

THE FARCICAL AND THE MAGICAL: GHOST(LY) RE-WORKINGS IN J. M. SYNGE AND SEAMUS HEANEY

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Abstract

The ghost and the ghostly is considered not only as a site for an evocation of horrors but a site of 'in-betweenness'. As a Gothic trope, it emphasizes on the presence of the ghostly in the quotidian given the challenges to the macabre and the violent in the apparent killing of Old Mahon in J. M. Synge's The Playboy of the Western World through the mode of the farcical. Seamus Heaney's creation of a realm of the 'magical' enunciates the limits of transcendence when nightmarish images of brutal realities cannot be depicted. Hence he employs the 'ghost' as a trope for various threshold presences – of people desiring to migrate, of people wishing to forget their past of horrors while re-living them, giving space to a prolonged anxiety and a post-nationalist horror of indeterminate presences akin to the ghosts.

According to Dorothy Scarborough the ghost is absolutely indestructible. It appears as unapologetically at home in twentieth century fiction as in classical mythology, Christian hagiology, medieval legend, or Gothic romance. It is really the permanent citizen of this earth, for mortals, at best, is but transient.

The trope of the ghost has reappeared in twentieth century fictional creations to bring to light (through its play of light and shadow) the terrors of the past and a more unsettling present. J.M. Synge and Seamus Heaney undertake to intimate us with an existential reality of twentieth century Ireland through this revitalized trope. They deal with their 'ghostly' colonial past and postcolonial present not through common motifs of the satire and the grotesque but elements entirely opposed to evocation of ghost figures as such.

Ghosts, especially in the Gothic tradition, are part of a well-established past haunting the present. In Ireland they are bound in a complex way with the political insecurity and the waning of colonial power. These zones of 'in-betweenness' in post-nationalism makes use of the ghost not so much as a symbol of loss but a threshold presence between the more native Protestants and the far-residing Catholics. In a similar mode of trans-creation even atmospheric motifs are changed in its use of ghosts.

In this article the position of the ghost(ly) rebirth has to be defined in its peculiar use. Powell differentiates ghost stories within the larger category of Gothic fiction. She makes clear that while the supernatural might find a rational explanation in Gothic fiction, in ghost stories

cause and effect operate on an alternative plane of reality according to different premises. An innocent victim, an unresolved crime, the re-surfaced body remain basic paradigms for ghostly fictions, accommodating psychic fear and terror. Yet in Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* and Heaney's 'Electric Light' normality of these trans-normal evocations are challenged. I want to go to the logical climax of William McCormack's understanding for a renewed interest in the genre:

"...normality in war undergo a serious change, including an altered perception of time"

Perceptions of time have changed which force these divergent re-imaginings of ghost figures – farcical and magical - at once resisting and parodying themselves from its confinements. Tzvetan Todorov posits the fantastic and the uncanny as embodiments of the Gothic but the farcical and the magical sites occupy crucial positions within it. It is time to pay attention to post-nationalist horrors through eyes not veiled by a one-dimensional picture of brutality itself. For the farcical, Synge makes the ghost (of Christy's father, Old Mahon as a representative of the Irish past) a victim of the illusions of the modern present as well as the heroic past. The magical in Heaney's ghost(ly) evocation forces us to see beyond the brutal victimization while all the time keeping us perceptibly aware of it.

Origin of these works and their critical reception may shed some light on my line of thought and justify the present analysis. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* (26 January, 1907) had as its inspiration Ibsen's *Ghosts* (1881). George Moore's appreciation of it led to the establishment of the Independent Theatre Society of London which then provoked Yeats to begin the Irish Literary revival in the Abbey Theatre where this play opened to riots. Authors from Eugene O'Neill to James Joyce are preoccupied with ghosts of the past and the nightmare of history. Synge follows this tradition to its literal climax where the torment inflicted on the person has to be proudly acknowledged and a ghost deliberately invoked to boost the heroic credibility of the past in the present. The ghost thereby becomes not so much a victim of untold terrors but he himself barges into the present to uphold the horrors. Synge also defines the nature of the modern ghost. According to Scarborough:

The humorous ghost is distinctly a modern character...in these days of individualism and radical liberalism, spooks as well as mortals are expanding their personalities and indulging in greater freedom. A ghost can call his shade his own now, and exhibit any mood he pleases...The modern spook is possessed not only of humor but of a caustic satire as well...The modern humorous ghost satirizes everything from the old-fashioned specter (he's very fond of taking pot-shots at him) to the latest psychic manifestations.

The ghost of Old Christy Mahon may return to reclaim the heroic grandeur of his wounds but his position is hardly that of the satirist. For Synge, the ghost becomes the focus of the directed aim of the playwright's satire. He cannot be mistaken for the spook of the modern ghost story because the aim of this work is not merely corrective laughter. Seriousness in literature has to give nourishment to imaginative reality. In Synge we find an inversion of this seriousness, through laughter. Humour is present in the evocation of the ghost but it is more in the mode of parody of nationalism than a satire of an individual through laughter. Old Mahon's skull was cracked as his son fell the loy on him and could never be considered a hero's wound. It shows Mahon not as a blatant liar but one emblemizing the false ideals of

nationalism emerging through the nightmarish depictions of Christy's tales. Descriptions of brutal violence are made light-hearted but not a site of raucous laughter and dismissal.

The terror of violence also finds artistic space in Seamus Heaney who acknowledges that he is:

infused
with its (Irish nationalist pasts') poison
and affection,
murders and pieties.

Literary ghosts in Heaney have received extended treatment with reference to *Station Island* (1984). Spectral presences are mostly father figures in Heaney, like Sweeney and Joyce; and the real father haunts collections like *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) (as in 'Digging'). His descriptions of cruelties on Irish people are related to ancient crimes exposed through the bog bodies but depictions of these horrors tend to become more internalized and 'invisible' in his later poetry. Anger towards the father figure and an aestheticising of sectarian violence are emphasized by critics as Heaney's poetics of evasion. But the ghost figure, through its marginal presence in the title poem of *Electric Light* (2001), serves to re-emphasize the accusation itself only to justify its presence in another realm altogether and also posit itself as the most prominent 'through-other' entity of his poetics. The father-figure has become the haunting ghost-like presence, whose forceful recuperation is achieved by Christy in Synge's play.

Peter Denman deals with ghosts in Anglo-Irish literature and finds these stories as lacking in "temporal or spatial certainty". For him the supernatural manifestations in Synge and Heaney are conventional and their appearance is subordinate to the overall effect of the poem, which seek not to narrate a supernatural event but explore the human and social relations of the artist. Furthermore the literary ghosts in the *Station Island* dramatize the act of memory and the ghost utters from a dead past, minatory or monitory, as the case may be. The past which produces the revenants requires something of the supernatural to make it present again. While it may be true for most of Heaney's work, yet towards the end he makes an exception and produces a spirit like Ariel for his oeuvre. The common parental affiliation changes along with his mode of perception, as Heaney becomes more conscious of the position he is in and moves from an evocation of the ghost to the spirit.

What mainly relates Synge and Heaney in this article is their position as dubious outsiders. The ghosts in *Station Island*, like Sweeney and Joyce are outsiders to Christianity while Heaney himself was a member of the Catholic minority and an emotional part of its evocative rituals as Dylan Thomas was part of his. In fact Synge himself becomes the much respected literary figure who accepted a sick man's exile on one of the Aran Islands to resist a mechanical modern life. The ghostly presence is therefore a primal one associated with Nature and it is in this regard that the evocation of the spirit and the spiritual may be made. The magical becomes a resonance of the transcendent spiritual, and religiosity is merely a part of it. Catholic ghosts and Protestant spirits are transfused as a singular 'hauntological' and spectral entity.

The spiritual or the magical can only be seen as 'ghostly' when its spectral nature is invoked by a constant reference to gruesome details reminiscent of the Gothic which in this case leads only to a subversion of it. This attempt should not be confused with a refined perception of the ugly which the survival of the Gothic works towards. Kenneth Clark quotes Evelyn's Account of Architects:

The Goths and Vandals, having demolished the Greek and Roman architecture, introduced in its stead a certain fantastical and licentious manner of building which we have since called modern or Gothic.

The ghostly, more perceptibly within the Gothic form, has blurred the boundary of such refined aestheticization. Colum McCartney, Heaney's second cousin who appeared in 'The Strand at Lough Beg' in Field Work (with an epigraph from Dante's Purgatorio), castigates the poet in 'Station Island' for whitewashing ugliness and proffering saccharine accounts of death. We are worms, William Carleton's ghost says, eating through the earth to renew its body and our own, and when we die only maggots will 'purify' our flesh. However in his later poetry Heaney does not emphasize nor evade these brutal details. Rather like dark shadows against a blaze of light he tries to make distinct an imaginative niche for us.

Synge on the other hand portrays the fear and the horror of a ghost very clearly. Christy is introduced by Shawn as "a kind of fellow above if the furzy ditch, groaning wicked like a maddening dog...fearing ..." Furthermore expectations intensify the level of violence perpetrated. Pegeen Mike says:

You (Christy) never hanged him, the way Jimmy Farrell hanged his dog from the licence, and had it screeching and wriggling three hours at the butt of a string, and himself swearing it was a dead dog

Critics have associated such a hunger for violence with romanticism of a kind - a post-nationalist respect for courage inversely related to the peasants' irrational fear of ghosts and dark places. This brings us onto the dramatics of counter-violence as it combines the farcical and magical in terms of the ghosts. Jarlath Killeen convincingly refutes Roy Foster's explanation of the Irish Gothic which persuasively links politics, religion and culture, and his depiction of the Protestant Irish as a cultural group obsessed with their own impending extermination and determined to find methodologies by which to circumvent such annihilation by escape into other realms of power. Rather than emblemizing an annihilating position, the figure of the ghost depicts a threshold position - between the native and the 'enemy', between life and death; between the known and the unknown; between the complacent and the serious point-of-view. I have tried to see this relation in spatial terms through the post-nationalist motif of the border-land territory and mentality in another essay (referred to a little later), but here I wish to contest Denman's claim that a ghost is "an unsettling presence which intrudes into the empirical world without warrant or status...called into its uncertain being to compensate for some felt absence". The ghost gives a very certain expression to the flux of socio-political experience. Yet the ghost story is also inimical to efforts to read it as the experience of a specific culture or period. In this regard the 'ghostly' sounds and presences in fiction recurrent in the fiction of Northern Ireland Troubles since 1969, as pointed out by Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, are only partially true. Critical

developments include the balance between the Gothic and the domestic drama to obliquely signify the pressures of contemporary reality but Synge's farcical mode posits the representational relation of the flux in a most tenuous way, similar to the mode in Bhooter Bhabishyat. The farce in this 2012 Bengali film directed by Anik Dutta includes humour, but not satirical or mere entertainment. In fact the character of Biplab Dasgupta (a ghost of the revolutionary past who narrates a 'story' for the writer-narrator of the story) makes these distinctions at the very beginning of the film. We may be tempted to remember the nationalist and the communist past but in the end the writer-narrator can only guess the origin of the story. When the ghosts are given screen presence they remain vital figures with song, dance, melodrama and pathos, but when their credibility needs to be foregrounded, they are obscured within the remains of the distant past.

In Heaney the defining dynamics of the threshold figure is important. His mode of poetics is that of flight and the movement is directed towards the creation of a magical landscape. 'The First Flight', for instance, views Heaney's move from Belfast to Glanmore as a bird's migration, 'A Waking Dream' imagines poetic composition as an attempt to catch a bird and 'On the Road' actually locates the moment when Heaney, previously behind the wheel of a car, is lofted into flight – "I was up and away". Though these associations make clear an artistic relation to the (mad) flight of Sweeney, they also emphasize on 'a graph of the effort of transcendence'. The banshee and other spirits in Irish and Indian tradition remain tied to the earth whilst attempting a full flight. Hence what the ghost exemplifies is not the spirit's full flight but a tormented presence's half attempt. In 'Visitant' Heaney makes clear this relation:

It kept treading air, as if it were a ghost with claims on
us, precipitating in the heat tremor. Then, released
from its distorting mirror, up the fields there comes
this awkwardly smiling foreigner,...

...

.. treading the air of the image he achieved,
released to his fatigues."

Other-worldliness is a constant visitant upon this world. Through this mode Heaney dramatizes in the title poem of *Electric Light* a peculiar poetics. The female relation's death is a 'ghostly' presence but how very different from the literary ghosts in 'Station Island'. Denman has put Heaney at the end of a long tradition where evocation of literary ghosts is a part of modernism's belated and ironic adherence to an intellectual tradition. Plato's ghost haunts W. B. Yeats' poetry. The supernatural in Heaney becomes part of the literal not only in terms of intellectual irony or modern thought, but rather as a part of common everyday experience. One of the important points differentiating the legacy of ghosts in Ireland and India is its significant role in quotidian existence. They are not deemed grotesquely or miraculously other-worldly but a significant deviation in everyday experience. Hence studies in magic realism contend with issues of what may be considered 'magical' in different cultures. In this regard the visual experience in *Bhooter Bhabishyat* gives a graphic depiction

of how a ghost story can move beyond the extra-terrestrial and satiric to include ingredients of item song, boy-meets-girl repartee, raunchy dance numbers, fashion show, 1970s melodramatic cinema and even the feudal lord (zamindar) - robber (dakat) conflict.

A little differently Heaney's perception of the 'ghostly' is hardly 'other-worldly'. He comments that the "Irish language did not undergo the same Romance influences and indeed early Irish nature poetry registers certain sensations and makes a springwater music out of certain feelings in a way unmatched in any other European language". The ghost is sensuously evoked as he compares one of Sweeney's innumerable outbursts where "his imagination is beautifully entangled with the vegetation and the weathers and animals of the countryside...all of them attesting to the god in the tree as a source of poetic inspiration."

This poem gives a slice of quotidian existence and victimization. The poet's subtle shifts of ground make the association to the 'ghostly' tenable:

Candle-grease congealed, dark-streaked with wick

soot...

The smashed thumb-nail

Of that ancient mangled thumb was puckered pearl,

...

In that first house where I saw electric light,

She sat with her fur-lined felt slippers unzipped,

To Southwark too I came,

From tube-mouth into sunlight,

...

Electric light shone over us, I feared

The dirt-tracked flint and fissure of her nail,

So plectrum-hard, glint-glittery, it must still keep

Among beads and vertebrae in the Derry ground.

I quote at length to show how the details of victimization are subtly moved out of the poetic picture to bring in the presence of the persona, then an evocation of light, to again return to the brutality at the end but only as part of the remembered past which continues to haunt the present. Commonness and in-betweenness characterizes the persona in this poem, especially the use of the light metaphor against a background of darkness, and Heaney understands the 'ghostly' persona as such. Reference to light may be related to the restructuring in vision-related developments related to the momentous shift to the wave theory of light which proved immensely useful in constructing scientifically buttressed claims for the existence of invisible spirits and higher intelligences, but Heaney makes a special transcendental claim in this regard but an optical basis for illusoriness remains predominant. In the eleventh section of 'Stations' the poet evokes a ghost-like presence:

As if from the prisms of the kaleidoscope

I plunged once in a butt of muddied water

surfaced like a marvellous lightship

and out of its silted crystals a monk's face

that had spoken years ago from behind a grille
spoke again about the need and chance

“Sudden apprehension of the world as light, as illumination” is at the heart of the magical, where transcendence is not so much the issue but a bringing forth of the apprehension of constant guilt and a resistance to it rather than a prolonged fear. The subtle shifts of ground create a far greater anxiety which in the last paragraph is explicated in terms of a shared intensity. Katarzyna Poloczek in her chapter on “Identity as Becoming” writes:

germanium ghosts are all liked by the pure intensity of their fading existence. In a Deleuzian way, intensities pass and circulate between them

The aesthetics of “fading existence” may only be evoked through the metaphor of light, signifying intensity recovered after existential agony and wise understanding.

The ghost figure in *The Playboy* is not so prominently associated with the light metaphor, but dilemmas of genres based on lightning victory and trifling conflicts are made deliberately indistinct so that we are forced to ask some questions regarding the nature of post-nationalism and counter-violence. Ghosts of legendary heroes are evoked and forced to acknowledge existential dilemmas even in Yeats’ *The Countess Cathleen*. However just after the Irish Literary revival a drier, more realistic and social-minded mentality was beginning to take shape, typified by the new school of fiction-writers. These writers saw around them not an Island of Saints and Scholars, nor one populated by spiritual presences and the ghosts of legendary heroes, but a rather prosaic small country bogged down in local politics and class tensions and the hard necessity to scrape a living. By the time of Heaney revocation of a bygone tradition was up surging but also accommodating the new recent trend. Placing Synge and Heaney within the realm of postmodern spectral narratives which characterizes twentieth and twenty-first century fiction as such is not common.

In order to gain a more complex understanding of events, Kathleen de Burca, in *My Dream of You* turns to a less traditional mode of historical research—she invites the ghosts of Marianne Talbot and William Mullan to haunt her:

It wasn’t people I was thinking of. It was a shape, a blurred image—me outside somewhere, calling, and tragic ghosts listening to me and waiting for me to free them—that settled inside me (22).

Kathleen’s request to be haunted calls attention to her hope of productively borrowing memories from the past to inform her research, and to recalibrate her own sense of contemporary Irishness, which she identifies as the lingering specter of early twentieth-century nationalism: parochial, patriarchal, abusive.

Schultz also brings in the reference of Derrida’s ‘spectral’ logic which I find in both Synge and Heaney. In *Specters of Marx* (1994), Derrida explains that reality, and the historical writing that attempts to document past reality, follows a logic of the specter, meaning that reality is comprised of nothing but contradiction and ambivalence. Derrida explains:

If we have been insisting so much since the beginning on the logic of the ghost, it is because it points toward a thinking of the event that necessarily exceeds a binary or dialectical logic,

the logic that distinguishes or opposes effectivity or actuality (either present, empirical, living—or not) and ideality (regulating or absolute non-presence). (*italics original* 78)

According to Schultz, Derrida's "logic of the ghost" illuminates the ways in which *My Dream of You* employs a similar spectral logic that subverts clear this-or-that binaries in favor of more genuinely complicated historical representation. It follows that if the Irish historical narrative is bereft of certainty, national identity based upon that narrative would remain equally dispossessed and protean. Deleuzian intensity and Derrida's specters give a sense of postmodern diverse particularities emerging as phenomenal, phantasmagorical, hallucinatory, fantastic and imaginary. Yet the 'ghostly' in this regard should not be seen as sites of poststructuralist thought and deliberate epistemic inordinateness. Here Derrida's essay provides an important clue - If the ghost gives its form, that is to say, its body, to the ideologem, then it is the essential feature [*le propre*],...this transcendence is not altogether spiritual, it retains that bodiless body which we have recognised as making the difference between spectre and spirit. Within a structure – of the farce and the poem – and an artistic centre; questions regarding the nature of the 'centre' and 'non-centre' are asked. Furthermore, while Derrida's discussion mainly centers on Marx and commodity fetishism, I argue that even in the aftermath of socialism and communism, ghostly re-imaginings of nationalism continues in diverse ways as the above examples show. Hauntology replaces ontology in the spectral narratives of Synge and Heaney which explore the modalities of this process.

A socio-historical movement like nationalism has its adjacent literary counterpart. 'Readerly' expectations are constantly thwarted as well as expectations of associated genres. Michael James Flaherty in *The Playboy* tries to justify his daughter's marriage to the 'heroic' Christy Mahon:

I'm a decent man of Ireland...and I seeing a score of grandsons growing up little gallant swearers by the name of God, than go peopling my bedside with puny weeds the like of what you'd [Shawn Keogh] breed

Nationalist literature uplifting the standards of heroism was common in both Ireland and India. Even the inter-war poetics of pity of Sassoon and Owen allows pacifism of sorts. Synge's play questions the nature of nationalist literature as merely propagandist. In fact Christy's popularity lies solely on elaboration of the tale of the killing of his father. A murder is associated with heroic stature. Literature of counter-violence asks these existential questions about the nature of heroism as such. Real violence can hardly be desired and condoned as Pegeen's flagging interest shows when Christy actually attempts to hit his father. Synge parodies and subverts the trope of the ghost to make complex any complacent trajectory in the idea of the 'ghosts of the past' is. With the use of the ghost as the trope explaining the nature of the genre of ghosts, Synge exposes what Derrida calls the 'logic of the ghost'. What remains is an unadulterated interest in the ghostly and the magic of fervor it can create. Therefore the playwright gives the last words to Pegeen Mike who also significantly opens the play spinning yards of cloth (which may be associated to spinning long tales of yore):

Oh, my grief, I've lost him surely. I've lost the only Playboy of the Western World.

Recalling a genre as part of the remembered past may be 'ghostly' in terms of the disastrous terrors evoked. Heaney uses literary ghosts for these spectral narratives but they are created as 'shadowy' figures in both the literal and figurative senses of the word, as the past of these people as well as the genres they used to express their thoughts in are constantly questioned. Millennial issues will be given grandeur in nationalist literature but cannot be sustained in existential or the corresponding imaginative reality. The ghost of Virgil in 'Bann Valley Eclogue' is seeking light amidst darkness:

POET

What on earth could match it?

And then, last month, at noon-eclipse, wind dropped.

A millennial chill, birdless and dark, prepared.

As name dawned into knowledge: I saw the orb.

VIRGIL

Eclipses won't last for this child.

The search for light has to be mediated by darkness and it is this indeterminacy which makes appropriate the use of the figure of the ghost which becomes the site of the nightmarish. Literary characters are de-familiarized but the haunting presence of the genre forces a recognition and utilization in the twentieth century:

The poems in question were again produced in the atrocious conditions created by the Nazis in Eastern Europe...the road to town is still the meeting place and the ones who meet and talk are every bit as shadowed by disastrous times as Virgil's goatherds ever were,...but the strength of the work is that it confirms Joseph Brodsky's exhilarating concern that if art teaches us anything, it is that the human condition is private. And that deep reach into the private strata is felt in many oddly nightmarish images that surface all through these poems [by Louis MacNeice which Heaney quotes at length] (*italics mine*)

In dialogue with the past, the brutal realities of the genre cannot be forgotten but the literary ghost as used by Heaney in searching for the light and highlighting the dark eclipse exposes the "nightmarish" realm of the private. This is the crucial function the ghost and the ghostly perform in the works of these artists rather than only re-vivifying a singular haunted and macabre past. The ghastly horridness of existential reality has been so replaced by a search for illumination that we forget to look for the 'ghost' at all. Yet the figure of the ghost is used, even in its very peculiar usage, to enmesh the ghastliness and the transcendence for us, flitting as it does, through light and shadows.

What does the association to the ghost and the ghostly bring into our focus? Perhaps like these presences, the absence of who are more marked, the artists themselves are not sure of the being of poetic inspiration and integrity. Like supernatural occurrences their origins have to be contested. Moeris at the end of 'Virgil: Eclogue IX' can only exclaim:

When the real singer comes, we'll sing in earnest.

Denman also points out a linkage between ghostly fiction and expatriate authorship in the works of Elizabeth Bowen. For the purposes of this article Heaney's 'through-other' position will be analyzed along with Synge's position as an 'exile' only after a more objective

bonding with the roots. Claire Connolly in the chapter 'Dead and Alive' traces some relations between Gothic fictional modes and material history of authors, books and readers shaped by the distance between the London lives of the novelists and the Ireland represented in their Irish fictions. Other-worldliness may be represented at various levels – space and the supernatural. Synge and Heaney are expatriates in very different senses. One is a rich Protestant who sought to attain Continental scholarship and was asked to search for greater artistic credibility in the remote and backward region of his home front – the Aran Islands, while the other was from a poor, rural Catholic background that attained mastery in world literature after his scholarship from the West. Ghosts of the past are important sites of conflict for both of them as the contention between space and place. In *The Playboy*, Christy Mahon and his 'ghostly' father move to other lands for diverse adventures and the telling of 'ghostly' tales. With the indefinable territory is associated the greater predominance of the supernatural, here deemed as a capacity for heroism:

MAHON: ...my son and myself will be going our own way, and we'll have great times from this out telling stories of the villainy of Mayo, and the fools is here.

CHRISTY: ...I will then...for I'm master of all fights from now

In a retreat to the rural and the regional Synge explores the dimensions of the ghost and the ghostly against a background of heroic endeavours and quotidian existence and particularly shows that not much difference lies between the illusions of the two. Such a perspective could only be attained by his expatriate position. The ambiguity may be related to an anomalous position and a tenuous portrayal and Connolly's 'dead and alive' aesthetics will become the most pertinent here.

Crossing of borders between the known and the unknown, the natural and the supernatural is common in Heaney. In 'Frontiers of Writing' he defines place as one:

that exists as a state of unresolved crisis which Ulster people don't quite admit as an immediate realistic expectation but don't quite deny as a deferred possibility. (*italics mine*)

Just as the known world has been brutally transformed, it has created disorientation in its wake. Hence the presence of that world has to be created and questioned in the ghostly fashion. Like Synge, Heaney's ghosts are also drawn from the everyday world but transfused with an eerie extraordinariness. Victimization of the Catholic minority may have drastically changed the human and cultural landscape for Heaney but it remained a part of his mental makeup which had to be constantly revisited and which furthermore continued to haunt him. The relationship between dwelling and displacement is not as that of the Self and the Other rather it is an aesthetics of what Heaney calls 'Through-Other'. On this level of an imaginative reality the trope of the ghost could be sustained. The motion in 'Electric Light' takes in fleeting England and the "beads and vertebrae in the Derry ground". Importantly the virtual reality is conflated with a spatial infinity. The light encompasses all, creating a realm of the 'local spatial'. In this way settlement in external territories is complementary in extra-terrestrial perception. Segregation does not create minority politics, but embodies the duress and distress of living which are emplaced in particular areas in history. The poetics of Paul Celan and Seamus Heaney embody the creation of an existential niche through a constant

honing in this agony and anxiety. The latter also helps transform this site from a merely subversive location to a site of 'agony and ecstasy'.

Language in ghost fiction has to elucidate the 'other-worldly'. Seamus Deane comments that Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* is written in a ghost language about phantasmal figures; history is haunted by them and embodies them over and over again in specific people, places and tongues. In the postmodern poetics of Seamus Heaney intellectual irony will be evident, but Heaney also shows us through the use of literary ghosts that certain comparisons, even for purposes of cynical irony, cannot be sustained for long:

Allegory, I say, but who's to know
How to read sorrow rightly, or at all?

Like the ghost whose existence may be denied at any moment, Heaney's evocation of literary ghosts cannot pose an intellectual, though oppositional validity like that of Yeats. The reference to allegory is quite pertinent here as the same term is invoked to describe the nature of Irish Gothic in Joyce and Beckett by Jim Hansen:

both Wilde and the Unionist Gothic deploy allegory in order to represent and to work through the structural disinheritance instigated by British colonial ideology...Ulysses comes to signify Irish literary modernism's overcoming of the Irish Gothic's allegory of structural dispossession... Beckett begins to move from deploying allegory to unpack sociopolitical problems to allegorizing acts of writing and interpretation themselves...

An allegory demands at a certain level a religious and metaphorical faith to sustain the level of comparisons but in a post-national world, evocation of an oppositional force does not make use of familiar tropes. Therefore the 'ghostly' in this article is not the terrible Other of the Gothic tradition, though including elements of it. The texts of Synge and Heaney to which I have referred are not conventionally Gothic or 'ghostly' but serve to question their very nature. Interestingly they are not only related by the common ghost of the past of affliction but are charting similar routes in interrogating the trope and its conventional paraphernalia. They come out with farce and magic, both generic features honed to perfection after a persistent struggle with the self and the world.

Notes:

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