of the *collective, political* unconscious. For Nietzsche this language was music,[125] for Breton it was Freud’s unconscious,[126] for McGuckian it is the language of dreams wherein a silenced nation’s “inability to speak” is revealed in thousands of poems that, though they “speak,” manage nevertheless to “say nothing.”

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Chapter Five:

Broken Nations, Troubled Histories, Anxious Authors:

Specter and Doubt in Anna Burns' *No Bones*

> *History is what hurts.*
> ~Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious
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> *I ask for a history that deliberately makes visible, within the very structure of its narrative forms, its own repressive strategies and practices... The politics of despair will require of such history that it lay bare to its readers the reasons why such a predicament is necessarily inescapable. This is a history that will attempt the impossible: to look toward its own death by tracing that which resists and escapes the best human effort at translation across cultural and other semiotic systems, so that the world may once again be imagined as radically heterogeneous.*
> ~Dipesh Chakrabarty, Provincializing Europe

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Catholic, working-class and a resident of Ardoyne—West Belfast stronghold of the Provisional IRA and bastion of Catholic dissent—Anna Burns was born in 1962 in the political turmoil of post-1950's Northern Ireland. Her debut work, *No Bones* (2001), recounts the era of civil strife and state violence that goes by the moniker of "the Troubles." Burns' debut work was highly acclaimed, winning the Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize and becoming a finalist for the coveted Orange Prize. She has since published a second novel, *Little Constructions* (2007), which, though not as directly historical as the first, returns to many of its themes, especially the violence and enmity that continue to plague her homeland. In this chapter, I review and theorize Burns' historical, experimental first novel. Like Anne Devlin and Medbh McGuckian, Burns documents the conflicted history of Belfast in *No Bones* from the palette of personal memory and, with McGuckian, turns to imagery as a key narrative mode. Reminiscent of Devlin's
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characters, Amelia Lovett and her friends wait*:* for the Troubles to end, for nation and home to reconsolidate, for a semblance of normalcy to return or simply to feel real hunger and full sentience undiluted by alcohol or the adrenaline high of violent experience. It is tragically ironic when readers realize, at about the fourth or fifth installment, that the political turmoil with which the story commences is to become the defining fact of her characters' lives.

Burns' work bears traces of other Irish novelists—though I am hesitant to name anyone, save Samuel Beckett, without reserve. As a novelist, she has indeed met and greeted Beckett most authentically. We sense Beckett's presence in the "slapstick" hilarity, the wildly absurd developments, the preposterous, mad dreamscapes, and the bizarre tragicomic episodes that occur in landscapes of loss and madness, disaster and forgetting. We observe the absurdity, alienation and existentialism typical of Beckett, as well as Franz Kafka, and there is also Beckett's "intuitive" nonsense, his gift for interior and exterior monologue, his use of the fragment, his idiosyncratically Irish humor—ridiculous with a sad, "black" core. Judith Grossman describes Burns' humor as "grimly absurdist" (11), and, as with Beckett, Nancy Pearl points to her ironic incidents that are at once grotesquely frightening and absolutely comical (176). James Joyce presides like a specter over all of Irish fiction, and indeed all literary production. But his sway is more evident in the work of a Belfast novelist like Robert McLiam Wilson, perhaps, and may be detectable in the weird syntax and absurd diction of Eoin McNamee. We sense Bernard MacLaverty, Edna O'Brien and William Trevor's presences in the backgrounds of *Resurrection Man* and works such as Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark* or Colum McCann's "Everything in this Country Must," but not so much in Burns' writing. Like most Irish writers, Burns' influences also come from outside the island. Resonances of storytellers like Sylvia Plath, Toni Morrison, Salman Rushdie and Franz Kafka are noticeable.

For Gerry Smyth, it would be the deep self-reflexivity observable in Burns' novel that unequivocally marks her an Irish novelist.[127] She betrays a Beckettian "skepticism towards the novel" (Smyth 41); and, like McNamee's, her "book is taking issue with itself and its relation to the culture that has generated it" (McCarthy 140). One of the most distinctive literary renderings of the Troubles, a characteristic of *No Bones* that locates it squarely in Burns' troubled landscape is her continuation of the celebrated tradition of the bildungsroman. Like most, Burns' coming-of-age story develops as an epic novel of nation and tribe and, as with Joyce and Deane's equivalent novels,[128] includes the obligatory schoolroom narrative—more than one—and its tell-tale staple: the despotic teacher, allegory of colonial authority, who commits unthinkable injustices against a grossly victimized student population. In the literary landscape of the island, Burns' elementary school installments, and her style overall, are distinguished by copious, gratuitous violence and a bald-faced critique that minces no words and waters nothing down. Other than McNamee's *Resurrection Man,* almost no novel, from either side of the border, is as "flamboyantly replete" (Haslam 205) with brutality. Bloody incidents mark every chapter, save the last, as Burns' novel, too, becomes the "Baudrillardian inferno" observable in McNamee's (Haslam 206). As Judith Grossman reflects, "Although Burns' book… has been compared to Roddy Doyle's portrayals of Irish families…, it opens up a far deeper level of social hell" (10). Indeed this is so: through stories of Amelia Lovett, her friends and family, *No Bones* "[traces] what the culture of violence does to… families… in an innovative, literary way" (McEvoy 29).

Innovative is understatement as applied to this novel: anecdotal and absurd, autobiographical and historical, monstrously real—not merely a bildungsroman and novel of the nation, *No Bones* constitutes a compelling wartime testimonial that chronicles the "bloody shitty life" of war (Burns 269). Its twenty-three installments accumulate as a series of violent vignettes interrupted by a handful of madness chapters, and bookended, at the opening and close, by episodes of play. Four madness chapters (paired two and two) partition the narrative at ten-year intervals and at the verge of new decades. All in all, we have violence, madness and very little play. Burns' text features an *enfant terrible*, Amelia Lovett, as chief narrator and witness, who, as in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India,* tells a story of partition from a child's perspective. Unlike Sidhwa's book, however, Amelia recalls the Troubles phenomenologically, rather than from the adult perspective of looking back at her childhood. This is different from Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Deane's *Reading in the Dark*, too, where history's orator is an adult recalling a childhood entrenched in partition's effects. Respective episodes are told not from the time of composition but in a remembered, larger than life immediacy. Burns abandons herself to the chaos of the Troubles by reliving it, transcribing flashbacks in an epistemological narrative blur.

This author blazes a bizarre trail through the uncanny "Araby" that is Belfast, toeing the line between the partial nation and the orphaned statelet as between the two nation-less worlds unhappily co-habitating there as (in turn) between the colonizer and the colonized, the feminine and the masculine, the mad and the sane. Readers come to see, over time, how the nucleus of war—brutality—defines nation, place, self, history, the whole. A veritable disaster zone between 1969 and '94, violence is the continuous present in the "small place" (Kincaid, *passim*) from which the protagonist hails and finally escapes in 1989. Burns' Belfast is a Northern Irish "Araby" with cabaret shows involving bloodletting and torture where homes, stores and pubs are carnival booths staging terrifying magic tricks and other spectacular demonstrations of "blood and horror" (Benjamin 38).[129] The city is portrayed, mostly by Amelia, who is seven years of age when the novel begins, as an outlandish "place full of hate" (155), peopled by "beings that did everything for badness" (88). Thus, Vincent's imaginary friend Mr. Hunch, is "freezing with the hatred he felt for everybody" (170). Belfast is a carnival of blood such that everywhere Amelia goes—home, school, in the street, at the pub, at work—she encounters violence. Such events characterize every sphere of daily life: as her friend Vincent reflects: "The next thing that happened was that he walked into murder" (186). Minute by minute, therefore, the populace is on alert, fearing the next explosion or military-style assassination or middle of the night raid. The terror-stricken madness of war programs the characters to hate and harm indiscriminately—children, mothers, fathers, everyone. The book is peopled by mad militants for whom brutality is an addictive drug: mothers love children by teaching them the rules of combat, social codes in which saving face ranks above saving their lives;[130] partners love one another only when blood has been spilled and death looms and fathers' lives are a continuous, too-exhilarating game of Russian roulette, a spectacular peek-a-boo with death where jobs, families and lovers together make up the backdrop for their breathtaking feats of brawn—performances that, were readers unaware of their true-to-life character, they might consider examples of fabulism.[131]

While Burns' narrative is in various ways ambiguous, violence is one theme about which she is absolutely clear. She sets her protagonist against the cruel Belfast ordinary. Reflecting on her sister's flippant attitude toward it, Amelia thinks that "[s]ome people are terrible. Lizzie and I were different in our approach to how we lived our lives. It amazed me constantly the things that never worried her. Violence in her world seemed some sort of vitamin-taking experience. It tended to be the opposite in mine" (89 – 90). Every chapter but two is told from the perspective of the protagonist, Burns' autobiographical Stephen Dedalus figure. But there are two other characters who guide us through the Troubles, Jamesey and Vincent. Aside from "No Bones, 1991 – 1992" and "Triggers, 1991," the long, double narratives recounted by these terrorized male characters are the novel's most historically evocative. In the second installment, "An

Apparently Motiveless Crime, 1969 – 1971," the unforgettable James Tone takes us through the frenetic first years of the Troubles. Jamesey grew up in London and, after joining the British army, finds himself stationed in Belfast as part of Operation Banner.[132] Wolfe Tone, the leader of the "failed" 1798 rising, is reincarnated in him, a half-Irish half-Anglo, half-Catholic half-Protestant British soldier. This "partitioned" Irish "mulatto" is a hybrid figure who merges place and body and stands in the frantically liminal space between partition, colonialism and nationalism. In him, Burns unites her two radically split communities, a characterization that exemplifies David Lloyd's notion of an "adulteration." Through Jamesey, she vividly illustrates an "insist[ence]… on a deliberate stylization of… inauthenticity, a stylization of the hybrid status of the colonized subject as of the colonized culture, their internal adulteration" (Lloyd 110). Rather than staging this hybrid heterogloss through the more common inter-rival romance between a Catholic and a Protestant,[133] communal alterity is collapsed and state polities reunified[134] as self and hostile other cohabitate in one brutalized body. It is not a little ironic that this figure—beaten by his mad British father, neglected by his dead Irish mother, later finding himself enlisted by the British state to defend the nearest reaches of its empire in Ireland—feels he is going "home" in crossing the colonial border from England to Ireland and is then murdered not long after by members of the Belfast family whose hostile arms he runs toward.

Jamesey's chapter highlights not only the futility and folly of systemic violence but also Burns' view of the foolhardy way contemporary Belfast citizens relate to each other as to Irish history. He is killed off in an illustrative statement of Burns' disgust with the sectarianism defining Northern Irish life. Developing this thread, Vincent, Burns' third narrator, is the quintessential "mad" Irishman of colonial discourse and most sympathetic of the Troubles' victims. While nearly every character in the world of this novel is mad, Vincent, like Jamesey, stands apart and is of special importance. Fleeing a world too terrible to know, Vincent lives more and more in his imagination as a means of coping and (ultimately) surviving. He is a flat character in the sense that he performs a straightforward function as an indisputably duped sufferer, and yet Burns manages to imbue him with depth and complexity. Vincent is repository for much of her own anger and disgust regarding the history she barely survived. This remarkable character is debilitated, not only by the problem of bloated church authority endemic to Ireland (and familiar from Joyce), but also through high politics: colonialism, Republican anti-colonial nationalism, and Loyalist pro-colonial unionism. Vincent is clobbered, beaten, wracked and wrangled by the worst of war's effects: he is neglected and abandoned by a mother who locks him into his room, leaving scraps of food and a slop bucket; he is clobbered, too, by his imaginary friend, Mr. Hunch, appropriately, sanely invented as a replacement for both his mad missing mother and his absent because murdered father; and, he is clobbered by his community, who, in spite of their own raging psychoses, regard him as the "village idiot."

In writing *No Bones*, Burns said that she was thinking about the absurd situation of "how hard it is for … people to let go of pain, …of something that is familiar, even if it is killing them" (Gee). She sees the book and its history as "one, big giant fight: voices out there, voices in here. The fact so many died reflects the reality of that particular period of time. It's both about a specific historical period and about people and human relationships and how violence can emerge and be perpetuated and passed on" (Gee). On page 68 she writes: "Mrs. Lavery was massively disappointed but decided to settle for what she could get. Of course she didn't want a reconciliation—she wanted mayhem and war and blood and dead bodies…" But, though the aggression constantly on display may overwhelm the reader, it never overwhelms the narrative. As one review notes, Burns "never once winces or loses control of her material" (Kirkus

Reviews). In spite of copious commendations—rave reviews, awards and nominations—and, despite its publication by an imprint as substantial as Norton, thus far, *No Bones* has garnered virtually no scholarly response.[135] Despite Judith Grossman's glowing assessment of the book and claim that it "demands to be read" (12), that call has been largely unheard by scholars. Leaving aside Postcolonial and Gender Studies scholars, as well as those interested in partition, Psychoanalysis or Trauma Studies, even Irish Studies scholars are not treating this book. There are reviews, some of which do skirt the edges of literary criticism.[136] The paucity of academic treatment may stem from the fact that the window onto the statelet is exceedingly small, and a first novel by any Northern writer will have trouble commanding attention. There are critical responses to McNamee and McLiam Wilson's more orderly and palatable novels—but only a handful. In addition, working with texts of the North typically requires engaging that ancient conflict of which all and sundry have grown tired; as the location of a more celebratory twentieth-century history, novels of the Republic may have an automatic first claim on scholars.

Another factor in the dearth of response, however, is the overwhelming violence and grotesquerie of this novel, the fact that Burns chose to tell the story of the Troubles with such honesty, realist grit and animation. *No Bones* exemplifies the difficulty of representing violent histories, particularly when the author witnessed or experienced the moment. When asked "How far does *No Bones* mirror your own experience of growing up in Belfast?," Burns replied "[c]losely," which is clearly not the answer readers wish to hear (Gee) as "…one desperately hopes this novel is not autobiographical" (Perkins 123). Indeed, we neither want to "know" what Anna Burns tells us, and neither do we want to believe it. Additionally, Burns largely eschews the nationalism compulsory for her half of Belfast's political community. She is a Catholic and that that also means Nationalist in Northern Ireland goes, in a word, without saying. Burns may have suffered for the fact that her reach beyond the paradigm is met by her craft: she is genuinely ready to imagine a new, multi-national, pluralist transnation, and to dwell there, leaving all Irish nationalism in the past. Most contemporary Irish women writers—McGuckian and Devlin, O'Brien and Reid, Boland, Ni Dhomhnaill and Ni Dhuibhne—are senior to her and came of age before or during the Troubles. Burns was a "war child," as Günter Grass casts himself, a wee girl in August, '69—a fact her novel underscores. Her very different experience of her nation—by which (because of the partition) we mean nations—calls her to transcend it in terms of her political imagination, vision and poetics. In her life, the nation was always already eclipsed by war, trauma, political and communal violence and the accompanying pervasive loss. Burns never lived in an Ireland where it was possible to experience any semblance of "home": for her, Anzaldúa's *la frontera* is not conceivable or occupiable because the location metamorphosed into a warzone when she was six years of age and remained so until age thirty-one. By then, like Anne Devlin, Burns had already "defected" to the colonial mainland. Burns and her work reside in a de-nationalized zone. Naturally, then, it is her work that has not been "heard" in Ireland—not by readers, not by critics, not by Irish Studies scholars.

Burns' middling surrealist politics of location encompasses the most patent transnationalism I have yet to observe in Irish letters. We see this in her unflinchingly brutal portrayal of a brutal world, her deployment of the grotesque as primary narrative mode and the book's visuality and absurdity, its postmodern non-linearity and language play, her shunning of not only the predicates of Irish nationalism but also those of literary common law. The genre into which *No Bones* most effortlessly fits is one Dominick LaCapra names "traumatic realism" (13): a novel written in the "'in-between' voice of undecidability" (20) which "provides insight into phenomena such as slavery or the Holocaust [or the Troubles]… by giving… a *plausible 'feel'* for experience and emotion which may be difficult to arrive at through restricted documentary methods" (13, my italics). This would be a "history as the history of trauma" (Caruth 60) for which LaCapra's prototype is Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (14), a novel used here as guide and explicator of Burns'. As with *Beloved*, memory, history and their complications—"the interaction or mutually interrogative relation between historiography and art" (LaCapra 15)—are foregrounded. In the novel's crafting, she employs modalities of the dream, the absurd and the grotesque as well as profuse narratological fragmentation as the means to negotiate the crisis of extreme content and unsuitable form facing many postcolonial writers: the perplexities of a location at war that unavoidably enter, shape and texture the narrative, the problematics of remembering and forgetting attending the extreme experiences associated with political conflict, the social and psychological imperatives both to silence and utter words of historical witness.

The key to Burns' novel is the affective work of a poetics of doubt that locates readers in a carefully constructed precarious landscape through which history's phenomenology is resurrected and "plays" across the text until a final, cathartic substantiation of the truth claim. This is a poetical structure shared by other postcolonial novelists, I suggest, including Toni Morrison and Joseph Conrad, and by filmmakers such as Ari Folman. I argue that it is the location of the postcolonial author, at the site of striving with and against silence and wordlessness in the act of bearing witness, that led Burns to develop a uniquely postmodern form of the historical novel that endeavors to raise history from the dead and draw the reader into the panorama of the political past. The overarching question of the following chapter is ultimately historiographical: how account for an experimental strategy characterized by doubtfulness, one specifically intended to generate uncertainty? What is the political valence of an indistinct, mumbling history—of ambiguity, forgetfulness, fragmentation and abridgement in the epic story of a twenty-five year domestic war, of a historian who takes it as her task to represent the past by means of a surreal grotesquerie? What is the political and historical value of bewildering readers while refusing to release them from the skein of the real? How read a work that claims to represent the past but goes on to offer preposterous incidents that destabilize it?

In what follows, I propose some answers for these manifold perplexities of the text. In this, I employ varieties of reflection—by LaCapra, Lukács and Morris as well as Salman Rushdie, Toni Morrison, Seamus Deane, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Fredric Jameson, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Cathy Caruth, Gyan Pandey, Michel Foucault and Ernst Bloch. The political import of Burns' poetics of doubt, I conclude, is as a mimesis of anti-partition reunification and postcolonial reparations. These reparative gestures are carried off, most of all, by means of Burns' reclamation of the lost bodies of the Irish dead, the masses murdered in connection with colonial process, the most grievous loss incurred through imperial conquest. In the novel's resurrection of the whole of Joyce's collective of "the dead," in locating these figures *in* a historical landscape from which they were criminally removed, Burns re-peoples the nation and symbolizes the very necessary, and as yet uncollected, reparations.

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~**Part I:** *Raising the Specter of Doubt: "How could she be telling the truth?"*

> *We live in permanent doubt.*
> ~Manoel de Oliveira[137]

In this historical novel chronicling the Troubles, the author develops a *poetics of doubt*—registered as madness, vacillation, hesitancy, fragmentation, forgetting, self-reflexive interrogation, and a desperate and dogged uncertainty regarding its truth claim—through which the past is refracted. Just as Medbh McGuckian finds herself at odds with an imposed, inescapable colonial *language*, Burns chafes against the *form* of her work, one similarly steeped
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in colonial history and to which she feels correspondingly bound. A "novel of memory" (Rushdie 1982 14) recounting the Northern Irish Troubles from the standpoint of unknown residents of Burns' careworn town, *No Bones* represents the political life of the time, the state of her partitioned, ever-fissuring nation, and an intra-national and colonial war. Irish novelist Colum McCann has said that a number of contemporary "Irish writers are interested in trying to expand the borders of the Irish novel."[138] Anna Burns is clearly one of these authors. In her first attempt to document Northern Irish history, the question of form is paramount: toil, self-questioning and experimentation are arrant presences in this surprising, profound book. And although her aesthetic diverges from the more common naturalist realism he preferred, it would seem she nevertheless takes up Georg Lukács' call, heralded long ago, for a "revitalization" of the historical novel "in radically new social and political configurations" (4). While Lukács believed Sir Walter Scott's avant-garde work had *not* been "the product of a 'search for form,'" it is *precisely* that pursuit for a postcolonial writer like Burns (37). In scoring and interrogating a series of vital historiographical concerns, Burns clearly "revitalizes" the genre.

While Pam Morris views the whole history of the novel as an "artistic development during which writers [have] struggled and experimented with the artistic means to convey a verbal sense of what it is like to live an embodied existence in the world" (4), this difficulty is more intense and complicated for postcolonial novelists attempting to represent the extreme experiences of violent political histories or of empire at large. The twelfth installment, "Mr. Hunch in the Ascendant, 1980," coheres as a meta-commentary on the historiographical paradox facing this writer. Here, Burns' uses the psychoanalytic structure to allegorize not only the colonial construct but the palimpsest of silence, interruption, erasure and doubtfulness surrounding the articulation of history. Told from the perspective of Amelia's childhood friend

Vincent Lyttle, it charts the time from his boyhood—when the child would be locked in his room while his mother attended Catholic pilgrimages, in response to which he invents Mr. Hunch,[139] an imaginary friend—through to his adulthood when he is occupied by and occupant of a British-run mental institution only to be misdiagnosed by Mr. Parker, his psychotherapist. Parker is a representative imperial figure as "the poor new doctor *from England*" (159) who says "dear boy" over and over and who Mr. Hunch names "that nosey Englishman" (175). Readers first encounter Vincent in a public area of the facility, participating—or more precisely, trying *not* to involve himself—in a group therapy session during which his mind travels between sentience and the flashbacks assailing him, especially the (traumatic) memory of his father's death by stabbing. The irony of Vincent's episode is that his absurd stories are true—they only seem fictional, and indeed "mad," to *his* reader, Mr. Parker. Burns writes: "'As for you, Vincent,' [Mr. Parker] said, turning full frontal. Vincent could see a ton of red knifemarks all at once. 'You were in freefall, Acuting, in Concentrated Panic Stage, in possession of toy guns, *imaginary explosives, with voices giving commentaries on events that never took place*. Is it any wonder,' Mr. Parker smiled at him, 'you ended up back in here?'" (156 – 57, my italics).

Vincent's articulated experiences sound so outlandish to Mr. Parker and so, this doctor misreads his patient. He believes Vincent is under siege by an entourage of imaginary friends when, in reality, there is only one. All the others he speaks of are real, the nightmarish episodes, the weapons and bombs, all actual memories. Rather than some hallucinatory vision, when Vincent sees "a ton of red knifemarks" he is experiencing a traumatic flashback. The world he lives in is so uncanny, so violent, and so traumatizing, that his therapist cannot entertain the notion that it is anyone's actual world. In the end, Mr. Parker gives up, wringing his hands over the piteous Vincent, believing him delusional and beyond cure. Thus, as with the extraordinary "tundish" episode in Joyce's *Portrait*, the colonial, teacherly figure is wrong and the colonized, "student" right. Equally the effect of trauma and a dictate of socio-political silencing, Vincent cannot speak about his experiences and so he translates them—as the author who created him has done—into allegories set in surreal dreamscapes. What the psychoanalyst doesn't understand is that in a still colonized, post-partition, domestic war zone, speech about anything political is always already foreclosed. And, of course, it is a given that events in the lives of Belfast residents, circa 1980, are going to be political, particularly when they involve paramilitary murders, knee-cappings and the other traumatizing experiences Jamesey, Amelia and Vincent face. The injunctions on Vincent's speech are matters of life and death, and the methodology of the talking cure can, therefore, hardly function therapeutically.

Just as Vincent's chapter insinuates the need for new forms in the treatment of PTSD, it urges an additional and related imperative: the necessity, within the skein of language and art, to re-imagine and reinvent the forms of history. As suggested, this is a challenge facing the postcolonial author, especially those coming out histories of partition and conflict. Historical accounting is at once, therefore, a fact and a problem of this text. *No Bones* is an absurd, fragmented dream story voiced by narrators and recalled by witnesses who are deeply unreliable, who habitually tell the reader they cannot recall events they nonetheless go on to recount. Burns presents the past as having involved so much trauma as to render memory im-memorable, history irretrievable and its witnesses entirely mad. Thus we grasp why Vincent's chapter has the structure it does: as with Anne Devlin's *After Easter* and Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum*, history's orator is introduced from the confines of an asylum for the mentally insane, one administered by a colonial state.[140] Each of these histories is "set" in the question of madness, its representation being structurally reliant upon mad witnesses as, indeed, for its documentation in the annals of history. History is predicated, in each of these narratives of the political past, on the condition of lunacy and each author's insane narrator insinuated, for better or worse, as its obligatory conduit. Not only does Mr. Parker doubt the validity of Vincent's testimony, Vincent doesn't believe the doctor either. Musing on the group therapy session in progress, he thinks "although the doctor started off audibly, even if bizarre and outlandish and off-the-rails wrong, everything he said after this sounded as it usually did, indistinct, blursome and 'bla bla bla'" (156). Vincent articulates a precise description of the novel in which he appears—the text is glossed, its indecision underlined ahead of the critic's questioning review. The reciprocal skepticism of doctor and patient mirrors Burns' expectation that her reader will not "believe" her book; they will think she and it "mad." Crystallizing as allegory of Vincent, Jamesey and Amelia's mad, colonized, traumatized society, the madhouse is self-reflexive sign for the narrative itself, and how the author anticipates it being read. She knew the questions that would circle its reading like Greek furies: Burns expects to be seen and heard as a "mad" person, like Vincent, is seen and heard—the words doubted, scorned as preposterous, pathetic, categorically false.

And yet, Burns goes on to speak in strange tongues of even stranger events, repeatedly to assert the surreal uncanny tale she tells as history, as truth in fact. The implication is that her history cannot avoid an irrefutable narratological unreliability: if the task of the historian, as of the historical novelist, is to bring history into the skein of reason and structure by means of language, how is this to be accomplished when its most reliable source is a damningly undependable narrator? How is Vincent's necessarily mad (hi)story to be read—why listen to him at all, how is its transcription to be believed? How, likewise, can Amelia—who is hardly ever sure *what happened*—bear witness to *what happened*? How can these "delusional" figures relate the reality of such a complex, impossibly fraught time as the Troubles? Anna Burns' unusual narrative mode leaves readers of her first book enmeshed in a struggle of belief as they are constantly called to reconsider and question her truth claim. Her historical novel is beset by a particular madness, the structural self-contradiction that, in my reading, is its most compelling, historically significant feature. Vincent's meta-reflections on the psychotherapeutic enterprise, as well as his doctor's "off the rails wrong" diagnosis of him, meta-fictionally allude to the most politically efficacious aspect of Burns' narrative: its contradictory, confusing "blursomeness." Mimicking and mocking her own literary act, Burns asks within the novel, "How could she be telling the truth?" (84). This query flowers as double entendre critical to the articulation, the poetics and the meaning of *No Bones*: it is a literal question, asked numerous times—directly, in the content, and indirectly through the book's structure, voicing and modes—and, an indirect signifier of the issue of whether "she," that is the author, is indeed telling the truth.

"How could she be telling the truth?"—it is the nucleic dilemma haunting the novel, functioning not merely to undercut the truth claim but also to indicate something vital about the way Burns has chosen to relate the past. The author underlines the central problem she faces by means of the conflict developed in her novel around the question of history. Rather than push back against the uncertainties of the remembered past and produce a totalizing realist narrative, she chose instead to turn *in* to the doubt and face up to postcolonial history's most urgent query: how does the novelist represent "the moment of violence and suffering" (Pandey 19)? Betraying an intense authorial anxiety about her role as historian, the lynchpin through which Burns refracts history is the argument this book has with itself: that it so often pulls *away* from reality in an apparent questioning of an otherwise wholehearted claim *to* reality, leaving the reader to struggle through an epistemological tug-of-war over whether or not *No Bones* can be relied upon as true or is to be taken as false. Its historicality is continuously destabilized by this intentional and “peculiar double movement” (Sedgwick 94): the volley of assertions and abuttings of the truth claim, the back-and-forth of an entitlement to speak history and equally strong questioning of that. Even as she obviously wishes to be read as a historian, rather than as diviner of “pure” fiction, Burns appears driven to undermine and vex the development of textual and readerly trust. In a strange twist on Coleridge’s notion of the reading epistemology he called the “suspension of disbelief,”[141] this novel necessitates a *doubling* of that deferral: it calls readers to forestall *suspicion* about the story’s truthfulness by not merely postponing but calling it off altogether.

Burns’ readers must *will* themselves to believe that what they read is true in spite of overwhelmingly bizarre content and the other methods by which she questions her own enthusiastically heralded truth claim. The first arm in the production of doubt involves the ways Burns demarcates the narrative’s historical status with such anxious fervor. Temporality is invoked by every means and at every turn, its most dramatic symbol being Wolfe Tone’s watch, appearing multiple times as a kind of figurative bouncing ball.[142] The title is important too: it presides over the text like a blinker, continuously signifying its status as history: “No Bones” is a fragment of the figure of speech, “There’s no bones about it!,” meaning that there can be “no more resistance to hard facts that stick in the throat,” no more struggle against the unabashed truth of the matter (Grossman, J. 10). (In one of several uses of this phrase, on page 238, Amelia’s friend Marseillaise shrieks: “He hates me. There’s no bones about it! The man wants me dead!”) In terms of narrative structure, the story begins in 1969 with the official start of the Troubles and ends in ’94, their formal end, with the chapter “A Peace Process, 1994.” This is the year the ceasefires were called and the actual political body, led by George Mitchell and charged with settling the conflict, was formed. These bookends transparently designate *No Bones* a war chronicle. What is more, each of twenty-three chapters is assigned a year—the first, “Thursday, 1969," the second "An Apparently Motiveless Crime, 1969 – 1971," and so on. Chapter titles are followed by a comma and then the year(s) compassed—a translation of the content of the second installment might be: "events of the Troubles, 1969 – 1971, Ardoyne, Belfast, Northern Ireland." Episodes are numbered solely as a means to place them in the temporal continuum, and, by this means, the text is recursively located and relocated in history: chapter year(s) appear on every odd-numbered page, and readers are constantly reminded that what they read is political history.

Within installments, compulsive significations of the truth claim redouble. In the short opening chapter, Burns repeats the period moniker four times (11, 13, 14, 19). The story begins on a summer day[143] in the year 1969 with the words, "The Troubles started on a Thursday. At six o'clock at night" (11). Four references to time here in two tiny sentences—or rather, one "partitioned" sentence commencing this partition narrative. Even readers with cursory knowledge of Northern Irish history are aware that it has opened with the onset of war. Those who know more understand that Burns has pointed to the wave of sectarian violence, starting in August '69, when Catholics were burnt out of their homes by neighbors belonging—ideologically, politically, historically—to the other side of the conflict and the other side of empire. As the story advances, we see that its characters are time fetishists, obsessively tracking the temporality of every little thing. Amelia: "It was a Thursday, the second Thursday since Bossy had given Amelia the warning. …according to her calculations, that meant it was now the beginning of the second week of these Troubles so far" (19). Jamesey: "Four years later, on his sixteenth birthday, he joined the British Army. In November 1969 he was sent to Belfast…" (22). Vincent: "…the Identify the Body display…had a queue a mile long waiting to go into it. Vincent turned away… there was something too previous, too raw on the shinbone, too Concentrated Panic Stage about the Identify display" (159).

The constant reassertion of the text's historical status derives in part from the knowledge that it is under threat of forgetting as the book is read, hence the scattering of "proofs." The declaration is not perceived to be enough, the words carrying the history seem unequal to its weight, because, ironically, and this traumatized author has all the same questions her reader does about the credibility of her voice and the dubiousness of her traumatic memories. Burns must therefore consistently signify the idea expressed by another re-inventor of the historical novel, Honoré de Balzac. A quote from *Le Père Goriot* is used as literary talisman in Rohinton Mistry's historical partition novel, *A Fine Balance*: "And after you have read this story of great misfortunes, you will no doubt dine well, blaming the author for your own insensitivity, accusing him of wild exaggeration and flights of fancy. But rest assured: this tragedy is not a fiction. *All is true*." Burns does not use such an epigraph, nor does she offer the type of evidence Ronit Matalon (*The One Facing Us)* and Colum McCann (*Let the Great World Spin*) do: photographs of historical characters. By placing a snapshot of his featured tightrope walker at a pivotal moment, McCann does not permit the reader to forget either that Phillippe Petit was a real person or that his strange novel-in-fragments regards a historical episode. In contrast, Burns provides structural, intrinsic carriers of her claim: the obsessive stutter charted, the various forms of reminder that insinuating the text as history, refusing the will to read it ahistorically.

That Burns is such a meticulous timekeeper ought to mean there is no room to forget that her book is historical. But that space is intentionally opened up by the other half of the dialectic of *No Bones*: a counter-action destabilizing its status as history that contradicts her enthusiastically alleged claim to truth. In the fold of the narrative, readers experience an abiding sense that what they read simply cannot be true. Burns commences her (hi)story by immediately raising the specter of doubt: "The Troubles started on a Thursday. At six o'clock at night. *At* *least that's how Amelia remembered it*" (11, my italics). Her first gesture, as historian, is to question the veracity of memory—mother of historical witness. A few pages later we learn that Amelia Lovett's "mind couldn't hold on to… a strange piece of information and so, time and again, she simply forgot" (14). Straight away, Burns' muse and primary gatherer of the past is a historiographical "problem": she often forgets or feels confused about events and is unable to recall either the order of things or whether she experienced or only dreamed them. In 1978 on page 93 of a 350-page novel ending in 1994, Amelia reflects: "I can't remember the order of things much after that day." Indeed, many chapters read like "enigmatic testimon[ials]" (Caruth 6), eidetic transcriptions of fragmentary "flashbulb" memories (Schacter 195). When she and Burns' other eyewitnesses *remember* the past, "[w]hat returns… is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality… that its violence has not yet been fully known" (Ibid). All three witnesses—Amelia, Jamesey and Vincent—are introduced in such a way that their capacity to fulfill the role is robustly questioned. Memory loss is one of the first ideas attached to Jamesey: "Reports were filed about the dreadful accident, the adults didn't refer to it again and James just couldn't remember" (22). And Vincent's voice, too, is highly problematized: his ostensibly qualified psychotherapist views him as fully delusional and disbelieves all his claims, a status Burns bolsters by offering him as the character *everyone* believes to be mad.

We are tempted to dismiss the novel's historical claim in the same way Mr. Parker dismisses Vincent's memories as phantasmagoria even though the trauma victim had spoken truthfully, testifying to his father's murder, to being terrorized by sectarian gangs—which Parker calls "the Sectarian Murder-Gang fantasy" followed by insisting that Amelia's brother and his friend are likewise so: "Jat and Mickey are your characters… They have no reality of their own… They don't at all exist. That goes for Mary too… Little Mary. Displacement theory we call it, son" (177). Fuel is added to the mounting doubt when, in the first chapter, Amelia's friend Bossy warns the kids on the block about the impending Troubles: "There would be shootings and bombings and hand-to-hand fightings… if they didn't find somewhere else to go, to get out of Ardoyne and away from it, there was nothing else for it but to be burned in their beds" (12 - 13). Amelia reacts disbelievingly, thinking "This sounded too much. It must be a made-up thing, for how come none of the others had heard anything about it?" (13).[144] As with Mr. Parker's response to Vincent, she finds Bossy's news not news at all; the idea that a war is about to theatrically play out on her street, confining and restricting her unimaginably, is, to Amelia, a preposterous fantasy. Burns' readers receive her ridiculous history in the same way: they think it "sound[s] too much" and do not believe her historically true, confused testimonies offered by Amelia, Vincent and Jamesey. Burns concludes the episode saying: "So they dismissed Bossy's news and played that day at the top of the street as usual… It was obvious… she'd got it all wrong" (13). Of course Bossy'd gotten it all *right*, as Amelia and her reader come to see.

The method by which the past is recalled everywhere betrays how "the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it" (Caruth 92). The specter of doubt is in the text—in its textures, times, extreme undulations—*and* in the reading of it. Across the novel, line after line arrests and flummoxes, so many failures of memory in the remembering narrative. This quote, for example, occurs six years in to Burns' twenty-five-year narrative:

> It was a very slippery memory… the least inattention and it might slide away forever. I didn't want to lose it, not for the second time… I made a note in my jotter, to remind me…. In fact, I can't remember the order of things much after that day. The two things that stick out are one, it had been a sunny, no, a hot day, and two, on a different sunny hot day, I'd been given a chocolate... (92 – 93)

These perplexing words belong to Amelia and, to make matters still more narratologically unreliable, they are bridged through to the next chapter, which begins: “Somethin’ happened political. Now what was it? Was it the hunger-strikers? No, not yet. Was it a Butcher killing? No, not this time. Was it someone shot in the area? Oh, that’s right. It was someone shot in the area. She was a past pupil and was shot in the area and that’s what started it. / Her name’s gone now…” (95). At this point, the novel’s obsessive claim on history seems a mere house of words. The many instances in which Burns implies that her history is unbelievably absurd or has her narrator confess uncertainties, she mimics the readerly doubt she actively, intentionally produces.

Burns develops the epic into a deeply self-contradictory, desperately ambivalent one. But there is still more to the aura of doubt suffusing *No Bones*. The gesticulations and difficulties outlined are exacerbated by an aesthetic of implausibility. The author conflictingly questions her book’s credibility, likewise, through its structure and crafting. The profuse grotesquerie (discussed earlier) is material readers instinctively dismiss, and the language, too, is often wonderfully bizarre. A confusing street syntax and the absurd colloquialisms of “Belfast speak” add much to the richness of this narrative (283). Rendering the slope of doubt still slipperier, episodes seem driven to incite incredulity in that they are either so bizarre as to be unbelievable or so grotesque as to be unknowable or unthinkable. The poetical force confounding readerly trust most is Burns’ deep reliance on the absurd as chief mode. Unlike the work of more traditional realists—such as Bapsi Sidhwa (*Cracking India*) or Seamus Deane (*Reading in the Dark*)—history is told as a surreal dream narrative that will, without fail, provoke disbelief. Though presented *as* remembrance, events often “[sound] too much” (12) and read like nightmarish hyperbole. Each chapter is one more moment into which the reader is pulled that seems unreal: Is it a dream? Is it fiction? At once uncanny *and* fully possible, this narrative places them between the poles of belief and skepticism and, as such, it is neither magically real nor realist but a true kind of narrative “sur-realism.” This tag is used because, though chronicled like a bizarre video game or movie in which characters play Russian roulette as if its deadly consequences are neither real nor deadly (121),[145] all incidents nonetheless remain within the scope of the possible. At a basic level, what didn’t happen isn’t historical. But this narrative is designed to cause readers to question its validity even as they remain aware that the content may indeed be entirely true: the episodes are not phantasmal or magical, not dismissible as flights of fancy or symbolic impossibilities, not events one *knows* couldn’t, and thus *didn’t,* happen.

This true ludicrousness or feasible absurdity is the foundation and pivot for the work, both the novel’s *unreliable* madness and the register of its *reliable* veracity. And of course the buzz humming in the background of all the irrationality is the continuously blinking repetitively articulated claim to truth. An early episode clarifies the issue. As Amelia and her aunt walk along Herbert Street, they encounter her soldier-cousin Jamesey and his colleagues on patrol: “It was pouring down as [the soldiers] patrolled the Short Strand. A few five-year-olds came out in the cold and rain and shouted ‘Ya ya—Brit fuckers’ and fired a few stones. Then other five-year-olds came out and shouted and threw stones as well. ‘Brits out! Brits out!’ yelled even more five-year-olds and all this went on, right up to their bedtimes” (34). The scene is absurd: over the course of an evening, children stream out of their homes onto Herbert Street, screaming the same expletives at colonial state officials lining the street. Clusters of kids—all five years of age—begin appearing from every direction, yelling and firing rocks and this continues “right up to their bedtimes,” and they all have stones to throw from a magically unending pile. It is improbable, though not impossible that, were the event to occur *as narrated*, children would fill the street until hundreds of them are gathered, all the same age, all screaming “Ya ya—Brit fuckers," all throwing stones. In reading this, one is not sure if this historical novel may have switched gears, mid-read, and moved into straight ahead fantastic fictional mode.

Comparatively, however, this incident falls far short of Burns' absurd range. Many feature even more outlandish situations. The clownish hilarity of chapters like "An Apparently Motiveless Crime, 1969 – 1971," "The Pragmatic Use of Arms, 1973," "Troubles, 1979" and "The Present Conflict, 1983" scale the heights of literary absurdity. Amelia's date with the scary Janto Pierce is a crazy surreal circus during which he cries "Stupid females" at Amelia and "a big green bush… spread itself out… It appeared to be an innocent bush, doing absolutely nothing , but this here was Belfast so you could never be sure. Some bushes were real… Others were military intelligence—and took pictures" (217). Later, the bush was "shaking and trembling" (218) and speaks as a "disembodied English voice" saying "Christ! Will you shut up! And move that fuck-een car!" (221) and "Fuck's sake! …Will you get out of the way wee girl…" (223). Elements such as the family dog, Dachau, add to the eccentricity of this narrative. In a keen reference to both Joyce's memorable (and relevant) "moocow"[146] and the concentration camp located at Dachau in World War II, the pet's name is spelled in Amelia's head as "Dakcow" (27). The figure chosen to "sign" a clearly political message is a domesticated pet located in the oxymoron of a battlefield located in a living room. The dog's symbolic presence is precise: his euphemistic presence as sign casts the Jewish and the Irish as the "dogs" of imperial, fascist, murderous political history, insinuates Northern Ireland as a concentration camp and Northern Irish life as a holocaust where victims are not relocated from home to a ghetto but the domestic space surreally transforms around them into an incarcerating prison.

Indeed, every absurd incident *could* be true, and it is the maintenance of this balance—keeping the reader specifically *in doubt*—that is the real work of this text. We remember, too, that through all the “nonsense,” several lighthouses continuously flash the truth claim: the meta-title, chapter titles, that anecdotes are remembered, that years appear and reappear on each page, etc. It seems the greater the threat of violence, the greater the uncanny character of the telling, the more likely the reader will be prompted to write the novel off as the fancy of a deranged mind and ask Burns’ own question of the author: “How could she be telling the truth?” (84). In “Troubles, 1979,” the bizarre is taken to its tipping point. When the chapter opens, Amelia’s brother Mick and his wife Mena are having sex in the living room with the entire family present plus “four cousins, five friends, three neighbours [and] their own four-year-old daughter” (139). All the while, the group eats, watches *Starsky and Hutch*, talks. “Nobody, it goes without saying, noticed” that the couple was involved in foreplay and sexual intercourse there, and this in spite of the fact that, in order to get out of his chair, Amelia’s father had to “thrust his daughter-in-law’s shuddering leg off his lap” (Ibid). Afterwards, the couple attempt raping Amelia for fun while mother and father ignore their son’s brutality and their daughter’s victimization. Amelia’s mother is busy: “She remembered she had to go upstairs and scream her head off,” as is her father who “remembered he had to go [outside] and stand at the gate” (Ibid). Her brother and his wife rape Amelia in the midst of their food-and-sex-play—adding much to the grotesquerie here—involving a pot of curry and rice and the familiar game of “Will the dinner, won’t the dinner poison us?” (141). Amelia is saved, after it is too late, by her sister Lizzie’s dyke gang, a group of guardian angels all named Mary and called the Mary-Marys (148 – 49). This all-girl-team pummels Mick and his wife until they nearly expire, after which, in order to comfort Amelia—because, of course, by this time she is morbidly anorexic—the Mary-Mary’s offer her “a tray of laxatives: ‘Have some of these. We know you like them wee things” (152).

What is more, Burns uses a refrain as preface to several paragraphs in this shockingly hideous chapter—"A few bare bones" (142, 144, 148)—suggesting that either Amelia or the author herself can only remember shards of a fuller incident, which, though recounted via Burns' gruesome absurd—for "there's *No Bones* about it"—is nonetheless *true*. The absurdity of this novel is unrelenting and, yet, inclining the slope of doubt still further, each episode offers only a fragment from a bizarre nightmare, snapshot of a larger historical canvas; their truncated nature adds much to feelings of confusion and suspicion. Snapshot—Chapter One, a girl-child in a boarded-up house trenched beneath the kitchen table, fully clothed and shoed in the event sudden escape becomes necessary. She is playing a memory game with her sister: can they correctly count the number of burnt-out homes on Herbert Street, naming each one? They try to predict which houses will go up in flames on this night. Snapshot—Chapter Three, this same child, now seated in a third-grade classroom, now circled by ugly teachers who leer and snap. She fails to write the assigned "peace poem" and is then removed for chocolates and finger-printing by the British authorities. Snapshot—Chapter Four, the same girl guards her cherished collection of found objects: thirty-seven rubber bullets retrieved from the blood-stained Ardoyne Road. She hides under a bed and is violently assailed by her snarling, snapping, violence-addicted brother who covets her trove. Snapshot—Chapter 11: Now, the family dog, Dachau, has been replaced by Bullet and Mick and Mena are married with children. Now it is 1979, a most pitifully wretched year in the Troubles. Now, Amelia's other "trove" is violated by that same brother.

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The key to Burns' mode, I argue, is its *refusal* to flee the space of doubt and resolve the historiographical undecidability plaguing the novel. The fracturedness that defines it, the gratuitous violence and surreality, its status as trauma narrative *and* historical novel, *No Bones*
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comes together as a specifically unbelievable history. Askew and off balance, the narrative teeter-totters drunkenly around the scrim distinguishing reality from fantasy, belief from skepticism, imbuing the reading experience with a palpable aura of doubt. Its trajectory can be charted the way Richard Haslam reads Eoin McNamee's *Resurrection Man*: as a historical novel comprised and textured by "patterns of interference between imagination and reality" (199). Burns, too, "knowingly alludes to the ethical and stylistic questions facing" her endeavor, and like McNamee, asks, "What pose should the prose assume? What forms of lingering are exhibited by the author and induced in the reader?" (Haslam 192). Like the "doubt and unease" striating Grass' *The Tin Drum* (Cunliffe 319), the reading of *No Bones* is atmospherically infused with a hum of uncertainty—as the words are declared true and then questioned at every turn, as readers are made to occupy the intersection of suspicion and trust. Like the work of Beckett and Kafka, *No Bones* dwells at the border of the believable and the preposterous, betraying the narrative indirection, absurdity and "highly personal, grotesque" seen in Grass' work (Ibid 311 - 325). Burns is self-conscious about these components, recognizing (again like Grass) that "[t]he situation [of representation] is one of confusion and pervasive doubt that finds its adequate expression in the various absurd features noted… the subjective imagery, [the] obscenity… the atmosphere of parody and the indefinite perspective" (Ibid 327).

No Bones is self-consciously situated in the surreal borderlands of representation where the author finds language, metaphor and image capable of meeting, compassing and witnessing the criminality of the colonial state, the losses incurred and experienced by Irish people, the vast, overwhelming damage of war. Characterized by the hazy liminality of a dialectical struggle, written according to the precepts of LaCapra's traumatic realism, the experience of the text is distinct from what we are brought to by other forms of the historical novel. Hers is like few others: though unambiguously offered as history, in manifold ways it does not “match” its genre. It occupies a generic middle ground, has its genesis in the interval of *feasible absurdity,* is articulated through a *historiographical* “third space.” This “middling” enunciation of history does not permit either the comfortable distance and false totality of high realism *or* the politically suspect readerliness and escape of magical realism. Burns’ is a LaCapraian skewed “traumatic realism” set just outside the ordinary, an epical-historical hovering *immediately* outside the range of the real without eclipsing it by turning fabulist. Because never magical and always absurd, the reader remains epistemologically *between*. And, it is the specter of doubt, rather than awe, which is raised. The text therefore develops into a paradoxically structured dialectic—amalgamated fragments of a true story whose narrative mode is a mind-boggling absurd that alternates between the hilarious (Beckettian) and the grotesquely frightening (Kafkaesque).[147] Indeed, the strange, the confused, the vast, the absurd, the viscerally, gratuitously visual become the way *in* to traumatic memory, the means of access to history. The fractional move away *from* the real makes room for a return to memory and the possibility of its iteration.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty says “[t]he work of a great novelist always rests on two or three philosophical ideas… [Their] function… is not to state…ideas thematically but to make them exist for us in the way that things exist,” to “make them present” (26). Making history exist for us in the way things exist is Burns’ ultimate ambition. Colum McCann, too, describes the novelist’s true task: “to lay out an emotional landscape into which other people go.”[148] Some novels aim, however, for an appreciably dramatic full immersion. The boundary pressures perceptible in novels written according to the precepts of surreal realism make them uniquely capable of conveying that “plausible ‘feel’ for [the] experience and emotion” of the political past LaCapra theorizes (13). Burns’ novel has this credible feel precisely *because* it feels incredible.

These developments depend on the capacity to use words in such a way that assertions of truth are taken in through a haze of uncertain, wobbling, specifically false-feeling perplexity—that is, the ability to "say inside language the outside of language" (Felman 214). Sedgwick suggests one way to achieve this, to transcend language from within, is the phenomenology defining *No Bones*: "If texture and affect, touching and feeling, seem to belong together… [w]hat they have in common is that at whatever scale they are attended to, both are irreducibly phenomenological" (21). The unsayable becomes sayable, and language performative, through the combination of affect and phenomenology seen in Burns' work, history conveyed through an "enigmatic language of… experiences not yet completely grasped" (Caruth 56). Because of the mixed message causing readers to waver for over three hundred pages between accepting *No Bones* as true and feeling urged to declare it false, the effect of this phenomenological narrative is to exude a "force-field creating power" by which they are fully rapt, wrapping a "kind of skin… around a reading body," as if "body-and-book" are "shrink-wrapped" (Sedgwick 114 - 15).

This idea that some literary texts are phenomenologically powerful enough to suture "the self with the book and the world" (Sedgwick 2) points us to what is most important about *No Bones*: its construction of an epistemologically perplexing reading space that dubiously "sandwiches" readers at the meeting place of the believable and the suspicious—the very sinew of history—so as to make possible history's *reenactment*. Living in time means living in doubt, after all, particularly when the state has been broken by partition and citizens lives occur within the confines of a surreal battlefield. As Jameson says, "[h]istory is what hurts": that is, it is a progression of time (102), the suffering through a space of confusion, ambiguity, liminality and supplement, "a step in the fog" (Merleau-Ponty 3) that gains coherence only afterwards and outside. Thus, the aesthetic that will most effectively imbue literary narrative with the sense of a past, lived time is a poetics like the one Burns executes. Because history is traumatizing, and thus the author has the same uncertainties the reader does about the words on the page and the memories behind them, she is compelled to bring readers to the "*site* of memory" (Morrison 1998 *passim*), through an aesthetic driven by a fidelity to the historicity of history. By placing the reader *between* acceptance and refusal of the truth claim, and maintaining that posture near to the end, *No Bones* mimics the experience and affect of real time. The emotionality of the text matches that of unfolding time as readers are awash in a fog of uncertainty.

Such a poetics must be phenomenological and work through the affect of immediacy. The phenomenology of the high political, the experiential truth of the body, "the moment of violence and suffering" (Pandey 19), the *historicity* of history—Burns' ostensible aim is to relate *this* through language and story. Painfully aware of the limits of language, she summons the reader to séance, compels their tumble across the temporal scrim into the maelstrom of the "moment of violence" (Pandey 19)—in the *gerund*, in its phenomenology. *No Bones* immerses readers in the thick of war through an epistemological, phenomenological, emotional topography, a surreal "carpet ride" through the tragedy of the Troubles, calls readers to occupy the very muscle of history with her and her characters. Toni Morrison's aim in *Beloved* was much the same: she wanted the reader "to be kidnapped, thrown ruthlessly into an alien environment as the first step into a shared experience with the book's population" (2004 xviii). Morrison would "render enslavement as a personal *experience*" (2004 xix) and readers would bear unwitting, extemporaneous witness to it. And it would be her story's phenomenology, the "nimbus of emotion surrounding" the reading, which makes this effect possible (Morrison 1998 98). This textual operation is embodied at the opening of that novel—pages one, two, three, the reader meets a mother and girl child summoning the dead to séance, calling the past to speak, now, in the time-space of the novel. Both deeply ambivalent novels, I argue, are founded on the affectivity of a dialectic of *doubt*: the reader, the reading, the meaning, the truth, all are held in abeyance. The combined seductions of contradictory speech, of the grotesquely absurd, of the fragment, of the privately lyrical and grotesquely visual cause readers to be fully immersed in the the panorama of the Troubles. This historical novel "shows" rather than simply "tells" a series of historical fragments and its readers cannot preserve the filter, and so fall, headfirst, into the text's cacophony. As such, Northern Irish history is not simply "read" but felt, seen, "lived" again.

The method to Burns' doubtful "madness," then, is this phenomenological *conjuring*, a simulation of the "making" of the nation—the *poesis* of political time, the partitionist (de)nationalization of the subject. Burns provokes the reader's fall into her world and memories so as to fulfill their purpose as text and art object. Along with responding to the silencing effects of material politics and psychological trauma, the fear that language and description are inadequate to extreme history, the text's status as testimonial also necessitates its perplexing aesthetic. Histories of witness require witnesses: they are not just read, they are *beheld*, not just known but *felt*. The phenomenological real time of *No Bones* stands the reader right next to the character, drags them through the scrim partitioning the writerly and readerly realms, the distinct spatiotemporalities of transcription and reception. Now, the reader is Amelia's double, now Burns' other witness, second self to character and author. Judith Grossman says of *No Bones* that Burns "requires her central witness to survive intact enough to *render testimony*" (11, my italics). And her reader, willingly or otherwise, occupies this role with Amelia, with Burns.

No Bones is indeed immersive. It has a lyricism standard realist novels lack, voiced through a lyrical low voice, that has the feel of an extreme close-up, which permits the author to drag readers deep into this truth tale they do not quite believe. The novel's landscapes are not magical, they are emotion visualized and reified as object, color, image, sequence. The temporality of episodes is likewise an "emotional time" (Burns 2001 49) that impacts the novel's temporality—elongates, shortens, complicates. The mode of narration slows down and magnifies "the moment of violence and suffering" (Pandey 19); it is as if episodes are told through the haze of a mind altered by some drug or the 'scape of a dream. Burns' method is one of a bloated, exaggerated heightening; she develops a "notion of locality that edges into dream" (Alexander 2009 xi). She recounts history in the manner of a distorting "fun" mirror: *No Bones* reads like a narrative version of those interchanging convex and concave warping effects—which disfigures, stretches, parses or enlarges the body but does not entirely *metamorphose* it. It does not transform but skews its subject. Reading such a novel often feels like the slow-motion of dreams or as if the story is on "fast forward"; sometimes it feels out of focus and at others as if told entirely through "extreme close-ups." In terms of the "work" a literary text calls its recipient to, Burns reader will "face up" to the Troubles whether they opted for that in engaging the words filling its pages or not. The highly pitched lyrical torment of a chapter like "Triggers, 1991" brings them into Amelia's mental breakdown: readers hold on to a window grille with her, body arranged in the search position, they wait with her to be searched, incarcerated and interrogated.

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There are two compulsions of the postcolonial historian, then: to show, and not just tell, history—so that its uncanny surreality and qualm are witnessed and believed in spite of themselves—and, finally to claim the historical text as history, once and for all. As witness testimony, the novel must be claimed, finally, as *history*. The various "modalities of spatial and temporal perception" (Haslam 204) in Burns' profoundly postmodern, self-reflexive novel mean that, all through, readers anticipate an *answer* to the atmospheric question inspired by the conflict
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within it. Far from awaiting the “late entry” of a national hero, as theorized by Lukács,[149] readers anticipate the resolution of the “tension[s] in the text, a paradoxical opposition between the form and content of the narrative” (Rushdie 1982 16). In Burns’ novel, witness a postmodern, postcolonial generic evolution in which the hero has fallen and his late appearance is replaced by “semantic tension[s] between the artistic and emotional denotations of ‘relief’” (Haslam 193). Lyotard notes a postmodern evolvement whereby “[t]he narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements” (xxiv). The temporal teleology of a conflict between a national protagonist and his nemesis transforms into a spatial phenomenology in which no one functions as hero, and characters float between colonial and partitionist ontologies, borders and nations. Meanwhile, the reader reads in the postmodern posture of atheist and skeptic: waiting for the narrative either to explode into historiographical parody or soberly consolidate as horribly real.

No Bones is a history of movement as we see—that is, of being *moved*. Transported. Of phenomenology and the affect of doubt. It is a history we “fall” into, like falling into a dream or hypnosis. Despite its ambivalent affect, the novel is finally revealed, *claimed* really, as history full stop. Readers suffer through three-hundred and thirty-three pages in too close proximity to Burns’ mad, violent characters and madly violent world, all the while struggling with whether or not to accept it as real, until the swift drop out of the constructed aura as the hum of a question is dramatically, palpably called off. The question of the text is answered, the specter of doubt settled through Burns’ employment of that most ancient of “conjuring tricks,” literary catharsis. Readers are immersed in the pathos of undecidability until being released by an unequivocal assertion of the truth claim and simultaneous purgation of the doubt on which her story dizzily turns. This is accomplished by way of the “conflict of opposites” theorized by Aristotle long ago

(60): the work does “not let our emotions remain enflamed within us, but calls them forth and expels them” (Ibid 61), a kind of emotional “vomiting” (Ibid 60). Recipients are plunged into an affective bath, as emotions from the “affective table of elements” (Sedgwick 117) are aroused in a carefully calibrated equilibrium, followed by being released from that scary, absurd place, “washed” clean of the anxiety palpably experienced across the reading. Burns’ postcolonial tragedy does not work through Aristotle’s pity and fear, however, but Cézanne’s *doubt*: that is, according to Merleau-Ponty, the painter’s artistic suicide being in his determination to recapture and convey the necessarily distorted phenomenology and uncanny birth of the image as it occurred in his line of vision, which—like the historical moment—is lost the instant it occurs. To represent this “absolute reality, [or] surreality” (Breton 14), the narrative must be warped, affective, phenomenological, devised by way of a “suicidal,” paradoxical method that “aims for reality while denying… the means to attain it” (Merleau-Ponty 12). Cézanne’s spatial, visual doubt is analogous to Burns’ temporal, historiographical ambivalence: all three take the reader back to the phenomenological origin of the subject and *resurrect* it from out of the temporal dust.

Cézanne and Burns’ doubt—both speak to the skepticism of the postmodern, the political critique of postcolonial thought, the qualm of politico-traumatic memory. Notwithstanding all the doubt, this purgative movement is what makes Burns’ history ultimately so convincing. The edge of doubt, held to the last, makes the extant delivery of relief and recognition extraordinarily profound. Burns wrings this uncertainty principle out of the novel through decisively pitched events of the final chapter, “A Peace Process, 1994.” Of greatest significance is the first and only direct reference to a political event, when at last the author imports a real-world event into the narrative. All through, as we know, political events have been rendered as allegory and doubling, extemporaneously grafted on to the private sphere as analogous domestic incidents: the rendering of hunger strikes as anorexia, the schoolyard protest, etc. This novelist does not recount a single standard incident associated with the Troubles—not even the staple of the era, a bombing. In fact, students of Irish history have never heard of a single individual in this novel. Burns does not mention Bobby Sands or Bloody Sunday or Operation Banner; never does she refer to a specific assassination or protest. The "public" political narrative of the state and its para-states is represented through private lives of unknown citizens. As such, her history is "approached by way of the average, anonymous consciousness of ordinary witnesses" (Lukács 2). To maintain the aura of indecision and *différance*, Burns waits until the final installment to answer her poetically constructed meta-question. When that question is finally answered, the reader is nearing its posterior limit, simultaneously hoping and fearing that the doubt will be maintained beyond the skein of the novel and the narrative able to settle, cognitively, into fiction. That hope is dashed by the high-pitched alarm call that pulls the reader out of the hypnotic spell of doubt.

Burns flips a switch, introducing the world into the absurd dreamscape by means of the single instance of "real politics" with a passport into *No Bones*: "They were watching something on the TV about a possible ceasefire" (333).[150] Despite all the questions, the forgetting, the traumatic "black holes," the doubt, the reader sees finally: "There's no bones about it" (238), *"[a]ll is true."* The dream-narrative is in this way "kissed" by reality and the reader dropped out of the hex cast from the start, out of the question anguished over for so long. Instantaneously, palpably, the world enters the ambivalent nightmare of the text and the discourse of the story shockingly clicks into place *as history*. Readers are plunged back through the scrim dividing the real and the unreal, the past and the present—released from the "shrink-wrap" of the dream, sobered by the fact of truth. This reading trajectory is precisely the reverse of waking from a dream: whereas the novel seemed a long, choppy, frightening nightmare, now the reader awakens into the realization that what they thought a dream was real.

Another arm in the dissipation of doubt is the critical late revision of Vincent. In the final chapter, Vincent informs Amelia and their friends, now adults, that he plans to bring his wife along on their daytrip. The others snicker, thinking she's an imaginary friend, thinking he's just "mad" Vincent. Ironically, when he shows up the next day with her, they are not a little bit chagrined. This is the second cathartic "tundish" moment involving Vincent—Burns even has him say: "…this Parker fella had a few defects and shortcomings himself" (159)—where the novelist declares he is *not* mad. This is a profound moment because Vincent has been packed with emotion—especially pity and terror. As the most brutalized of the brutalized, readers are fully sympathetic with him. Also not trivially, Burns' affirmation of the character comes *after* she has taken pains to align the madness of the text with that of her characters: the insanity of the narrative was built together with that of Amelia, Jamesey and, above all, Vincent. As *he* is shown to be sane in the end, so too the "questionable," schizophrenic historical text housing him. His earlier exclamation, "'I'm not schizophrenic'" (166), is shown to be true in the end. These various closing signals cathartically "sweep" the text of the doubt by which its reading has been haunted. Three-hundred-plus absurd pages in, Burns sets off a chain of affirmations like a domino effect and the question of "crazy" is turned on its head, the novel's madness unraveled.

Versions of an affective poetics of doubt culminating in catharsis are observable in other postcolonial works. In the Irish landscape, of course Joyce's renowned epiphanies are currently evaluable through a cathartic lens. A more recent analogous development is seen in the trajectory of Bernard Mac Laverty's *Cal*—the design whereby the "imagery of photography" is purgatively replaced by the "motif of painting"—painting, a construct, photography a "realist" image of “fact,” the move there being from certainty to doubt, rather than Burns’ reverse trajectory (Haslam 200). Similarly, in Morrison’s *Beloved,* a cathartic sequence brings the narrative to its denouement. Women of Sethe and Denver’s community gather at 124 Bluestone Road to exorcise the corporeal specter, Beloved. As the text expurgates this fury, so too its reading is cathartically cleansed of palpable emotions—fear, pity, qualm, awe—built up around and packed into the figure. Joseph Conrad’s highly inscrutable, deeply ambivalent historical novel, *Heart of Darkness* (1902), can likewise be interpreted through this frame. Virginia Woolf characterized his story in this way noting its “queer effects,” “sudden silences” and “internal conflict[s]” (Conrad xxxvi). Self-contradictory from start to finish, Conrad maintains the hum of doubt until Marlowe utters the all-important lie on the final page. Rather than reveal Kurtz’s actual last words, “The horror! The horror!” (86), he tells the Intended: “The last word [Kurtz] pronounced was—your name” (96). The true meaning of the novel, revealed paradoxically by a falsehood, is that this soldier of empire had broken faith with the enterprise that brought him to Africa, founded his existence and structured the globe for five hundred years. In dramatically performing this deception, Conrad finally answers his novel’s question—circuitously yet unambiguously—thereby silencing the hum of doubt. By way of a silence, the words neither Marlowe nor Conrad utter, the novel’s sole clarification, is proffered—the answer buried in the lie.

In this way Burns is, like McNamee, one more “Belfast Conrad” (McCarthy 133). This aesthetical design is recognizable in other forms of literary history, too. Israeli filmmaker Ari Folman—also representing partition and political conflict—follows an equivalent structure in the animated documentary, *Waltz With Bashir* (*Vals im Bashir,* 2008*).* Its reception is destabilized by a critical juxtaposition of form and content: though animated, it is a documentary film—not unlike Joe Sacco’s journalism, animated in the style of a graphic novel or comic book. Replacing

Burns' phenomenological absurd, the fact of animation causes Folman's film to take on the aura of doubt and ambiance of the dream. This generic defamiliarization, likewise the genius of the piece, places viewers in a dream-space between the represented real and its fantastical, uncanny modality. Indeed, the unrecognizability of Folman's "docu-mation" troubled its production: documentary funding sources and those supporting animation alike insisted, if it is a documentary, it cannot be animation; if it's animation, it cannot also be a documentary. As with Burns, Morrison and Conrad, Folman closes by reversing the film's doubtful aura, abruptly "dropping" the viewer out of the dreamscape and into the corporeality of fact. This effect is achieved by means of a memorable piece of footage that closes the film: the minutes immediately following the massacre at Sabra and Shatila when survivors return and encounter masses of dead, mutilated bodies. Much like *No Bones*, the catharsis of doubt is carried off at the narratological tail end by way of a miniscule fragment—approximately 30 seconds—which plummets the viewer back to reality. And this sharp shift from cartoon imagery to live footage is likewise Folman's final, unforgettably jarring re-assertion of his truth claim.[151]

This analysis suggests, first, that forms like the one Burns devised have a larger life in postcolonial letters than is as yet recognized, and, that her political catharsis contains and refracts a historical "surplus…[,] a literary residue" (Felman 223) that is part of a complex epistemology of postcolonial representation. These experimental works all bring the reader into an inherently doubtful surreality by, on the one hand, insisting on their status as history and, on the other, representing it through a style that questions that very premise. They are dream narratives that whisk the viewer into a surreal space of reception by means of the hum of doubt and then, in silencing it, cathartically drop them, as through a scrim, into the reality of the nightmare as history in fact. Reviewers speak of the eye-opening power of *No Bones*—its unique power to convey the true meaning of the Troubles. Judith Grossman notes how “parallels with the desperate history of non-Serbs in Bosnia, or of Palestinian communities in Israel” cannot be missed (12) and Noddy Holder that, “[d]espite all we know of the events in Northern Ireland in the last thirty-odd years,” it was this book that shocked him into the realization “that beatings, knee-cappings, bombings and murder would be as familiar to [Amelia] as nursery rhymes and teddy bears” (Holder). He points out, too, that the protagonist witnesses “depraved and sickening death and destruction” as “routine occurrence[s]” (Holder). (From page 82 of the novel Amelia says: “’Bang,’ said the last soldier, lowering his rifle from where he’d been practising aiming it at my head.”) Joanne Ahern says too that “[a]s time goes by midnight raids, bombings and shootings become commonplace. Murdered friends are remembered for a fleeting second, then life goes on as normal” (Ahern). And Holder concludes: “*No Bones* gave an insight into the situation in Northern Ireland that could never be gleaned from TV reports [or] newspapers… I believe this was Anna Burns’ intention and… her real achievement.” These critics all suggest that Burns’ narrative possesses the cathartic clarity demanded by its status as both history and witness testimony. They respond to Burns in these ways *because* of the choice made to thread the narrative with a doubtful drone, and then, like Conrad, Folman and Morrison, to abruptly overturn and call it off so that the novel’s authentication as history rings audibly.

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~**Part II:** *History, Trauma, Partition and the Meanings of Narrative Form*

> *The root of the tongue had been severed. New languages would have to be invented.*
> ~Eoin McNamee, Resurrection Man
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> *[Vincent] doesn’t say “I’m afraid” in case the Hum, like the silence, is bad.*
> ~Anna Burns, No Bones
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Anna Burns' conjuring trick, the creation of a phenomenological artifice of doubt, is also the genius of her book. Recognizing and explicating Burns' poetical structure—the progression through madness, affectivity and catharsis outlined above—is only part of the task, however. The poetics is the "what" of this historical novel; the "why" remains to be addressed, both in terms of the conditions that gave rise to the form, addressed in Part I, as well as the political import and efficacy of such a history. The question is, can the past loom large and replay by means of words alone? Clearly this is Burns' goal and, to the extent that it *is* achievable, her novel succeeds. How is it that these creators of distinct literatures of witness find themselves in corresponding aesthetic places, each having *separately* divined a poetics for history that is *new* yet highly comparable? Why does this gathering of storytellers follow a roughly equivalent epistemological structure, one doubt-infused and affectively cathartic that uses analogous sets of aesthetic building blocks: phenomenology, trauma, the grotesque, surrealism, extreme visuality, alarming fragmentation, juxtapositions of form and content, and, importantly, the deployment of a late purging of the work's ambivalent affect? Each writer documents extreme histories of conflict spurred by partition and the colonial praxis of distinct British imperial incarnations: in Conrad, the administrative colonialism and enslavement practiced in Africa; in Morrison, practices structurally linked to empire—the slave trade and institutionalized slavery in the United States; in Folman, the long-term aftermaths of the British Mandate in Palestine and the struggle for nation-state sovereignty and territorial control there; and, in Burns, the settler colonialism exercised in Ireland for the last eight centuries. What is the circumstance of the writing? Such an author occupies a complex location, a cross-section of the political past and the partitioned national present, of her own biography and of the promise of language and form in terms of compassing all these things. They feel compelled to show evidence for and insist, like clockwork, upon their claims to truth and are yet driven to tempt and taunt readers through varieties of absurdity and draw them into the moment by mimicking phenomenological time.

Another critical question, then: why create a doubtful reading environ for a narrative of history rather than recount the past in styles more familiar historiographically and, importantly, more believable to readers? I believe, to a large extent, it is the need to search for new, and to merge and reinvent old forms that brought these authors, especially Burns, to their doubt-infused poetics and undecidable narratives. A key issue confronting such a historian is how the form of the work must alter to meet the vicissitudes of modern political life, the machinations of national partition, what Salman Rushdie names "the surrealism of real life." Yet one more author hailing from a place beset by partition and conflict, in a recent lecture, Rushdie discusses how, in the modern era, "the intrusion, the daily impact, of gigantic events on private lives" characterizes civil society and, at the same time, makes our lives and nations "odder," in comparison with earlier eras, and "gives us new problems in the telling of their stories" (2007). Anna Burns wrote *No Bones* conscious of and determined to demonstrate the existence of this phenomenon in Belfast life. She depicts the high and para-political phenomena deluging the private lives of ordinary, working-class residents of Belfast with extraordinary clarity and reveals a direct feed from that sphere and its officially unrecognized war to the spatiotemporality of private life. Of course, the Troubles was nothing if not a "gigantic" event that not only invaded the domestic sphere but determined the character and livability of life in the North. Burns' work reminds us, too, that the surrealist phenomenon named by Rushdie does not characterize all places, or all subjects of a single location, in the same way. The amalgamation of the personal and the political overwhelms in colonized and post-colonized locations, in partitioned nations and conflict zones. The imposition of political process in the space of daily life is experienced as invasive when power, ownership and agency are *problems,* when the subject is marginalized or persecuted, when, as Seamus Deane explains, the “political system, especially… a rancid one, as in Northern Ireland, …spreads right through the whole society. …when [it] is based on various forms of coercion and colonization” (Ross). The postcolonial subject, whose condition is that of being always already violated by state authority and interpellated by a discourse that denies them any true existence, experiences the surrealism of real life necessarily as *intrusion*.

This distinction, obfuscated in Rushdie’s description of the issue, is critical. And theoretical work in Postcolonial and Irish Studies establish it as a critical register of that condition. While it may be a truism of the postmodern era that “the struggle with the world and the struggle with the self are inextricably one” (Ostriker 317 - 18), the private, daily burdens of the high political function at a perceptibly *higher* register in historically colonized locations and for subjects thereby subjected. Deane notes how “politics penetrating… personal life… comes from Northern Ireland's peculiar history,” that the border between the private and the public is narrower there than it would be in a… less oppressed [society]” (Patterson). Homi Bhabha has also theorized that, in postcolonial narrative, “[t]he recesses of the domestic space become sites for history’s most intricate invasions. …[where] the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other” (9). Like the novel he appraises, Morrison’s *Beloved*, Amelia’s residence is personified, too, as a monstrous character, the space of an inextricable amalgamation of home and world-at-war: “the household would reassert itself, stretch and yawn, and become activated once more” (154).

One of the implications of Bhabha’s theory is that, rather than being a touchstone of modernity or postmodernity generally, far from functioning as a “universal” experience of contemporary life, the phenomenon of place Rushdie points to is more accurately a surrealism of *postcoloniality*. Its experience is frequently addressed in commentaries by authors coming out of broken nations, living and writing amid the traumatizing, rupturing effects of division. Israeli writer David Grossman depicts his ruptured location in an uncannily similar way. He contends, rather emphatically, that the establishment, even temporarily, of a tenable refuge from political violence is impossible in catastrophe zones like Israel and Palestine. Political "reality is here, no matter what," he writes, "like an acid that eats away any protective coating" (Grossman). In the same vein, Deane says: "I don't suppose there was any point at which I ever felt… a visible gap between what people call politics and my private life. The two things were always integrated" (Ross). The history and the war are in the domestic space, in the ostensibly sacrosanct educational realm, in the life of the child and the intimate landscapes of adult experience.

We recognize the extemporaneous intrusion of high political events in the domestic sphere as a key awareness in *No Bones* also in the allegorical "grafting" method by which Burns circuitously tells the history of the Troubles. Burns metamorphoses high political[152] events into analogous incidents from daily life and tells high political history circuitously: the Shankill Butchers, a gang that drove around Belfast in a yellow Ford Cortina terrorizing and "hunting down" Catholics to butcher and torture,[153] are allegorized in the darkly romantic incident during which Danny Megahey, the married man who gives Amelia her first kiss, is murdered directly following it (201 - 211). Likewise, the introduction of the police state is told from the deeply personal, highly sympathetic perspective of Jamesey, Amelia's half-Irish, half-British cousin now working in service of the Crown as a soldier on duty in Belfast (31 - 40). The political conflict, at large, is rendered in miniature, through a kind of doll house of young girls in school uniforms, in "Somethin' Political, 1977" when Veronica, the only girl whose IRA affiliation is known to all, saves Amelia from a gang of girls intent on beating her to a pulp 102 – 03). In

"Miscellany and Drift, 1978," teenage boys in Ardoyne set up a false check point, posing as officers of the colonial state (107). When Amelia is a bit older, the names of the discos she and her friends frequent include: "The Powder Keg," "Reconnaisance," "the Artillery," "the Rearguard," and of course, "the Holy Blessed Child" (87). And the two Lovett family dogs: Dachau and Bullet. The initiation of the peace process is similarly rendered through the novel's closing episode when Amelia and her friends, now adults, decide to spend the day playing for the first time since 1969 and the start of the Troubles (333 - 359).

Burns traces touchstones of the war through allegorical "doubles," complex symbols and images. Burns writes, "It seems the first rebellion was to refuse food" (96), a strategy also found in the real-world context of the Troubles. Represented in figurative form is a key strategy of anti-colonial resistance, the hunger strike: domestic figures allegorically "act out" parts played in the high- and para-political realms as anorexic girls and school children who refuse to eat lunch. These imitators of countless historical figures are bizarre reverse-versions of Homi Bhabha and V.S. Naipaul's "mimic men,"[154] discursive mimicries of the paramilitary figures who set themselves against both the colonial state and the Loyalist establishment to work toward reunification and all-Ireland sovereignty. Running alongside her "domestic" tale are the actual "blanket" protests of the early 80's at Long Kesh Prison presided over by the Thatcher regime of which Bobby Sands was only the most famous victim.[155] She represents this moment by telling stories of the lived manifestations of such events in the private realm. Rather than speak directly of Sands' tragic demise, or those of his fellow rebels, the author extemporaneously transports those events into parallel, contingent mirror stories occurring in domestic life, in the private world of her protagonist and other characters. In the second episode set in Amelia's school, "Somethin Political, 1977," the school administration decides to ignore the assassination, by

Protestant paramilitaries, of one of her classmates, whose name Amelia can no longer recall as she recounts these events in first-person. This sardonically hilarious installment reads:

> …it happened when she was sitting by the fire in her house in Gracehill Street... the Loyalist gunmen got in to do it, did it and got away. It turned out pretty quick she'd been IRA so Sister Mary Fatima… announced she wasn't having any of it. She was not going to acknowledge the shooting or say prayers for that soul in assembly. This didn't go down well… The schoolgirls decided to riot. (95)

In paramilitary-style response, the students go on hunger strike, refusing to eat lunch in the cafeteria; they stage a "mini-riot" (96) in the schoolyard.

This narrative grafting redoubles in its translation by the author into mental and physical disorders, too. That Amelia, her sister Lizzie and their friends all become bulimic or anorexic means these self-starving, vomit-inducing domestic figures function as doubles for the contemporaneous swell of political protest in the high political realm. In "Troubles, 1979," Amelia now an adult and chronically anorexic, is described using the same label: "The hunger-striker to the side of them [Amelia] went on sitting doing nothing" (154). What is more, her eating disorder is described in political terms, the terminology used to describe one's association with the IRA or the UVF: she had been refusing food "for over three years and all for a reason that was inner, top secret and to do with my own soul" (96). The hunger strike has of course been part of Amelia's entire anorexic debilitated terrified life. As Noddy Holder put it, she "turns the Troubles in on herself. The first manifestation within her is severe anorexia… later followed by alcoholism, and finally by a vividly-described complete mental breakdown" (Holder).

This tactic of the extemporaneous doubling of historical events takes shape by other means too. As the main character comes of age, readers notice the complex web of high politics shadowing her and other residents of a small, fraught world. Like any bildungsroman, *No Bones* follows its protagonist from childhood into adulthood. In this case, the biographical years correspond directly with the official years of the war, and the arc of the Troubles is basted and tacked, like crumbs of bread, along the character's path—from early childhood through her eventual exile and return home at the close. Across the narrative, we observe the war occurring *inside* the home, the school and other civil space. Amelia's mother screams, "Give me peace now!" in response to which the narrator reflects: "The women in the household apparently had their own ideas about these house-burnings and about this war. The boards were up. The women themselves had their sticks and their bricks and their knives and their pokers ready…" (14). The public, political enters the private, domestic—unannounced and forcibly as high-ranking IRA leaders—like the "fathers" of an imagined though still uncreated 32-county island nation—enter Amelia Lovett's home to intervene in and quell a domestic squabble between mother and aunt. Regarding the IRA's dealings with the cantankerous Lovett family, Burns narrates the "beyond" of political process: the moment when political figures "invade" the Lovett home in this way.[156]

The third, seventh and eighth chapters are schoolroom narratives through which we recognize the history of the Troubles playing out inside the ostensibly sacrosanct space of education. The first of these, "In the Crossfire, 1971," when Amelia is in her third year of elementary school, takes place on a day when the children are to "write a poem about peace" (44), a "Special Day of Hope as well as being, unfortunately, Spy Wednesday" when the third-graders are finger-printed (43). The episode is hilarious owing to the characterizations of the teachers as "ugly," inept, violent hypocrites with itchy skirts who continuously scratch themselves and beat or verbally abuse the children. The poetry assignment proves impossible because political conflict, sectarian prejudice and the violence thereby wrought are all these children know: “Like the others, Amelia too was in confusion. It wasn’t that she’d anything against peace. It was just that she didn’t have anything for it. What did she know? Who could she ask? Nobody. Nobody she knew knew anything about peace” (47). Amelia’s poem, a verse narrative about being finger-printed, serves as addendum to the chapter while the rest of the children “sniffled and snuffled and doodled violence on their desks” (50). This botched exercise is followed by a “game” involving ink and chocolates: a visitation to Amelia’s school by representatives of the RUC to finger-print the children. The episode demonstrates how they cannot escape the war; it marks and constitutes them *a priori*—before they even have the maturity to comprehend it. Their unthinking, bloody notebook doodles reveal how deeply the ongoing conflict defines not only their world but their imaginations and indeed their selves. What is more, these eight and nine-year olds’ futures as “terrorists” and “thugs” is preordained: they are marked, the way paved long before the fact for their incarceration at sixteen years. The chapter leaves readers suspecting that the next exercise involving chocolates and officials of the colonial state might be the “mug shots” or the “being searched” game.

The political quagmire courses through the veins of residents, too, fully occupies their minds, is grafted right into their physicality as they are marked bodily: scars, pen and finger-printing ink, tattoos. As if rattled by exploding bombs, Vincent Lyttle’s “blood shakes” (163). After Amelia’s brother beats him, Vincent “got up and dusted some of the dust off him, but then stopped and took a red pen out and drew lines up and down himself. He did these lines exactly on the places Mick Lovett had touched him, five long red lines up and down his forearm” (160). Mick had not simply touched Vincent, however; he had physically abused, harmed and traumatized him. Vincent draws the border on his body, penmarks on the places where bruises will soon blossom. It is not just his dazed and confused mind that is occupied and terrorized, but his entire being. That he "costumes" and "decorates" himself with "partition" in this way reveals that war does not just enter the home, it invades the subject's body, circulatory system and stream of consciousness. And, in one of the most incisive metaphors of the division, even the temporal partition—that between sunrise and sunset—is dissolved: "Day and night blended easily here, the way Belfast and London also seemed to do these days" (306). This structural temporality is not a random detail. It symbolizes the impossibility of escaping war, or the political at large, and how, in one fell swoop, these phenomena, especially the brokenness of the nation, define the location represented, the people there, every single miniscule aspect of life.

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That partition is the most invasive and overwhelming of the political forces assailing domestic life in Northern Ireland means that it will be the trope of *breakage* that weaves undifferentiated *space* into lucid, historically specific *place*. By transcribing memories of the war-ravaged Belfast of the '70's and '80's, twenty-three episodes told from the alternating perspectives of Vincent, Jamesey and, mostly, Amelia, the novel shapes up as a private rendering of public political events that exposes doubt as the very sinew of partitioned national life, the location as "Logue's crumbling backyard" (83). And this means that Burns' poetics of doubt is also Meena Alexander's poetics of dislocation, a text sketching out the "[n]o place" that is partition (2009 35). This is a political location where "languages are constantly unraveling under the pressures of coming to voice" in a partitioned homeland and time of postcolonial exile, where "[s]yntax falls short of sense. The voice comes to rest in a temporality marked by perpetual aftermath. Memory succours itself on a traumatic return. The tongue is bitten and starts to break" (Alexander 2009 20 – 21). Due to the partitionist unmaking of nation and subject, Vincent's reflections are a precise translation of Alexander's view: "After all, if you can't trust your own
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tongue, whose tongue can you trust? He took a bit out of it and it bled" (166). As if to prove that he exists in spite of all the partitionist doubt he lives with, Vincent bites his tongue to be certain he actually has one, to be certain that when he bites a tongue, it is *his* tongue that is bitten.

The novel offers a specifically *partitionist* politics of location, articulating the meaning of a broken territory. As Amelia says,

> I told [the Peelers] there had been cries of Fenian, Taig, Billy Boys, Remember, general effin' and blindin' and No Pope Here. No, I didn't hear what became of… No, I most certainly wasn't involved in the… No! I didn't witness what happened with the Black & Decker, I didn't touch any of them breezeblocks and—were they stupid?—of course it was about the Border. (136)

The meaning of partition is conveyed through the novel's poetical design: to be partitioned is to be ontologically and specifically in doubt. The subject of partition is "at the right time but in the wrong place" (163) and, in this nation, "[a]s usual, everything was fast-motion and slow-motion at the same time" (82). Burns describes the location meta-fictionally in numerous other places, besides. In Vincent's chapter, Mr. Parker describes his psychosis as "isolation deadland, …a world of absolute horror, …a place full of hate" (155). In self-reflexive commentary on the narrative and perceptive translation of partition, Burns writes: "First Aid in English it was called… but as a matter of fact, it wasn't… A naughty child had interchanged all the covers of the books in the class library… Anyway, after Miss Hanratty threw it, it *landed with a great crack and a broken spine* in the corner and that… was the end of that. *It was dead*" (42 my italics). And Amelia's workspace is drawn as an uncanny metaphor of partitioned Belfast, too: "There was plastic sheets over most of the concrete floor, with partitions here and portakabins there and drills going and wires hanging and people wandering about everywhere. The big old flax machines were gone and the place was cold and full of echoes" (125).

The political location is, in these ways, allegorized as a madhouse, a place populated by "quiet dead road[s]" (70), systemically broken, and, like a maze, everywhere bordered: "right in the middle of the Shankill, on the other side of the barricades, a stone's throw away" (Ibid). In this narrative of partitioned, conflicted Ireland, Belfast is drawn as a frantic convolution of internal breakage, everywhere divided along sect lines and the scrim becomes Burns' primary means to show that. That metaphor is used to particular effect in these scenes: Vincent: "He is in disarray. Half his pyjamas are still on his body and halves of his body are in and out of the bed. His shaking is violent" (179). And Amelia: in London, "Amelia stood in the darkened hallway and looked at [the] communal door in silence" (265). And, in a truly luminous evocation of the scrim, upon learning the news of her sister's death by suicide, Amelia: "She sat down on the floor…, in the silence, in the summertime, she felt air from a breeze coming in around the loose panes. As it surrounded her, she breathed it up her nose. Then she breathed it out and, with her eyes closed, she waited…" (266). And, at Lizzie's funeral: "She leaned over and slid one of her own hands down inside the coffin… She touched her sister's and it was clenched, a stony fist, just as it had been in her life always… She put her own hand round the fist and held it and a shadow fell across the coffin…" (270). A primary aspect of the surrealism of postcoloniality is Burns' bordered aesthetic, as seen in these examples. The novel is under siege by borders and breakage, it "weld[s] together" the many "partial views" (Merleau-Ponty 17). The geopolitical border is both conspicuous and ubiquitous: there is no way to miss that the largest city in this broken partial-nation is founded on the trauma that birthed and undergirds it.

Burns clearly experiences her life, remembers her childhood *in* borders. A vivid exemplification is in the allegory of the borders drawn on the pages of "peace poems" Amelia's third-grade class is assigned but unable to compose. Their draconian teacher, Mrs. Hanratty, tells her third-grade class: "I want nice little borders drawn all the way round" (47). Burns continues:

> Amelia's border consisted of fangs and teethmarks, pointing inwards… Bernie had drawn potatoes with orange and yellow and red spicy lines…, Bossy had Cowboys and Indians, Marionetta scalps and bonfires, Debbie whistles and binlids and Pauline, rows and rows of little tiny soldiers, lining up and searching rows and rows of little tiny men. (49 – 50)

The passage is loaded with political symbolism: potatoes; the colors orange and red; "Cowboys and Indians"; scalps and bonfires; binlids; men being searched. And, it is one of Burns' best illustrations of the surrealism of postcoloniality: here, we see graphically how the political is inescapable, the distinctions between public and private a confused rubble, as even the mouths, minds and pens of babes are thus inhabited.

The onslaught of partition in the life of the subject is signified, too, in the way Burns' urban landscape is an incarcerating, imprisoning encampment. Belfast is a mine-field, its streets a maze where residents are caught: "all she could see were forks everywhere—left forks, right forks, middle forks and side roads. She couldn't get clear, nor respond to who was speaking to her, so intent she was in trying to slot her religious geography into place" (285). In this city, "no longer [knowing] her forks" is a life or death quagmire for this protagonist (286). Residents live besieged by stultifying forms of territorialization ranging far beyond the incarceration of Catholic men for which the era is known: "…for it was natural after a shooting to arrest any young man. They'd be taken to Castlereagh to be unfairly treated about something intriguing they knew nothing yet about" (115). Repeated moves to trap Amelia express a partitionist ontology, the sense of existing in parts and as fragments. From the first page when she and her friends learn that they can no longer play at the top of Herbert Street, mere minutes into the narrative, we watch as she is flanked and imprisoned by a series of partitions. [quote?] Amelia is literally a captive of her boarded-up home, safely ensconced beneath the kitchen table with her dog, Dachau, a figure of the transplantation and border collapses Burns is keen on enacting (14 - 19). In a subsequent episode, Burns writes: "The school wall muffled one side of [Amelia] and the Bone Hills the other" (99). Still later, Amelia reflects: "Shots are fired—four, five, six, cracks. A rifle. I go on filling the kettle. Then there's more—rapid, closer together—on the other side of our wall. So I back up against it between the window and the stove" (192). And finally, at her sister's funeral: "…she stepped back but the coffin was behind her. [Jat] stepped forward and offered her the drink once more. He pushed the glass against her chest, her breast… She took it, and held it, then set it on the windowledge" (271). Belfast streets are, we see, battlegrounds and residents of Ardoyne may not survive if they enter the wrong section of the maze or even, simply, leave home at all. Amelia's neighborhood friend Fergal, too, "began the two-mile walk by himself and he took, it goes without saying, the Catholic Cliftonville route" (202). But in spite of remaining on the right side of the border, he finds himself hunted down by a Protestant gang anyway, and winds up "lying between the four front tyres of Eddie Breen's massive truck used ostensibly for delivering harmless pints of milk" (203). The description closing the episode is one of the most scrimmed, most evocative of partition: "The car drove off and Fergal stayed where he was, the ground beneath his belly, the lorry at his back, his life somehow yet working, all his blood intact in his veins. He couldn't get his arm up though, in order to see what the time was, because he had withdrawn to his centre. His periphery had gone away" (205).

Partition eclipses the entire location, bleeds into home, hearth and all institutions. Perhaps its most obvious presence—surely the most valent aspect of Burns' politics of location—is in the novel's fragmentary, intervallic structure and voicing: the various modes of disintegration of the narrative, of the voices and perspectives carrying it, of the minute space allotted episodes so that they come together as the "snapshots" described earlier, the fragment as the narrative's primary structural element. While it is true, as Lukács proposes, that "the historical novel presents the writer with a specially strong temptation to try and produce an extensively complete totality" (42), Burns does not give in to this lure. As a historical novelist haunted by multiple forms of silencing, yet determined to convey the life of partition, she writes a narrative that works through fragmentation, interruption and compression. *No Bones* is a piecemeal history in which nearly every chapter-fragment is a flashback from the year(s) indicated, an attempt to remember what can't be recalled and yet, because traumatic, keeps coming back, its witness being both compulsory and vexed. Like an account of trauma, *No Bones* is told through the kinds of vignettes Israeli filmmaker Ari Folman says result from the "black holes" of traumatic memory (2008). Just as trauma interrupts and erases time (Herman *passim*), the narrative time of Burns' autobiographical, phenomenological account of political history is incongruous and choppy, each chapter is the shard in a discontinuous account that could stand on its own.

Narrative chronology is utilized *and* rejected in a way reminiscent of Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, his use of geographic and temporal space with so many looping, unexplained deviations. Though clearly located in a broad swath of time, a year or two years, each episode offers a mere glimpse of the period assigned it. And, because of sizeable breaks in time preceding and following chapters, they seem to wrench forward in time from installment to installment and develop an episodic disjointedness that "mirrors psychotic fragmentation"

(Grossman, J. 12). Burns says this style "suits the world" she represents, one "where even reality itself is a big piece of madness and hence you have to become disconnected and/or delusional in order to survive" (Gee). The most extreme example of both historical and narrative compression is "Babies, 1974," also the novel's most grotesque episode. It tells of Amelia's brief encounter with Mary Dolan as her friend pushes a pram housing a dead infant along a sidewalk patrolled by British soldiers. The chapter represents its year in approximately fifteen minutes of total narrative time. Preposterously, readers are to accept that the year *in toto* is grasped on the basis of a tiny slice of time: twelve months captured in a quarter or third of an hour as—in Walter Benjamin's words—1974 "flits by" (255). This flashcard aesthetic implies that the time period compassed in this chapter was a long stream of grotesque, traumatizing fifteen-minute intervals like the one recorded—a year captured in fifteen gruesome minutes. Likewise, "In the Crossfire, 1971" covers a mere few hours—from the morning, when Amelia's school day begins, until just "[a]fter lunch" (51) when her third-grade class is finger-printed by the R.U.C. The next chapter lurches forward in time, where, once again, we are given a mere "scrap" (Benjamin 11): a couple of hours on the evening when Amelia's brother, Mick, steals her "treasure trove" of "thirty-seven black rubber bullets she'd collected ever since the British Army started firing them" (53).

Like life in a warzone, one never knows what to expect around the corners of *No Bones*—how far the drop will be from chapter to chapter, how steep the climb moment to moment or just what gratuitous encounter lurks. These narrative undulations are stretched and intensified by the disjointing of perspective and voice too. *No Bones* is "told from several viewpoints [and] flips between reality and psychosis" (Gee). While most are told from the protagonist's point of view, this is upturned from the short first to the lengthier second chapter. When *No Bones* opens, Amelia is six or seven years of age, in her first year of elementary school. The next time she guides the narrative is in the third installment when she is more than two years older—an inordinately long time for a child in a war zone and for a reader under siege of a deeply violent, traumatizing narrative. The intervening episode, "An Apparently Motiveless Crime, 1969 – 1971"—straddling three years, uniquely—is narrated omnisciently, from the perspective of Amelia's much older, "mulatto" (half-Irish, half-British) cousin Jamesey, who appears and is killed off in the fell swoop of this single, memorable chapter. Like McNamee's *Resurrection Man*, Burns "employs a… point of view [that] shifts from narrator to character, back to the narrator, then to another character… there is, consequently, also a consistent disjunction between the narrative voice and a focalized viewpoint" (McCarthy 132 – 33). In terms of voice, third-person omniscient is most common but, jarringly, in the sixth chapter, Amelia narrates for the first time in first-person. In the exceptionally compressed episode, "Babies, 1974," Burns' primary witness is eleven or twelve years of age. Her Joycean introduction of first-person is well-timed and symbolizes Amelia's place at the threshold of puberty and entry to adulthood. In the scene, the girls are surrounded by British soldiers—penal representatives of the colonial state—who function as reminders that the abomination housed beneath the pram allegorizes, at a minimum, the state of these adolescent females: their healthy growth foreclosed, their maturation the living, ontological filicide embodied by the dead infant. Like "[Bees] in a muckfield" (Burns 48), the implicit forecast is that, as young and later adult women, the girls will suffer Amelia's sister's fate, moving through cycles of destructiveness, from sexual abuse, anorexia and drug-addiction to Lizzie's final willed, spectacular death.

However, Burns does not evolve the narrative, as expected, into first-person at this point: instead she maintains Amelia's lyrical, intimate voice for the next two installments, on 1975 and 1977—there is no chapter on 1976—, teasing readers into anticipating a move toward (if not teleology, at least) narratological order. But, then, in "Miscellany and Drift, 1978," she abruptly returns to third-person—*limited*, this time, as Amelia stands at a remove "omnisciently" narrating events involving other characters. What Hutcheon says of Roa Bastos' *I the Supreme* is equally true of this novel: it "disorients its readers on the level of its narration (who speaks? is the text written? oral? transcribed?), [in] its plot and temporal structures" (47). In addition, Burns implicitly reminds readers of some of the lessons of life in a war zone: do not expect order or teleology, in a word (narrative) "safety," even if all signals point to such a change. Burns returns to Amelia's first-person voice in the *second* 1978 installment, "Echoes, 1978"—an unexpected repetition that echoes the previous chapter and is also jarring—again returning to third-person omniscient in "Troubles, 1979." *No Bones* is so irregularly voiced that, from moment to moment, one does not know who will function as guide, who will speak or for how long, or indeed how much time will have elapsed, between chapters or within a single episode. Burns' narrative structure is a form of organized chaos (Bradley 16): linear at the meta-level—chapters move from year to year in order—and fragmented internally—they recount only a day or a few hours of an entire year or two-year period. It is a version of Lyotard's postmodern "*petits récits*": a recounting of history through fragmented pieces of narrative and multiple, conflicting accounts and does not arrange them into a historical meaning, order or gloss" (Lyotard xxiv).

This is the house partition builds. As a novel representing a broken nation, her narrative is a "broken," "silenced" story speaking stutteringly of a ruptured place and people. The history offered is broken too by the doubt intentionally refracting it. In order to represent her broken place, Burns writes through her silenced broken voice. Her novel is everywhere interrupted in the same way the urban landscape in which it is set is everywhere segregated by walls just as the violent episodes are segregated by the madness installments. Burns' narrative is cracked and broken at multiple levels: the borders organizing the chaos of history and nation, fallen, its history told through shards of an exploded whole. It is a puzzle assembled with half its pieces, with palpable holes and pregnant silences encircling and destabilizing each and every incident. The narrative is broken, too, in the sense that it is orated by a voice which, at any moment, is like to falter and fall back into the obliterative abyss of silencing from out of which it emerged. It is again cracked and fragmented in the shift of perspectives and narrators, from Amelia to Jamesey, back to Amelia and then Vincent, from third person to first and back. And so, "[i]nstead of an intelligible world, there are radiant nebulae separated by expanses of darkness" (Merleau-Ponty 4). In truth, what Burns develops here is a politics of location that draws out the intense relationality between power and a geography formed and haunted by geopolitical process. She wrote the history of the Troubles so that it would be read as a film is read, so that it would be seen, witnessed, so that the reader would be unable to disentangle themselves from it, so that they would *fall* into the history, like falling into a dream, thereby confronting the truth of the truth, the lived memory of trauma, the historicity of history.

This style and poetics are rooted in the location, largely the fact of partition. That the narrative constantly collapses these domains, that private spaces double as battlefields, congresses, veteran's hospitals, torture chambers, negotiation rooms, that political events occur in schoolrooms, parks and playgrounds, all this comes together as a portrait of the fractured nation. Given this site of authorship, indeed, the best and truest history is one that may indeed seem *least* true. If written in fidelity to the surrealism of postcoloniality, it may be a text that leaves readers utterly confused about the time of things, about where they are, on which side of which border they stand. Readers recognize too how there is no sanctuary from high politics, as Grossman and Deane explain—even for children. They see how all the conceptual and corporeal limits have given way and the private, domestic sphere is superimposed upon, occupied and fully overwhelmed by the public, political domain. The crossing and merger of political process in daily life forms an important core for postcolonial authorship.

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The surrealist phenomenon described renders the work of art, and the space of its enunciation, likewise invaded. How compass historical damage within the hold of narrative and in conformity to grammars of culture, language and style when multiple forms of silencing suffuse, vex, shape and fundamentally truncate its composition and when neither accepted literary forms nor the syntax of a colonial mother tongue will sanction its articulation? The surrealism of postcoloniality changes everything about how the political past will come to be documented; it changes who its witnesses are and by what means they encounter matters of historical significance. Anna Burns finds herself in the precarious predicament of many postcolonial literary historians: the need to bear witness to history—because it is personal and lived, because the representation is not merely a presentation of fact and event but an act of political resistance—and thus in turn the need to break the mold and reinvent the form—the poetics, the style, the language. *No Bones* is neither an arrangement of data, facts and figures nor a flight into the magical, thus obfuscating a "truer" history of suffering in Northern Ireland. It is, rather, the recorded personal memories of three eye-witnesses, "bodies" inundated, defined, marked, traumatized, broken and turned "mad" by the surrealism of postcoloniality and partition, who "lived" through (or died in) that history and are compelled to convey those experiences. In coming to terms with Burns' work, we understand that the author's extreme geography isn't compassable by available models and that the public, political nature of extreme experience places her, irremediably, in the position of having to bear witness to it in an analogously public,
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political way. Because this is postcolonial *literature of witness,* it is concerned, fundamentally, with the question of truth. That kind of history must be truthful in the sense of admitting its own questions, its anxieties, its madness, the arguments it has with itself, and, given the trauma that is part and parcel of history, even the specter of the task's impossibility.

For the author whose claim to truth is founded on her experience of personally witnessing "the moment of violence and suffering" (Pandey 19) or whose aim is to document the criminality of a colonial state, aesthetic precedents operate to temper and censor the articulation of historical brutality and suffering, effectively re-authorizing political oppression by foreclosing its archivability. The function of the historical text is, after all, to convey "Somethin' Happened Political"[157] but, one must do so according to the unwritten historiographical rules governing literary as well as official histories, penning the past in a way that protects readers from the actual dreadfulness of events. And this requirement holds even when the history is violent before it is anything else. Disbelieving, negative responses to historical texts often stem from a readerly need to be shielded from the gruesome realities and lived experiences of abominable or terrifying events (Hutcheon 35 – 36). This is mandatory when the narrative is historical. Authors must reign it in and refrain from violating accepted frontiers of literary speakability. Toni Morrison observes the censoring effects of literary politesse, noting how slave narratives were often "scorned as 'biased,' 'inflammatory' and 'improbable'" by critics (1998 187). To avoid such dismissals, early African-American writers were driven to avoid "offend[ing] the reader by being too angry, or by showing too much outrage, or by calling the reader names" (187). The author was to refuse to be "inflammatory" and "[put] no emotional pressure on the reader other than that which the situation itself contains" (Morrison 1998 187 – 188). Through the omission of detail, they effectively masked their subject and, regardless of how outrageously violent or undoubtedly criminal, obfuscated the facts and truths it was their very purpose to reveal.

Thus, literary history functions as a censoring, muting bit; it carves out a space of enunciation that silences the enunciation it opens to. When the author is witness to violent political history she is also a trauma victim. As with the surrealism of postcoloniality that characterizes daily life, "[i]n trauma," Caruth says, "the *outside* has gone *inside* without any mediation" (59). Trauma fragments memory, ontology, identity, producing supplementary levels of alienation within an always already (psychoanalytically) split subject. Postcolonial writers wrestle with the difficulty of bearing witness to national history when, because of trauma, both memory and language are suddenly vacuous—lost right along with the memory of the past, the history itself. Burns conveys the issue in one of the most self-reflexive moments in this meta-narrative, where she draws the place of the postcolonial author:

> Tears—of rage—fell out of Amelia. Two of them, heavy, plopped and plashed and left wet marks all over the page. 'I wish for *place* in my country' she wrote, without paying attention… The words left black smudges entirely in their wake… She was starting to get interested in the mechanics of this exercise. She began her third line and soon was well into the swing... Forgetting all the instructions, she made the biggest mistake of all, and wrote what turned out to be her own little war poem about peace. (48 – 9).

That such events demand inclusion in the historical record but cannot be either remembered or clearly recounted is a constitutive predicament for the postcolonial historian. Whether participant, researcher, memoirist or journalist, compassing such a history depends on the dubious material of traumatic memory, a form of recall that is highly resistant to willed recall.

The absurd dilemma facing any historian, that capturing the past can only be achieved extemporaneously—from outside and afterwards, prevails too. But, when we turn to extreme histories—partition, genocide, slavery, war—this difficulty dramatically magnifies.

Political inundation leads to another aspect of silence and silencing, one that clearly haunted the composition of *No Bones*: the socio-political dimension of history's unspeakability. That the history Burns relates was so extreme means it will be verbalized only with extreme difficulty. Amelia reflects: "The words making up the questions slip away and I can't get the hang of them at all" (197). For philosopher Elaine Scarry, "pain has no voice" and betrays an implacable "resistance to language" (3); suffering "does not simply resist language," she says, but "actively destroys it" (3 – 4). Anthropologist and partition theorist, Veena Das likewise explains that "mutilation[s] of language" reveal how, in conditions of violence, "language is struck dumb. A relapse into a dumb condition is… part of the terror itself. …violence annihilates language… terror cannot be brought into the realm of the utterable" (184). Psychologist Judith Herman takes a somewhat more optimistic view of this perplexing site of authorship, however. She argues that, while difficult, it is quite possible to construct narratives of traumatic experience, and indeed her methodology for recovery is based upon that belief. She writes: "Out of the fragmented components of frozen imagery and sensation" victims articulate an "organized, detailed, verbal account" (177). Much like Burns' narrative, "[p]eople who have survived atrocities often tell their stories in a highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner which undermines their credibility" (Herman 1). On page 67, Amelia reflects: "It was a terrible injustice that had been done to her, but she couldn't get it straight in her head, never mind convey it with any coherence to another person… 'Ma!' she tried. Mick—trick … prisoner … thirty-seven … mine, fat, black, bits of shrapnel, gone!" For listeners and readers, "[i]t is difficult… to see more than a few fragments of the picture at one time, to retain all the pieces, and to fit them together,” while, for the traumatized orator, “[i]t is even more difficult to find a language that conveys fully and persuasively what one has seen” (Herman 2). The process of laboriously piecing together recalcitrant scraps of memory into a readable narrative takes shape, therefore, as an absurd, dreamlike story that seems exaggerated and irrational not unlike what we read in *No Bones*. In Amelia Lovett’s words, the recounting “sounds too much” (12), reads like Vincent’s trauma narrative, only a few lines of which are decipherable: “…about the beating that what. About know Hunch also, Snappy great come. Snappy. Hunch. Snappy. Write about Snappy. It’s a disguise. “Would that great about murder,” don’t and would Hunch come? It and together. *Make it great. Know about Hunch.* Make Snappy to it. *Make. It. All. Stop*” (175, my italics). In Herman’s view, however, the very *fact* of trauma paradoxically preordains its verbalization because of a “dialectic of trauma” whereby victims experience a “conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them” (Herman 1). They are compelled to silence their voices *and* to bear witness to extreme experience: “Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud... Atrocities, however, refuse to be buried. Equally as powerful as the desire to deny atrocities is the conviction that denial does not work” (Ibid).

A narrative of political conflict is articulated by way of a logic of self-contradiction then, emerging through a literary-historical that betrays the paradoxical need both to deny and give voice to the material that is its subject. According to Vincent, “Silence and golden” and we understand why he has this awareness (176). The problematics of language, voice and utterance facing this historian are complicated by the fact that, as a resident of Northern Ireland, Burns is inescapably part of the conflict. Thus, not only is her traumatized voice marginalized, her fear of not being believed extending from that too, but, speech touching the war is *a priori* foreclosed.

Her whole *world* is one where "speech [is] silenced" (Das 181), where the commitment to Heaney's dictum—"Whatever You Say, Say Nothing"—is a foregone conclusion (51 - 54). The Northern Irish subject cannot testify in any medium—not in a printed text, not to the authorities, not even in (Vincent's) protected psychotherapy.[158] The surrealist phenomenon Rushdie identifies leads to another aspect of silence and silencing, one that clearly haunted the composition of *No Bones*: the socio-political dimension of history's unspeakability.

From start to finish, we sense that the composition of *No Bones* was vexed as dynamics of witness and political struggle circle the narrative. The inescapable nature of the war and specters of silence surrounding its expression explain the hints *No Bones* "bears of an intensively problematized verbal process" (Sedgwick 95). The silencing issues facing the author come together as a palimpsest—the predicates of literary decorum, the machinations of trauma and colonial marginalization, and the societal prerequisite not to name names or anything else. The surrealist phenomenon Rushdie identifies leads to another aspect of silence and silencing, one that clearly haunted the composition of *No Bones*: the socio-political dimension of history's unspeakability. Burns addresses this issue all through *No Bones*, reiterating many times what she says at the close of Jamesey's memorable chapter: "Nobody would speak about what had happened. Nothing really had happened. It was just another of those motiveless crimes that were going on all over the place" (40). In content, format and structure, we perceive a conspicuous anxiety of authorship. It is a specifically *historiographical* concern rooted in the novel's status as documentation. That she anxiously peppers her novel with repeated assertions of its claim on history is a need arising not only from the fear that her incredible-but-true story will not be believed but also because of the specters of forgetting and madness attending its composition, receipt and appraisal. Burns' narrative is clearly in crisis: it is nervous and confused, silent in its utterances, deeply self-conscious, pathologically “insecure.” As Amelia reflects: “…who ever heard of a casual person living in Northern Ireland?” (293)—likewise, who ever heard of a casual Irish novelist? Betraying Ireland’s history as that imperial nightmare from which Stephen Dedalus was trying to awaken, most of the island’s novelists are haunted by the historico-political conditions that gave rise to James Joyce’s iconic self-reflexivity. Joyce, “fret[ted] in English” (1993 205), of course, and all the early work of the Field Day Company—by Friel, Kilroy and Paulin—“center[ed] on anxieties of naming, speaking, and voice and the relation of these to place, identity, and self-realization” (Deane 1990 14 – 15).

Burns’ work acknowledges the madness inherent to her task, how verbalizing the traumatic past necessarily means “sounding” mad and (thus) risking dismissal *as* a credible voice. How else recount history truthfully, other than by admitting—in the iteration—the forgetting that is indelibly part of the remembrance? This author indirectly suggests: a true history will be one that elicits just such a response. Burns’ evident “narrative anxieties” (Haslam 192) and the pressure of so many arms of silencing were overcome by forging a poetics of doubt that holds the reader in that in-between space of perplexity—between faith and atheism, between madness and reason, between the purely phantasmal and absolutely real, pummeling them with reminders of Balzac’s “[a]ll is true” while delivering such stunning preposterousness, unconscionable parsings of time and space and a hideousness from which they are tempted to do a “turnaway” as Burns calls it (159). The extemporaneity and surrealism of postcoloniality are geographical facts Burns’ novel lays out. In this partition narrative, we observe the persistence of trauma, loss and suffering, the intrusion of the political, in both content and craft—in the textures of the text, in what is remembered and what is disremembered.

The textual “schizophrenia,” the uncertainty and vacillation, signal the way this historical narrative was iterated under the auspices of an ambivalence regarding its subject, thus creating a reading location that mimics the tragic paradox of postcolonial memory, voice and iteration. Burns’ response to the crises of form and language, the dialectics of speech and silence, the concomitant need to name and concretize a political moment she traumatically forgets and remembers, was to compose an indeterminate, incoherent, incomplete history with doubt as the central affect and which is resolutely asserted as authentic and true. As a response to the dynamics of voice, language and representation haunting its composition, in spite of all the static, Burns’ resurrective aesthetic becomes necessary. She cannot speak through the traditional voicing and structure of the historical novel. She needs another voice, another platform, another space, pictures, a carnal gratuitousness, a visceral grotesquerie. The author must be capable of returning to and phenomenologically resurrecting the moment itself which is achieved by means of a poetics that affectively mimics lived time. Because history must be felt rather than merely known, felt in the body, in the landscapes of emotion, in the disgust response, in the pity and the terror and all the doubt, in that “formidably rich phenomenology of emotions” into which the reader is plunged and of which they are cathartically purged (Sedgwick 94). Her historical novel works through affect, it is phenomenological, immediate, bizarre, tremulous, like a dream that actually happened—history as the nightmares of Stephen Dedalus.

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~**Part III:** *Raising the Specter, Repairing “The Dead”*

> *Come, belovéd. / That we may lie here, this /*
> *is the partition…*
> ~Paul Celan
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The symphonic movement of *No Bones*—the long trajectory through the madness and affectivity of doubt and its cathartic exorcism from the skein of the text—begs the question of its materialist efficacy, political value and performative thrust. The entry of the world into the text, the reversal of madness, and the concurrent recognition of "the truth about *No Bones"*—these are critical surely to the novel's political valences. Ostriker raises the question, asking how is "resistance to be poetically organized" (319), how does literature work as constituent of the powerless, as epistemology of political criminality? A history of the masses would be one that "re-members" the moment phenomenologically. It would lay out the material reality of the hours, the minutes, "the moment of violence" (Pandey 1997 19). Eve Sedgwick says, in fact, that "the most useful work" is written as *No Bones* was, "near the boundary of what a writer can't figure out how to say readily," a text that "confounds agency with passivity, [and] the self with the book and the world" (Sedgwick 2). Burns' novel confounds reason with madness—the reason of history with the madness of history, memory, spatiotemporality, visuality and witness. But what does the language of this novel "do" in the world?[159] Sedgwick advises the critic to "disentangle the question of truth value from the question of performative effect" (129), to move "from the rather fixated question Is a particular piece of knowledge true, and how can we know? to the further questions: What does knowledge *do*—the pursuit of it, the having and exposing of it, the receiving again of knowledge of what one already knows? *How*, in short, is knowledge performative, and how best does one move among its causes and effects?" (Sedgwick 124). For us, the questions are, how does the dialectic of the text, the bouncing ball of doubt, align with the aims of the postcolonial text as generally understood? What is the relation between the mood and emotionality of the postcolonial novel and its performativity and political import? How can the social contract between reader and historical text be maintained in Burns' aesthetic, how is it not a thing that falls apart along with the partitioning logic of the text? In a poetics of *doubt*, can history's political cogency be retained, can the author question the validity of her history without undoing its purpose? Or might this be the very thing establishing its radical potential?

What is the "performative affectivity" of Burns' history (Sedgwick 68), the effects of the historical knowledge affectively garnered through it? How does a mad, self-conflicted history function as discourse and how does the *way* it functions compare to other forms of historical narrative? Anna Burns' history orbits an unavoidably complex cross-section of literary critical questions—issues of concern not just for Benjamin, LaCapra, Jameson, Sedgwick and the other historiographers cited, but to Tristan Tzara, Ernst Bloch and André Breton, to Dada and Surrealism, too. Above all, there is the matter of the use value of art in the face of corrupt power and the questions of genre and style that had been points of contention between Georg Lukács, Ernst Bloch and Walter Benjamin. Their realism debates centered on a central issue for the postcolonial author: the *form* of the work as against the real politic it is created in response to. These theorists' views differed regarding which aesthetic functions best: the abstract or the concrete; realism, surrealism or expressionism. Lukács, for his part, believed "[t]he proper function of art was to portray objective reality in organic and concrete works from which all heterogeneous material, and especially conceptual statement, was excluded" (Bloch 1977 14). This would be a realist narrative that brings its historical subject matter within the aegis of reason, renders the chaos of time logical and knowable, narrativized and orderly, attempts an epical totalization of the past. That form is familiar from the historical novel as well as documentarian history. Ernst Bloch, "[insisting] on the historical authenticity of the *experience* that underlay Expressionism"—its phenomenology—, took the reverse view (1977 14 my italics). He believed, as did André Breton, that the "attitude" of nineteenth-century realism resulted in a "clarity bordering on stupidity, a dog's life" (Breton 6), that the abstract, poetic rendering of the past would also be the one with the greatest political utility (Bloch 1977 14). Bloch theorizes the need for an "'intransitive [history]' which lays no claim to the kind of realism aspired to by nineteenth-century historians and writers" (LaCapra quoting White, 25).

Such a text would prompt the reader to *visualize* and *feel* the past, experience it through phenomenology in all its grotesque, low dudgeon. In "Marxism and Poetry," Bloch writes:

> Given the amazing superiority of philosophical truth—*in particular, the truth given by Aristotelian poetics in preference to poetry rather than to so-called naturalistic history*—it becomes clear…that …meaningful poetry makes the world aware of an accelerated flow of action, *an elucidated waking dream of the essential*. The world wants to be changed in this way. …the correlate of the world to the poetically appropriate action is precisely the *tendency*. …for truth is not the portrayal of facts but of *processes*. (Bloch 1988 160, my emphases)

Rather than being derived through reason, epistemologies of history are best when *affectively* consequent. Thus the historian's aim must center, in Foucault's words, on conveying "the rudimentary movements of [the] experience" of the past (quoted in Felman 213). Indeed, this would be a history that does what poetry does, one written in the language of madness Foucault metaphysically seeks, "senseless words anchored by nothing in time" (Ibid 214), the "forgotten words on whose omission the Western world is founded" (Ibid 212).

It was necessary, in other words, for readers to endure the painful three-hundred and thirty-three pages leading up to Burns' cathartic *finale*. For Foucault, the task of the historian is "no doubt doubly impossible: since it would have us reconstitute the dust of actual suffering" (Felman 214), that is to say, suffering's "truth." This is poetic, traumatic realism, a text in which historical meaning is clarified through a shock of recognition, the cathartic spark theorized by not just Bloch and Aristotle but also by Breton—"Between art and spectator there will be a tremor" (Breton 37)—and Benjamin, whose call to historical materialism would be answered by a narrative that "defamiliarizes a habitual, customary response to reality" through a "shock effect" (Morris 22). Indeed, historiographers like LaCapra and Jameson, or members of the Subaltern Studies Group, Dipesh Chakrabarty and Gyanendra Pandey, theorize the need for precisely this kind of history. Pandey argues," that histories of massive events—partition, war, communal violence—suffer for their collective elision of the phenomenology of "the moment of violence and suffering" (1997 19). He implies that a form of Benjamin's auratic withering occurs in the domain of history as "violence, suffering, and many of the scars… are suppressed" (18 – 19). In historiographical media—film for Benjamin, official history for Pandey—the humanity of the subject is metonymically drained, human truth discursively bleached and the relation of suffering perilously diminished (Benjamin 221). In tandem with Bloch and Benjamin, Pandey, LaCapra and Mufti suggest the need for a *poetry* of history, a "feeling" historian who refuses to "escape the problem of representing pain," chooses not to write a "sanitized history" or permit readers to be "relatively comfortable" (Pandey 18). To find Benjamin's materialism, these historiographers propose, we must turn to poetic writing (Ibid 19), a mode by its very design functioning as "commentary on the limits of… historiographical discourse" (Ibid 26).

Burns "responds," in Walter Benjamin's sense,[160] to the withering effects he and Pandey mutually theorize: by means of a phenomenological, mnemonic, Blochian telling through modalities of the fragment, the absurd, the grotesquely shocking and the undecidable. The author reaches for the sensation of spatiotemporality so as to reveal the tendencies and processes of violent political history and recapture the aura of colonial suffering, the vicissitudes of colonial loss. Thus, a historically rich affectivity plays out, and we identify Burns' design as "unreasoning" and entirely radical: a truly emancipatory history resurrects the past and, through a meta-presence of the moment of suffering. The author creates a space in which the reader can recognize "such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past… could have happened differently from the way it actually did" (Sedgwick 146). By returning to and raising up political time's confused, chaotic phenomenology, the material reality of the moment, readers recognize its malleability, too. The awarenesses acquired through her materialist history make it possible for the "revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past" to be brought to fruition (Benjamin 263). History's agency—which, as Jameson argues, is generally *thought* inevitable and evolutionary (101)—is in fact accidental, random and particular, in no way given or foretold. The residue of the catharsis of traumatic realism is in the readers' understanding that rather than depending upon massive indefatigable structures of power, history is constituted by flawed individuals and uncertain, ill-conceived, "unreasonable" choices. And it is this that the postcolonial historian attempts, in due course, to convey.

Burns clarifies an inescapable law of materialism—Benjamin says: "The angel [of history] would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed…" (257 – 58). Benjamin metaphorizes the role of the historian by explicating a work he witnessed *in the past*: it is "a Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus'" whose subject he names the "angel of history" (257 – 58). The image is recalled through difficult, asyntactical language and a fragmented story. As Timothy Bahti maintains, Benjamin's "Theses" are "not grounded in ideas" but in "images": "not the real picture by Klee (or its reproduction)… but a verbal image that describes… it" (7). As with the transcription of history, "there *is* no Klee painting, but rather only a single Benjaminian structure—a verbal emblem *inscribing* its visual component or image"

(Ibid). *No Bones* is akin to Benjamin's ekphrasis: a description of a past corporeality, the recounting of an image, of a space and a time now radically lost. Hence, as Bahti suggests, the point of Benjamin's work is to accept history "as rhetorical *enactment*" (*passim*): the historian re-members the past in and as a resurrected image. And this is yet another way of framing the work of Anna Burns in *No Bones*: she has given us the best history possible, her autobiography, her long narrative poem—the past "seized" as a collage of traumatic flashbacks puzzled together, rhetorically *re-enacted* as *something like* a historical novel (Benjamin 255).

The implications of this historiographical theory are significant in terms of the canvas Anna Burns works from. In *No Bones*, the aesthetic apparatuses of poetry—affect, image, fragmentation, compression, language play, etc.—are imported in order to craft, shape and texture a work narrating history. Burns' history is indeed a "waking dream of the essential," as are Folman's film and Morrison and Conrad's novels. Indeed, the challenge for a postcolonial author like Burns has been precisely how to write a historical *novel* that does the work of *poetry*: how reconstitute the form through a merger of the affective, visual methods by which versified writing makes meaning and the spatiotemporal swathe of long form narrative? How arrive at a *narrative* "poetics of postmodern witness" using "the fragmented structures and polyglot associations" that originate from poetry, that "reject master narratives… and refuse to pretend coherence" (Ostriker 319 – 20)? The time of the novel is the era rather than the interval or flash temporizing poetry; as such, it affords the historian epical stretch and distance. A novel can act to "[deny] the official, politicians' version of truth" (Rushdie 1982 14) and take readers through the dense, suffering phenomenology of the surrealism of postcoloniality. The most effective way toward historical knowledge, Bloch implies, is the feeling-work of a novel like *No Bones*: a phenomenological narrative that proceeds by way of a thick immersion in, a suffering through of and ultimate release from a perplexing pool of affectivity (Aristotle, *passim*).

No Bones asks and answers the impossible question of “what can be done by the living (the present) for the dead (the past)” (Bahti 6). The denouement of a generalized poetics of doubt reveals the author’s ultimate purpose: through mimesis, to render *loss*—political, historical, colonial—*visible*, to “show” *absence* and score the concomitant *reparation*. *No Bones* is, in the end, a novel of reparations—“reparation”: “a repairing or keeping in repair”—a mimesis of political loss, most especially politically lost lives. Burns’ ghosts—figures located at the “doubtful” border between materiality and the extraterrestrial, between corporeal life and its doubtful epilogue—lay her overarching aim bare: to get back to the dead, that is the “no bones,” the “lost” bones of temporality of the political, of empire, to allegorize and performatively signify postcolonial reparations, mimetically repair the body politic, retrieve the innocence Amelia lost somewhere amid thirty-seven rubber bullets and Vincent’s sane mind and the time before August ’69 when the children of Ardoyne could play. She needed a form that could allegorize colonial loss and concomitant compensatory reparations and still be a true *history* of the Troubles, still function as witness. Burns tells history and, in that, brings back what the nation has lost *in its lost shape*—that is, as Joyce’s “dead,” a lost thing re-appearing in a historical spatiotemporal landscape where it wasn’t. The lostness and the criminality and the question of unachieved (and perhaps unachievable) justice are simultaneously scored. She isn’t giving us the scene of the crime and its occurrence—Bloody Sunday, the torture chamber or a hunger strike at Long Kesh, the butcher killings, or a UVF or IRA attack—she’s giving us the individual in her daily life, living in a world defined as much by loss and absence as by those events. This problematic is demarcated too in the way the narrative depends so strenuously on a figure who loses more of herself every day as she lives with anorexia and drug and alcohol addiction—drinking “poteen mixed with poteen” (250)—and has experienced so much trauma that her memory is like a spider’s web: those remaining being the strands of the web, those lost, the blank spaces between them. Her ontology is a hopeless off again on again awareness—never quite capturable, never quite knowable, certainly not dependable.

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And so, enter the specter—the novel’s most vital metaphor—five chapters before the close. By way of the pivotal metaphor of the specter, Burns brings the past into the present as apparition and then scores that simulation with its own hauntedness, its own deathliness, its own political losses. The author marks history with what has been criminally taken from it, “make[s] whole what has been smashed,” and destabilizes history by showing it in the speculative way it should have been. Ghosts populate a literary text as contradictorily present-and-absent human beings who were *supposed* to be there but were not and are not. Such a figure functions as metaphor for Northern Irish identity and ontology. As representative of the realm of unknowing, the hurt of colonial time, the certain uncertainty of a stolen, erased past, the space of silence in history, postcolonial authors turn to the specter. Any discourse of doubt dwells in this field, but ghosts play a unique role in a *historical* text: this figure *was* materiality, and, like history, is now extraworldly, “dead” but not “gone.” The trope is part and parcel of the author’s will to resurrect the past and pull her reader through the spatiotemporal scrim. It functions, too, as reminder of the impossibility of compassing narratives of the past that “died” with the dead.

A flesh and blood human being transforms into a materially undecidable apparition representing doubt, surely, as well as the silenced, unknowable, criminally lost past. Readers see both the history as traumatically remembered and what was lost from and to it: the dead are an
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inconvertible imperial debt and “the wound of history [is] laid bare through the task of memory,” of “re-membering” them in the postcolonial text (Alexander 2009 14). Burns’ poetics of doubt is one of those “characteristic, culturally central practices…which can… be called reparative, [and] that emerge from queer [add: postcolonial] experience” (Sedgwick 147). In this case, a mimesis of history is superimposed by bodies that were *not* there, placed in the text in elucidative juxtaposition to those that *were*. Here is reading as phenomenological torture, as schadenfreudian “voyeur of suffering” (Haslam 193). Burns restores the past to life so that it is understood as a *process* of time—the experience of suffering, the hurt of temporality, the doubtful anguish of a decontextualized, uncertain event-in-progress. The novel is not just read, it is suffered through: it offers an epistemologically agonizing mimesis of the *hurt* of history by means of which the reader is to experience and thus comprehend the *moment* of it. What *No Bones* recalls, *how* it recalls, is about and of bodies, it trajects and refracts history through the body of a book that scrims the bodies of a writer and a reader, affectively effecting them. The bodies of Joyce’s dead collective are spectacularly inscribed, splashed across a phenomenological landscape as if to speak history *through* the silence of death and a criminal absence.

The potential for language to function performatively in *this* way gets at the very core of the historically radical, of postcolonial history. As with Conrad’s “horror” echoing all the way from Kurtz’s oceanic grave to Marlowe’s walk through London, and Morrison’s “fully dressed” corporeal ghost who “walked out of the water” (2004 62), the crucial distortions in Burns’ materialist history occur because the space of history is populated by specters haunting it, ghostly talismans of truth, history’s epistemological modality. She represents the Irish belief in the presence of ancestors and spirits of the dead in the material world. This is not “magical” in the Irish cultural context but a fact of life. At the same time, she makes the most egregious theft in the outrageously protracted history of the British Empire in Ireland crystal clear: the Irish dead. Like the cacophony of ancestral voices swarming Toni Morrison's haunted house at 124 Bluestone Road, Burns creates a great gathering of the dead as allegory of so much colonial loss and imperial debt. A novel re-peoples the nation in a *reverse* exorcism that does not merely mourn those lost but mimetically reconstitutes the meaning of colonialism circuitously, through a replay of the past in precisely the way it *wasn't*: a roll-back and undoing of imperial death through resurrection of the Irish dead. The apparition overlays the space of the nation and, in that, history is given back a ruined fullness, absence and colonial loss rolled back, the nation proffered reparations in arrears mimetically—no, not by the imperial power that owns and owes the debt, but by the postcolonial author-agent acting out a profoundly memorable brushing of history against its grain (Benjamin 257). History's cause no longer absent: there, inscribed in the spectacular body of the apparition, the crime of empire recounted and accounted for. Burns' postcolonial history—the dead no bones—is "returned to life and warmth and allowed once more to speak, to deliver its long-forgotten message in surroundings utterly alien to it" (Jameson 19).

As "[t]he roots of the world are held in the nest of the body" (Alexander 2009 31), the fall into the past is *necessarily* a fall into the dead, and the political thrust of this text, and its poetics of doubt, is located there. Burns works from the materialist premise in bringing us to what Cathy Caruth terms the "relation between history and the body" (26). Caruth asks, "What do the dying bodies of the past… have to do with the living bodies of the present?" (Ibid). Burns' highly spectral *finale* draws this connection owing to Amelia's experience of "the continual reappearance of a death she has not quite grasped, the reemergence, in sight, of her not knowing the difference between life and death," as between dead bodies and living bodies (Ibid 37). She experiences a "double telling, the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis* *of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival. These two stories… define the complexity of what I refer to as *history*…" (Ibid 7). Burns would seem to have redefined literary history and the poetics and purpose of the historical novel in much the same way. Ultimately, then, the specter is a metaphor for reunification and for reparations, a revelation that begins to clarify itself in "Triggers, 1991" when Amelia realizes, just before her nervous breakdown, that she's been "giving no thought to the dead people. What about the dead people? Those killed , those murdered? What choice did they have?" (281). Following that episode, the story is brought to its close by specters through a series of deathly thresholds, "spectral scrims" signaling Burns' status as a literary voice of the Troubles. Burns' closing sequence, presided over by ghosts, in which the principal aestheticizing mode becomes "resurrective" (McGuckian 1988 119).

In the last five chapters, covering 1991 - '94, the author turns to the specter as Virgilian guide through Amelia's healing process and postcolonial return to the "imaginary homeland" and site of colonial trauma. The "no bones" of the dead reconstitute and "demand expression through the central character" Amelia (Grossman, J. 10), who, as Burns says, appears "nine-tenths dead" herself (297). Paralleling the reader's catharsis, Burns' descent into the underworld, her visitations by various apparitions are a cathartic bath from which Amelia emerges changed. Burns' text works, in the end, by raising the specter of doubt, offering a phenomenological (hi)story, and as a final statement on history-and-the-postcolonial, ends with a grand *finale* in which several doubtful apparitions appear as menacing furies, metaphors of the same figure Morrison concerned herself with in *Beloved*. These are not eumenides, they are angry, spiteful furies, the dead and forgotten of colonial history. As in *Beloved*, Burns' "hauntology" (Derrida 1994 63) develops as a full Oresteian stalking: she is mercilessly harassed in a psychiatric hospital in London and, afterwards, at an intensely scrimmed, incarcerative "safe" house. Then, in the closing chapter, the protagonist and her friends stumble upon multiple angry ghosts on Raithlin Island. Amelia's encounters with the dead of Irish political history are part of the historiographical philosophy informing the novel: the desire to get back to the "stillbirth," history's phenomenology, which "died," like Cézanne's image, in the moment of its genesis.

Burns' postcolonial descent into the underworld must, as we expect, be initiated *through* madness: it begins in "Triggers, 1991" with an ironically meta-fictional gesture whereby Amelia has a mental breakdown outside a grocery store in London. Next, in the title chapter, "No Bones, 1991 – 1992," she wakes up, into or out of a dream, as the newest resident of a mental hospital in London. There, she is quickly haunted, the indemnification writ large: Amelia's childhood friend, Roberta McKeown is dead, she died, *in the novel,* in 1975. And yet, she appears: standing, speaking, querying Amelia as she did hours before her murder: *"'Come on Amelia…Answer me. Are you gonna call on me, or am I gonna call on you?'"* (Burns 2001 293). Roberta is Burns' "lead" menacing banshee: like Morrison's Beloved, she is fury, she is memory, she is apparition and muse come back to the *historian,* daring to speak for herself, to recount her past herself, threatening to fully insinuate Burns' authorial doubt and anxiety, to question her right to speak for Roberta and the dead collective. Roberta returns in order to find her place in history, to query time, not unlike Burns' questioning of her own composition. Roberta McKeown has returned to ask Amelia the question put to her the day she died: "I love discos. Discos are great. Are you gonna call on me or am I gonna call on you?" (293). This ghost wants to know if anyone remembers her, speaks of her, if any evidence of her former life exists—photos, newspapers, memories. The details of her death and her life remain a mystery of this novel, however; they are neither narrated in the chapter on the year she died nor in this one, where she functions as spectral therapy. There is an oblique reference to Roberta's death at the opening of "The Least Inattention, 1975": "Discos were great" (87), except that we do not know, when reading the line, that it refers to her. It had been decided, on the day of her death, that Roberta would call on Amelia, which didn't happen, of course, because she was killed. And yet, when news of her death reaches Amelia and the others, they head immediately to the disco and forget all about Roberta, perhaps so as to be able to forget.

It is this *forgetting*—a coping mechanism necessary to any resident of a war zone—that *haunts* Amelia. Burns' spectral *finale* begins in earnest in the all-important title chapter. The opening passage of "No Bones, 1991 – 1992" reads: "Amelia went up the Glens in the dead of night. She had just reached the white slabs of the old famine graveyard, when something made her stop and turn around. Roberta McKeown was standing on the edge of the cliff" (291). Amelia and Roberta are located at a spectral scrim—at the edge of a cliff, an ominous periphery that returns in a different geography in the final installment. Burns draws a large, looping historical ring that gathers together and encompasses the dead of Irish colonial history. The binding thread of this gesture stretches from the contemporary Troubles in the North—which landed Amelia in an insane asylum in the imperial seat, powerless to remember large intervals of her life including people she loved—all the way back to the famine by way of the graveyard at the Glens of Antrim. An unmistakable connection is sketched between the political modality causing the manifold deaths of *that* era and the deaths of many more during the Troubles. At the time of the famine (1845 – 50), the population of Ireland was cut in half—half of those lost lost to death, the other half to emigration or death *en route*. Amelia finds herself, at the end, at the scrim of *that* politically emblematic—a clear metaphor for the geopolitical border—place where these two distant deathly eras are juxtaposed. She is located at the periphery of cliffs where and "didn't seem to find it strange that her friend from so long ago was standing 400 feet up on a precipice, beyond the fence that warned of land giving way" (291). Surely the novel's most loaded sentence, metaphorized here are the precipice of death, the fence of partition, the creation of the deathly Northern quadrant, and beneath all this, the land is "giving way"—colonialism means the land "gives way," the Northern subject slides into a precisely conquered native death, and partition drops them into an even deeper level of colonial hell and deathliness.

These facts of life in partition take shape as the historical circling enclosure Burns draws in which she bundles all of the death and loss suffered by the Irish at the hands of the British. Political time is mimetically incarcerated and placed before her reader so the question of justice might be contemplated and understood. And *that* is the profound point finally arrived at across three hundred and ninety six painful pages. The final chapter, "A Peace Process, 1994," draws another of these politically significant spatiotemporal loops, this time stretching all the way back to the sixteenth century by means of historically significant Raithlin Island. As before, the gesture takes readers through centuries of the Irish dead, the ghosts of the Troubles, of the famine and of the historical, imperial massacre at Raithlin. Effectively, she symbolizes the sum total of the Irish political dead[161] and, like Morrison's Beloved, the actual specters encountered there are furious, needy furies. In this segment, Amelia and her friends arrive at another version of the key partitionist symbol, cliffs on the edge of Raithlin similar to those where she encounters Roberta. In one of the most obvious scrims symbolizing of the partition border, the author takes pains to make it clear that this crag is, like a wall or fence, on the other side of which lies the other- or underworld. When Amelia makes her postcolonial return home, having heard news of the ceasefire, she and a group of friends, including Vincent, decide to head out for a day of fun—their first time "playing" since the start of the novel twenty-five years earlier. Not knowing how to play, not knowing where to go, not knowing how to be “casual” in Northern Ireland (293), quite mistakenly, they head for Raithlin Island. This is, of course, “the site, though [the characters] don’t know it, of a savage massacre by sixteenth-century Englishman of the native Irish” (Grossman, J. 12). The characters walk blindly, as it were, from the contemporary paramilitary struggle into the brazen brutality of colonial massacre on a tiny island functioning as allegory for Ireland and all-Irish history. This significantly extends the novel’s signifying, historical grasp. Burns invokes the sum total of those lost under the aegis of colonialism in Èire—typically marked by historians as having officially begun in the sixteenth century.[162]

In these two significant arcs, the author traces a bloody trail of colonial suffering, loss, grief and death in Ireland. They comprise conceptual journeys back to the time of the famine and, further still, to the sixteenth-century massacre at Raithlin, ultimately winding, full circle, since wrapped in and occuring there, back to the present Troubles and *their* dead, to the specter of Roberta McKeown and all she represents. Roberta and all the dead are gathered in these symbolic, poignant gestures into a mimetic call for postcolonial reparations. The most important function of the specter must be in its role as “hinge” locking the materialism of the representation into place by which readers see, finally, that the scoring of that resurrective return *is* history because history isn’t only “somethin’ happened political,” it is equally, perhaps even more strenuously, what was lost in the happening of the political. They cannot be brought back or repaired. But, isn’t postcolonial history located in the corporeal absence of the dead? Isn’t the conjuring of their absence the true aim of Burns’ suffering, mad, affective historical novel? The key elucidation of the spectral allegory is as mimetic sighting of what was lost in the criminality of empire: colonial murderousness, abuse, damage and silence—the dead of the Troubles resurrected; the damages to Amelia and Vincent, healed; the silenced, excised, non-existent, unruly, "wrong" words unearthed. In history's mimesis, the apparition *must* come—otherwise the enterprise has failed, its materialism dissolved, its performativity upended. One of the critical functions of the postcolonial literary historian is to "un-erase" them for and in history. [163]

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Resuscitating history, retracing the aura of time and the subject: these are conjurings. The past would animate, breathe out the iambs of a magical pen and, like the wooden body of Pinocchio—animate, speak, testify. Generically located in a third space between realism and fabulism, *No Bones* comes together as a "surrealist" poetics of doubt and an arresting example of the affective power of historical literature to function as a means of materialist postcoloniality. For writers coming out of colonial histories, it is preferable to believe in the retrievability of lost things. Representing locations of modernity plagued by its defining political structure—imperial colonization—necessitates garnering confidence in the author's capacity to reinvent and repossess that which has been grievably, politically stolen—lives, ontologies, places, objects, resources, memories, histories. For believers in this "theology" of art, its agency to provoke second comings, is the very intrigue and the promise of the work, the location of its political valence. The tragedy of Toni Morrison's *Beloved: A Novel* (1987) is its deconstruction of this positivist principle. Of the many paths by which Morrison's novel conveys the particular wretchedness of empire, it is that which makes her masterpiece a tragedy in the truest, fullest sense. On the one hand, *Beloved* stands as testament to the power of art to resurrect and reclaim past losses, the facility of the artist for a re-generative, narrativizable "rememory" capable of repairing the injuriousness of imperial victimization and plunder— especially the obliteration and colonization of history. On the other hand, and in direct opposition to the above idea, in its unmarked coda,[164] *Beloved* soberly compels readers to recall both the *specter* and the *fact* of
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absolute, radically irretrievable loss: “By and by all trace is gone, and what is forgotten is not only the footprints but the water too and what it is down there. The rest is weather. Not the breath of the disremembered and unaccounted for, but wind in the eaves, or spring ice thawing too quickly. Just weather” (Morrison 2004 324). Morrison suggests that her nation is haunted by and blind to vital truths of history, that the spectral pasts of slavery and other imperial savageries lay buried (but not quite), lost (perhaps), unseen and unheard.

The losses of empire, though recalcitrant, are a historical palimpsest: histories of the colonized are not merely lost, they are sedimentary sheaths, buried layerings of discourse. Morrison’s closing sentiment ironically conveys the reality of the irretrievable loss of the past in a book for which the ostensible purpose is precisely to restore to life undocumented fragments from it. She locates the artist-author in that precise quagmire: in the dialectical space between the agency and the helplessness to resurrect the subject of art, that volley between the powerlessness and the capacity to enact “reparations” as part of the work a writer does with words. This is the location of the postcolonial author: one who bears witness to crimes against humanity, one for whom the retrieval of lost things is indeed, the core and the sinew of the work. As Salman Rushdie maintains, such writers are “gripped by the conviction” that they have a “history to reclaim… haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim… But if we do look back, we must… do so in the knowledge—which gives rise to profound uncertainties—that… we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, …imaginary homelands” (1982 10). There is real, incontrovertible loss, in other words: absences that leave the author with more questions than answers about her own history, her own ontology, her own political life, the place from which she comes, with only an “imaginative truth [that] is simultaneously honourable and suspect”—in a word, doubtful (Rushdie 1982 10).

Represented across Belfast novelist Anna Burns' own masterpiece and debut work is this very conundrum. Morrison's artistic and historiographical location is the impossible place Burns occupied as author of her autobiographical postcolonial history. Burns and Morrison mutually recognize the two conflicting ideas sketched: "that language can never live up to life once and for all" (Morrison 2000 21) *and*, conversely, that its "vitality…lies in its ability to limn the actual, imagined and possible lives of its speakers, readers, writers" (Ibid 20). While it is true that "[l]anguage can never 'pin down' slavery, genocide, war," still, they suggest, its "force, its felicity is in its reach toward the ineffable" (Ibid 21), in its "mid-wifery" properties (Ibid 15). There is an awareness that the words will fail in their movement toward and attempt to compass a violent imperial past. And so the artist approaches language in an *a priori* suspension of disbelief about its power to "be" other than itself—to conjure the thing itself, to signify at a zero remove from its subject. To complete the task, the postcolonial author suspends disbelief about the unavoidable failure of language, wills herself capable of using it in such a way that it transforms, as if by magic, into a materiality that can summon the "dead" past to *séance*.

Burns' and Morrison's mutual undertaking has been to dig up and hurl buried histories forward to the present, into language, as narrative, so that they may be known, mourned, and judged—finally, for the first time. In testifying to political tragedy, in asking questions about how to negotiate future nation-trajectories, Anna Burns writes with "an urge for [a] feigned desire" (McNamee 25), with the need to don the mask of belief in an always already vain endeavor, to feign faith in apparitions of lost things. The postcolonial historian strikes a pose, adopts the aspect of the conjurer, fakes the power of an omnipotent recall capable of digging through absurdly grotesque layers of colonial history and finding there her biography, her self, her political history, her "imaginary homeland." Burns functions as Terry Eagleton's skeptic, writing by way of the “difficult, perhaps ultimately impossible double optic” (24) of an “aegis of irony” (4), of a forgetting of the genuine doubt she has about her ability to grasp and refract history in language—and, to do so mnemonically and pneumonically. Burns writes with unbridled conviction that she can breathe life back into the lungs of the past, resurrect and retrieve what has been lost through the utterance and scoring of words in stony, intractable black and white; through the images thus drawn and the affective responses thus heralded; and, finally, through the epistemology of suffering thus conjured.

Burns shows us that it is only through the “resurrections” art makes possible that the colossal losses of empire, buried by political silencing and erasure, may finally be documented, acknowledged, understood and mourned. And we understand, through the exegesis, that Burns’ and Morrison’s novels are, quite simply, *better* histories: better by having been detached from brutal processes of their colonial states, better because centered on the absent, lost human subject and the damaging impact of imperial structures and their damning partitions. The hauntings of *No Bones* suggest that the dead went to their rest like Morrison’s Beloved and Burns’ Roberta McKeown—wrongly, unjustly, without the human rights unalienably due them. The specters of the text bring the reader more intensely into the *dementia praecox* of doubt, heightening the anxiety already in play regarding the truth claim, making the cathartic answer that finally comes still more impactful, weighty, resonant. Rather than the delayed arrival of Scott’s hero, we have the late entry of Joyce, Beckett and Burns’ “dead”: the many specters that return to haunt and terrorize protagonist and reader alike so as to force our remembrance of them, the consciousness that these figure are *wrongly* absent and discernment that their “non-existence” constitutes the criminal history now documented. We recognize in her historical looping gestures indelibly allying the dead of the Troubles with all the Irish colonial dead a literary summoning of the ancestors to séance: the séance of the read text, in its anguishing doubtful phenomenology.

Burns' historical materialism is composed from the palette of historiographers Bloch, Benjamin, Mufti, LaCapra, Caruth and Pandey: *No Bones* is a narrative history written as *poetry* is written, based in an affectivity by which the past is felt, in the body, rather than known, in the mind, through which it is disfiguredly, surreally pictured so as to convey the truth of it, so as to demarcate, isolate, and draw the "existence" of an inexigible debt—the postcolonial reparations owed Ireland by its former colonial overlord—and yet, in spite of its inexigibility, this debt must be known and named by, in and "as" history. *No Bones* would, if it could, "awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed" (Benjamin 257), give back to Roberta McKeown her voice, enact a dialogue—with Amelia and Burns and Burns' reader—about justice and injustice, about history and erasure, about ontology and exile, about the true, lived meaning of "The horror!" of empire (Conrad 86), about loss and about the condition of being lost, about absence and the condition of being absent—a conversation that would begin, of course, with a question: *"'Come on Amelia… Answer me. Are you gonna call on me, or am I gonna call on you?'"* (Burns 293).

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~Dissertation Notes:

~Notes to the Introduction:

[1] From a May 2011 press conference: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g0o3RyD2734&feature=player_embedded
[2] Commentator Mona Eltahawy, among others, drew the comparison with Germany's partition wall, such as here in interview with Democracy Now's Amy Goodman: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HeaTyq156jc
[3] A term used by partition scholars to refer to both positions in favor of partition as well as, as an adjective, referring to the state or condition of being subjectivized by partition and/or its discourses.
[4] Terminology used in Political Science and Public Policy scholarship to distinguish between the politics of the state or para-state and the term political as used to refer to the nature of relationships, institutions, and the like, as in "sexual politics" or "the personal is political."
[5] The Anglo-Irish Treaty, freeing all but the six northeastern counties from rule by the British Crown, was signed 12/6/21 though not ratified and implemented until a year later, following the Civil War fought to decide it. Partition passed by a vote of 64 to 57 in the newly formed Irish parliament, the Dail.
[6] Rather than, for example, those of speech or civil rights.
[7] The vicissitudes of which are captured most strikingly and incisively in the post-genocide, post-partition poetry of Paul Celan.
[8] As opposed to a reified "color line" (Dubois 5) as in phenomena like signs reading "Whites Only" that used to populate states in the southern U.S.
[9] My knowledge of this sign is from personal experience.
[10] This is discussed in detail with regard to the scholarship on the poetry of Medbh McGuckian in Chapter Four of the dissertation.
[11] For prominent examples of this problematic dynamic in Irish Studies, see Roche (1995) and Lloyd (1993).
[12] The Field Day Theatre Co. is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three of the dissertation.
[13] A book like Cleary's *Literature, Partition and the Nation-State* shows how these conceptual simultaneities function to underscore issues relevant to all of these critical strands.
[14] In his excellent study of Kashmir (2003), Bose compares the situation there with Northern Ireland providing one of the most thoroughgoing, incisive discussions of the six counties in print.

~Notes to Chapter One:

[15] After the Reformation, especially during the eighteenth century, sect difference became the primary basis for the colonization of and discourse on the mostly Catholic native people.
[16] A reference to Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the first chapter.
[17]In saying this I am thinking of scholars like T.G. Fraser, Hendrik Spruyt, Paul Diehl, Stanley Waterman, Joseph Cleary, Gyanendra Pandey, Kamla Bhasin and Ritu Menon, Niaz Zaman, among others.
[18] Bapsi Sidhwa's partition novel, *Cracking India*, is one of the best literary examples where this fact of life is clearly laid out. Also see O'Leary 2007, the subsection entitled "Inside versus outside agents of partition," 11 – 12.
[19] In particular the new world order and "interstate system" America and Russia built as part of securing (first agreed, later conflicting) "spheres of influence" (Schaeffer 1999 2).
[20] Also see O'Leary 2007, subsection: "The role of great powers," 14 – 16.
[21] See Cleary (2002) and Pandey (2001). These post-partition phenomena are also represented across contemporary literature coming out of Ireland, as in Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* and Nuala ní Dhuibhne's *The Dancers Dancing*, as elsewhere.
[22] Even as an anti-partition nationalist, Kiely said: "…if… given the choice to-morrow between the continuance of partition and a one-government Ireland ruling the Protestants of Ulster against *their* will, I would choose a partitioned Ireland" (184).
[23] Thinking of Lacan's well known essay on *Hamlet* in which he claims that the moment Hamlet steps out of the woods at the gravesite of Ophelia and declares "It is I Hamlet the Dane" is a performance of the constitution as a subject, this being the sort of quintessential mimesis of identity for the modern era.
[24] Obviously, we witness a similarly constructed ontology in Israel and Palestine as well as Pakistan, Bangladesh and India.

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[25] Cleary says, for example, that partitions are often “conducted in ways that reduce ethnic minorities to such a small proportion of the ‘core’ state population that they can no longer be construed as a serious political threat” to the state (21).

[26] Given that the vast majority of Irish people are nationalist, anti-colonial and Catholic, the largely Protestant, Unionist majority in the North is unwilling to tolerate a United Ireland as this would render them minorities of such a nation-state by an extreme margin.

[27] The incarnation of the IRA since partition and 1921 whose specific political aim is to reunify Ireland, revoke partition and fully dissolve the colonial occupation of the island.

[28] Both groups were founded in connection with the Orange Order, “[f]ounded in 1795 in Armagh as a secret society to defend the interests of the Protestant peasantry, its original emphasis was decidedly Anglican” (Fraser 10).

[29]A non-violent resistance movement inspired by Martin Luther King, Jr. and his Civil Rights Movement in the US.

[30]Eoin McNamee writes exceedingly well and insightfully of this most chilling aspect of the Troubles in his novel, *Resurrection Man*.

[31] I refer most especially to Bloody Sunday in (London)Derry in January 1972 when British soldiers opened fire on unarmed civil rights marchers, killing fourteen and injuring many more. The event had been covered up for years until a judge finally ordered it re-opened and re-investigated in 1998. The findings of this investigation, known as the Saville Inquiry, were finalized June 15, 2010 and published in the Saville Report where, among other things, it was determined that British paratroopers (and not members of the IRA, as had been the position of the colonial state) had fired the first shots and killed unarmed Irish civilians.

[32] The Agreement is summarized nicely by Sumantra Bose as follows: it “…involves three key elements: devolution of power from London to Belfast; a broadly inclusive, power-sharing regime in Northern Ireland with equal representation in government for parties representing the pro-British (Unionist) and pro-Irish (Nationalist) communities; and cross-border institutional arrangements linking Northern Ireland, which remains under British sovereignty, with the Republic of Ireland” (177).

[33] The Orange Order parades mark and celebrate the victory of William III, Prince of Orange, over James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. This victory led to the full subjugation of Ireland as a British colony. Each year, violence breaks out when the organizers of the parades insist upon marching through Catholic neighborhoods and streets.

[34] Most often represented “as if in this ‘moment of rupture’ ‘India,’ ‘Pakistan’ and their borders simply emerged fully formed,” she argues that it is an meta-phenomenon which merely began with “events of 1947,” including division of the sub-continent, and continues to reoccur through the “bureaucratic violence of drawing political boundaries and nationalizing identities” (2).

[35] Derry, renamed by the British “Londonderry,” is overwhelmingly Catholic; the community comprises about 80% of the population.

[36] Video of May 2011 press conference:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g0o3RyD2734&feature=player_embedded

[37] A reference to Yeats’ famous nationalist lament written in the aftermath of the Easter Rising, “Easter, 1916.”

[38] Hennessey says that “[b]y the end of the nineteenth century… a form of British national consciousness had evolved among Irish Protestants” whereby they perceive their “national community [as] a… British nation extending throughout the British isles” (xii).

[39] When I speak of reifications here, I’m thinking of the border itself and discourses such as map-making, wall-building, moralizing and graffiti, and socio-cultural developments such as sect-designated streets and areas.

[40] The first couple of chapters of Benedict Kiely’s *Counties of Contention* provide one of the most thorough and incisive explications of the way partition fragments and veritably tears the nation into pieces.

[41] The poem was published in Yeats’ 1921 collection, *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*.

[42] A 1996 study showed that “In the Republic, only seven percent [of those poled] said they believed the Border mattered and that people should be ready to fight for it… While a further 37 percent said it mattered but was not worth risking any lives for, 44 percent of respondents said it did not matter and was not worth arguing about. The poll also showed that the overwhelming majority of voters in the Republic no longer viewed a united Ireland as their preferred option…” (Anderson/Bort, 22). These statistics do indeed reflect the general mood of residents of the Republic *vis-á-vis* the North and the partition border, an apathy that is one of the greatest frustrations and fears of Catholics in the North.

[43] Which dates back to sometime between the 12th and 17th Centuries, depending which historian one follows, and was memorably imagined by such figures as the poet W.B. Yeats and the statesman Eamon de Valera.

[44] See note 16; Ibid.

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[45] I do not mean, in this, to obfuscate all of the "betweens" bordering these imaginings but rather, in order to arrive at a productive understanding of the territory and its "partition effects" (Zamindar 238), generalizations become necessary in ways that are admittedly reductive.

[46] Thinking of Clifford Geertz's notion of "thick description" from *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973).

[47] Cleary uses the term "haunting" to express the effects of partition several times (110, 124, 130).

[48] That the discourse failed to successfully interpellate the German subject is precisely why the wall came down in 1989.

[49] This is the subject of Chapter Two of this dissertation.

[50] Heaney references this question, too, saying that the three Anglo-Irish writers he speaks of were "born to a sense of 'two nations,' and part of their imaginative effort was a solving of their feelings toward Ireland, a new answer to that question Macmorris asked Fluellen…: 'What is my nation?' As Northern Protestants, they…explored their relationship to the old sow that eats her farrow" (2002 47).

[51] My analysis and unpacking of Northern Irish subjectivity and political life in comparison with the general assumptions and tropes of postcolonial theory is developed in greater detail in Part III of Chapter Three on the work of playwright, Anne Devlin.

[52] Other notable examples in work by authors coming out of partitionist circumstances include the opening pages of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* or the high-wire supporting Philippe Petit in Colum McCann's *Let the Great World Spin*.

[53] Playing out, for example, across the interregnum of the Easter Rising and its aftermath.

[54] As well as those from South Asia, Palestine and Israel—all partitions implemented in association with the dissolution of Empire.

[55] A detailed comparison of postcolonial thought as against Northern Irish subjectivity and the condition of partitionality at large is developed in detail in Part II of Chapter Three on the work of dramatist Anne Devlin.

[56] Again, thinking of Heidegger's notion of a "locale" in which one dwells as a presence and on which a sense of "Being" in the world is founded.

[57] This suggests the possibility of reading *Finnegans Wake as* a partition narrative, of thinking about the "break" represented by that novel as in some way reflective of the "break" in the nation that Joyce had spent his life representing.

[58] That silencing wall is brilliantly pictured by Seamus Heaney in "The Unacknowledged Legislator's Dream," analyzed on pages 23 - 24 of this chapter.

[59] Remembered also in *Translations* by Brian Friel. Along the same lines, when Friel theorizes history, as a playwright, he does that through a return to the Battle at Kinsale in 1601 and important figures like "the two Hughs."

[60] The only exception to this may be the 1975 collection, *North*.

[61] Which, again, he infamously claims to have occurred on the anniversary of Jesus' death.

[62] Loosely though perhaps especially in *Finnegans Wake*.

[63] Here I am thinking of a collection such as *Station Island* and Heaney's dramatic call to "bespectacled" James Joyce.

[64] Fix this: Influence may also come in part from an author like Flann O'Brien, for storytellers especially. In fact, Fin O'Toole draws a comparison between O'Brien's sensibility and Beckett's in his recent book.

[65] Of course, Ahmad's notion of a grief-stricken nationalism also evolved in South Asia as a direct result of partition, decolonization and associated atrocities (119). On this see especially Sarkar (2009).

[66] The spectrality of Northern Irish literature is also explicated in Chapter Three on the work of Anne Devlin and Part IV of Chapter Five on Anna Burns' work.

[67] As seen in the folk tale that closes Devlin's *After Easter*.

[68] One of the best known such moments is the one Muldoon employs as meta-example: the scene at the close of Joyce's "The Dead" when Gabriel Conroy has his epiphany at the window to his hotel room through which he observes the snow-covered Irish "dead" (Joyce 1992, 191 – 92). Many of them are however far more dramatic than the epiphanic Joycean example, involving traveling between worlds, "falls" into death, etc.

[69] In an early chapter of *Reading in the Dark*, for example, Seamus Deane writes: "People with green eyes were close to the faeries… they were…looking for a human child they could take away. If we ever met anyone with one green and one brown eye we were to cross ourselves, for that was a human child that had been taken over by the faeries. The brown eye was the sign it had been human. When it died, it would go into faery mounds that lay behind the Donegal mountains, not to heaven, purgatory, limbo or hell like the rest of us…" (5). A primary aspect of Irish superstition is taking care not to step into, cross, or go near a place where one might fall through the scrim between

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worlds and be "taken over." These dangerous "spots," where faeries reside, are literal geographical locations: particular trees and mountains, specific locations in a park or forest, etc.

[70] That is, as far back as history can be traced in Ireland.

[71] As Kiberd asserts, Beckett's characters' "surroundings *seem* decontextualized, because they represent a geography which has been deprived of a history" (539); though "presented as characters without much history," they are nonetheless "driven to locate themselves in the world with reference to geography" (538).

[72] Each of these scrimmed movements is discussed in Chapter Three of the dissertation on the work of Anne Devlin.

[73] In the final part of this chapter, this complex is identified and developed as the tropes of specter and scrim in the literature representing Northern Ireland.

[74] Friel's paper metaphor is discussed in detail in Chapter One of this dissertation.

[75] A reference to Percy Shelley's essay, "A Defence of Poetry" which he famously concludes with the claim that "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." Heaney's poem is a direct, contemporary response to Shelley.

[76] I owe this Irish neologism to Barry J. McCrea, Princeton University (from a private e-mail exchange).

[77] An allusion to Eliot's *The Waste Land*, published the year after Irish partition, 1921.

[78] Of course, the partition plan was agreed to by Irish representatives, including Michael Collins, in *May*, 1921.

[79] Though unspecified, I assume McCann was thinking of the River Foyle, which connects Ireland North and South and runs along the border between County Donegal (in the Republic) and County Tyrone (in the North).

[80] Explicated in Chapter One.

[81] Page 212.

[82] This question must also be addressed from the standpoint of the Republic. This dissertation focuses, however, on the North and how these issues play out in literature of the Troubles.

~Notes to Chapter Three:

[83] The SDLP is the nationalist group that has long existed in a highly contentious relationship with the other Irish nationalist parties, particularly Sinn Fein. The conflict between Labor and Sinn Fein is dramatized in Devlin's first play, *Ourselves Alone.*

[84] She also wrote screenplays for film adaptations of *Titanic Town* by Mary Costello and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights.*

[85] Marie Jones, Maureen Macauly, Eleanor Methven, Carol Moore, and Brenda Winter, all of whom were out of work at the time and frustrated with the state of Irish theatre, not only in the North but throughout the island. Anne Devlin has not been involved with this group.

[86] In *Tea in a China Cup* (1983), Reid's protagonist realizes over time that she "has never lived her own life" (Roche 235). Late in the play Beth says, "my head is full of other people's memories, … I don't know who I am … or what I am" (61).

[87] Here, I refer to Padraig Pearse's poem "*Mise Éire*" ("I am Ireland") and to WB Yeats' "I am of Ireland."

[88] I am making reference here to the metaphysic of indeterminacy we can follow from Nietzsche to Heidegger to Derrida and finally through to Bhabha and Anzaldúa.

[89] A reference to Bhabha's theory of mimicry and his essay, "Of Mimicry and Man" (1994) as well as to Naipaul's *The Mimic Men: A Novel* (1967).

[90] Such as in Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark,* Brian Friel's *Volunteers* and *Translations*, Eoin McNamee's *Resurrection Man,* Anna Burns' *No Bones*… the list goes on.

[91] These ideas are developed by Bhabha in his Introduction titled "Locations of Culture," notably on page 5.

[92] This argument is the subject of Chapter One of the dissertation and developed in detail there.

[93] See note 9, the same reference is made here.

[94] Again, this aspect of the theory is explained in Chapter One.

[95] See note 9, the same reference is made here.

[96] I'm referring to Bhabha's conception of postcolonial, postmodern identity articulated across the essays in *The Location of Culture* as I believe his ideas are truly central to our understanding of postcolonial subjectivity and at the same time require revision for partitioned locations.

[97] The term means is from the work of Paul Celan and means "breath turn." Belfast writers, Devlin, Burns and McGuckian among them, often use the term "holocaust" to signify the Anglo-Irish conflict. In "Naming the Names," Devlin writes: "Finnula, the Irish section's a holocaust!" (1988 96).

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[98] Refers to Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1991); as you see, Northern Ireland does not line up faithfully with his conception of the imagined national community.
[99] A reference to Marx discussed in Derrida 1994, page 102.

~Notes to Chapter Four:

[100] Key to Citations for Chapter Four: "*Fared": My Love Has Fared Inland* (2010); "*Currach"*: *The Currach Requires No Harbours* (2007); "*BA"*: *The Book of the Angel* (2004); "*TSYII"*: *The Soldiers of Year II* (2002); "*Shel"*: *Shelmalier* (1998); "*CL"*: *Captain Lavender* (1995); "*MC"*: *Marconi's Cottage* (1992); "*OBB"*: *On Ballycastle Beach* (1988); "*VR"*: *Venus and the Rain* (1984); "*TFM"*: *The Flower Master* (1982).
[101] This refers to volumes of McGuckian's work published in America. In terms of UK editions, there are twelve; the American collection, *The Soldiers of the Year II*, brought together two previously published UK editions.
[102] McGuckian speaks of this in her *Comhrá* with Ni Dhomhnaill (O'Connor 1995 592), a group of Northern Irish poets both she and Heaney have participated in as well as, among others, Paul Muldoon and Seamus Deane. Heaney's essay, "The Group," which tells its history, is republished in *Finders, Keepers* (2002, 42 - 44).
[103] See Paul Muldoon's *The Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poets*, Conboy's remarks on this (202) and Frank Ornsby's *Poets From the North of Ireland*, in which, among the 27 poets anthologized, McGuckian is the *only* female.
[104] See Batten, Burgoyne-Johnson and Wills.
[105] See for example: Patrick Williams' "Spare That Tree!" appeared in *Honest Ulsterman* Volume 86 (1989), page 50; William Pratt's review of *Shelmalier* was published in *World Literature Today*, Volume 73, Issue 4 (Autumn 1999), page 745; John Carey's "The Stain of Words" was published in *Sunday Times* 21 June, 1987, page 56; and Iain Sinclair's appeared as the Introduction to his anthology of Irish poetry, *Conductors of Chaos*, London: Picador, 1996. The titles alone convey the scathing tone of the reviews; as such, they do little service to the scholarly dialogue on the ways, means and character of Irish poetry. Shane Murphy summarizes how McGuckian has attracted so much "vitriolic censure," citing further articles by Jenkins, Lucas and McCarthy (85).
[106] McGuckian relates the vicissitudes of her coming of age years and entry into college in her poetic journals, "Rescuers and White Cloaks" (Haberstroh 2001) and "Women are Trousers" (Kirkpatrick), which together cover the years 1968 through '73 and were written consecutively and between the publications of *Shelmalier* and *The Soldiers of Year II*. These poetic journals are the closest McGuckian has come to composing an autobiography, although, as she says, all her poems are "autobiographic" (Sailer 115). Also see the prose essay, "Drawing Ballerinas" (in Lizz Murphy's *Wee Girls*).
[107] On this section and my re-reading of McGuckian, also see Aamir Mufti's analogous reading of the work of Pakistani Urdu poet, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, in which "against much of Faiz criticism" he argues that "the foremost theme of Faiz's poetry… is the meaning and legacy of Partition" (210).
[108] See for example of Sered 2002, Batten 1997, Docherty 1992 and Sullivan 2004.
[109] McGuckian submitted early poems for a contest under a pseudonym[109] and won first prize over a "well-known literary figure" who happened to be male (O'Connor 1995 593) and when the prize committee discovered she was a six months' pregnant woman, they moved her to second place and reduced the award by half. The question from her defenders at the time was whether she had lost the prize because she was "Irish, or Catholic, or a woman" or for some unknown reason (Ibid 592 - 93). Later, when she had an emotional breakdown, she was advised that "writing the poetry had brought it on," an unenlightened dictum she obviously had to defy in order to go on writing poetry (Ibid 595).
[110] Sirr sets few apart from this conformism: Kinsella, Ní Chuilleanáin, Muldoon, Carson and, of course, McGuckian.
[111] Referring here to the "Preamble" to Milton's *Paradise Lost* where he announces his choice to reject the tradition of rhyming verse.
[112] McGuckian explained this in her interview with McCracken, 160.
[113] This is consistent throughout all her interviews from before 1994; see Sailer and McCracken where she consistently downplays the political content of her work in both interviews.
[114] A reference to the famous *aisling* poem by Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill, *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire* ("Lament for Art O'Leary") discussed in Muldoon, 96 - 101.
[115] I use the term "closet" not only in reference to McGuckian's statement—where she speaks of having "come out"—but also to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theory of the sexuality closet articulated in *Epistemology of the Closet*. Sedgwick describes this closet as one of secrecy and *silencing* whereby gay men and lesbian women are forced to

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hide behind a false veneer of heterosexuality with individuals with whom they must, for whatever reason, remain "in the closet." According to McGuckian's description of her circumstances, her experience was much the same except the closet is necessitated by high politics rather than the politics of heteronormativity.

[116] In conversation with Sawnie Morris, McGuckian said: "The first professional poem that I put out was for Bloody Sunday. On that day, in 1972, I wrote the poem and took it to Seamus Heaney, who was teaching me at the time. It was in response not to just a political, but a military event that threatened our very existence, and the feeling that the state was not being the nurturing force that would protect us from invasion. No. The state would in fact turn round and destroy us" (68).

[117] Along the same line, there is a striking scene in Devlin's *After Easter* when, because shots are being fired in the street outside their home, the family hides under the dining table which holds the corpse of their dead father. In addition, in *No Bones* by Burns, the novel opens with Amelia, her sister and their dog, Dachau, placed under the kitchen table as a mob of Protestant Loyalists bangs on the front door, determined to burn their home to the ground.

[118] Refers to Bhabha's theory of mimicry explained in "Of Mimicry and Man" (1994). A dramatic analogue for this is seen in Devlin's "Naming the Names." Under interrogation, Finn recites the names of Belfast streets rather than naming IRA volunteers.

[119] As in, as Brazeau points out, "Porcelain Bells" where the adverb "meanwhile" is used as a noun in the line "meanwhile is my anchor" (131).

[120] From a May 2011 press conference:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g0o3RyD2734&feature=player_embedded

[121] This is an unusual poem in the oeuvre because she has altered the format of the words on the page, scattering and splitting each verse left and right, and unevenly, and leaving long several-space gaps in each line.

[122] A reference to Dubois' *The Souls of Black Folk*: "One ever feels his twoness,--an American, a Negro…" (5).

[123] Refers to Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist*, that memorable moment when Stephen Dedalus says his "soul frets in the shadow" of the English language (205).

[124] The story she cites is his best known, "Toba Tek Singh."

[125] Refers to Nietzsche's discussion, in *The Birth of Tragedy,* of the paramount role music plays in Attic tragedy (*passim*).

[126] From Breton's first Surrealist Manifesto (*passim*).

~*Notes to Chapter Five:*

[127] Smyth says that "The [Irish] novel…developed …a metadiscursive capacity, to the extent that much of the time, narration and the novel form itself – its limitations, its social and cultural impact… – emerge as explicit themes" (41).

[128] I refer to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Reading in the Dark*, respectively.

[129] See Vincent's chapter, for example, "Mr. Hunch in the Ascendant, 1980," as well as "Miscellany and Drift, 1978."

[130] Refers to the chapter "Somethin' Political, 1977."

[131] These references allude primarily to events in the chapter "The Pragmatic Use of Arms, 1973."

[132] Operation Banner was the name given to the entry of British troops to and occupation of Northern Ireland during the period between August 1969 when the violence precipitously escalated through July 2007 when the operation was finally brought to an end after successful implementation of most provisions of the Good Friday Agreement.

[133] Such as that seen between a Muslim and a Hindu in Aparna Sen's film, *Mr. and Mrs. Iyer* or as that seen in *The Crying Game* through Stephen Rea's character's love for the 'enemy' played by Forest Whitaker.

[134] A reference to Joseph Cleary's argument in Chapter Three of Literature Partition and the Nation-State, "'Fork-tongued on the border bit': Partition and the Politics of Form in Contemporary Narratives of the Northern Irish Conflict."

[135] And it is because of the lack of scholarly response that I devoted several pages here to summarizing the content of the novel.

[136] Judith Grossman's especially. There is also Burns' own, "School of Tears and Terror," an article in which she reflects on the novel's historical contexts and speaks in direct terms about her life growing up, her relationship with her mother, the daily traumatizations, etc.

[137] From Wim Wenders' *Lisbon Story* (Road Movies, 1994). Though part of the screenplay, Randal Johnson attributes the quote to Oliveira rather than Wenders.

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[138] The McCann quote is from a recent interview with Irish author and critic, Theo Dorgan: "Engaging Colum McCann." Published on the Irish arts program, Imeall, it is available here: http://youtu.be/LAd7Uy0DD1M.

[139] The name is explicable in sundry ways, particularly as a critique of Irish colonial discourse in which the Irish were represented as ape-like hunchbacks and more intuitive and emotional (than intellectual and reasoning). He is of course also Benjamin and Grass's "little hunchback" (Benjamin 15).

[140] In Devlin's play, set in London and Belfast during the Troubles, Greta is first encountered in a private room of the facility where she is promptly visited by a male psychiatrist. Grass initiates his historical novel with Oskar likewise incarcerated and with his first-person declaration: "Granted: I am an inmate of a mental hospital…" (15).

[141] Coleridge discusses the concept in the Biographia Literaria (1817): "It was agreed, that my endeavors should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith…"

[142] Tone, leader of the Fenians and their "failed" 1798 rebellion, is a much beloved Irish icon and one of the novel's several spectral presences.

[143] We know it is a summer day because it is a Thursday and the kids are not in school. The chapter as a re-telling of the events of August '69 is re-verified several times over by the details presented therein.

[144] Derry is the other major urban center in Northern Ireland, other than Belfast.

[145] Also note Vincent's outrageously absurd re-telling of the Northern Troubles in the section of his chapter involving Billy Battles, a Protestant character named after William of Orange, of course, who preaches and is the stand-in here for the "other" on the other side of the conflict (170 – 173). It is also the only near-full telling Vincent offers of the brutal murder of his father by Protestant thugs, including Billy Battles.

[146] I'm referring to the opening passage from Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist*.

[147] Though their work was almost never historical, I believe Burns derives this absurd realism primarily through Kafka and Beckett.

[148] See endnote 13; http://youtu.be/LAd7Uy0DD1M.

[149] With Scott's *Ivanhoe* as exemplar, Lukács proposes the critical impact of the late entry of the hero. Only after Scott "has made us sympathizers and understanding participants of this crisis… does the great historical hero enter upon the scene of the novel" (38). Without a doubt, from *Beowulf* onward, the anxiety of historico-epic narrative has been the wait for this pivotal figure.

[150] In fact, it is the most pivotal moment in the whole history of the Troubles: the calling of the ceasefires and establishment of the peace process.

[151] His realization of the role he played in the massacre occurs at the very moment the film drops viewers back into reality—so, it is, again, a doubled, "mutual" realization whereby, like Burns, Folman has placed viewer and character in analogous "spaces."

[152] The term "high" as modifier of the noun politics distinguishes matters of the state and para-state(s) from the term political as used to signify *cultural* politics, aspects of social and cultural life that are always already political: such as race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, etc.

[153] The same group that is the central focus of McNamee's novel, *Resurrection Man*. For historical background, see *The Shankill Butchers* by journalist, Martin Dillon (also fictionalized by McNamee), Routledge, 1999. See Haslam and McCarthy.

[154] A reference to Bhabha's theory of mimicry and his essay, "Of Mimicry and Man" (1994) as well as to Naipaul's *The Mimic Men: A Novel* (1967).

[155] These individuals were jailed as IRA members and are now heroes in the North. The most famous of these figures was Bobby Sands, who died in prison in 1981 on hunger strike from malnutrition.

[156] This incident may indeed be a story from real life, but it is shaped and narrated in such a way that it allegorizes a key role played by the IRA in the lives of Belfast residents as mediator of personal disputes—like priests but with guns rather than rosaries. For all intents and purposes, after 1968, the IRA functioned *as* the state in the lives of Catholics—who had been utterly failed by the state existing to protect and serve them.

[157] A phrase repeated multiple times in the chapter on 1977, "Somethin' Political, 1977."

[158] Seamus Deane and Anne Devlin show this in their work, too. I am thinking particularly of Deane's *Reading in the Dark* and really all of Devlin's work, though perhaps the issue is most dramatically performed in *Ourselves Alone*.

[159] I am thinking specifically of Morrison's assertion, in the Nobel Lecture, that language doesn't merely represent but is performative and "does" things in the world: "Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence" (16). This is asserted by numerous theorists including Sedgwick in *Touching Feeling* (also cited here),

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Judith Butler in *Excitable Speech*, of course J.L. Austin in *How To Do Things With Words*, and numerous other theoretical works.

[160] In using the word "respond" here, I am referring to Benjamin's use of that term in the essay referenced. The final sentence reads: "Communism responds by politicizing art" (242). Benjamin's assertions about art of the left mirror the thrust and spirit of postcolonial writing, particularly the postcolonial surreal.

[161] These important cliff scenes are reminiscent of the house at 124 Bluestone Road, in *Beloved*, where outside of which a cacophony of voices is heard as Stamp Paid approaches the door to knock, decides not to and leaves unnoticed. They are both symbolic locations used to allegorize and signify the mass of persons wrongfully, criminally murdered through processes of empire.

[162] The British had a presence in Ireland from the twelfth century, but most historians mark the official era of empire as having its constitution starting with the Battle at Kinsale, 1601.

[163] In Aeschylus' *Oresteia Trilogy*, Athena transforms the mythological furies—those who would wreak havoc in the lives of guilty persons and work to bring about revenge against them—into the eumenides, the "benevolent ones," whose (female) power and agency in the process of Greek justice is stripped from them and they are now forced to live "under the ground" of the city—they are literally buried and symbolically killed—their role now being simply to "benevolently" guard the city state. The grand spectacle of Aeschylus' play is the primary moment in Greek letters of the consolidation and legitimation of the patriarchy. In both *Beloved* and *No Bones*, the figures haunting Sethe and Amelia are not eumenides, they are very definitely furious furies.

[164] The novel's final two pages—in the 2004 edition, this is pages 323 – 24—were appended, after the fact, to the original manuscript sent to the publisher which had ended at page 322.

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