Daniel Becker

On the Threshold of Memory:

National History and Liminal Remembrance in Contemporary Irish Poetry

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Bergstraße 27, 54295 Trier
Postfach 4005, 54230 Trier
Tel.: (0651) 41503, Fax: 41504
Internet: http://www.wvttrier.de
E-Mail: wvt@wvttrier.de

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Wuppertal, September 2020 Daniel Becker

1. Introduction: Where Did All the History Go?

Throughout most of the twentieth century, Irish poetry was defined by "the dominance of the 'backward look'" (Goodby 93). Whether in the form of an idealised ancient past or the representation of more recent political events, Irish national history obtained a central position in the work of many Irish poets of that era. When Ireland intensified its struggle for independence at the beginning of the twentieth century, poets of the Irish Revival such as William Butler Yeats, Ethna Carbery, Emily Lawless or Douglas Hyde established the Irish poem as a powerful cultural institution which helped to 'invent' and shape the present and future Ireland via its "epiphanic […] view of Irish history" (S. Smith 27). In the same vein, while other national poetry canons had already 'opened up' to modernist experimentation, Irish poetry of the 1930s to late 1950s "seemed to be turning back to the past" (Quinn, *Introduction* 45). Poets such as F.R. Higgins, Joseph Campbell or Padraic Colum adopted the Revival's search for a national spirit in Irish history: at a time when Ireland predominantly practiced a cultural, political and economic discourse of protectionism, they limited their work to discussions of 'Irish matters', with the Irish past being one of the core concerns. Finally, in Irish poetry of the 1960s to 1980s, the topic of national history gained an even more pressing urgency: with the beginning of the Troubles in the North – triggering renewed public discussions of past conflicts in both Northern Ireland and the Republic – Irish poets on both sides of the border were faced with the dangerous effect of a history of colonial strife and segregation once again (cf. Walker 58), which led to a new and more critical poetic re-negotiation of the past in the work of authors such as Seamus Heaney, Tom Paulin or Eavan Boland.

This powerful connection between history and poetry was also reflected in a significant amount of academic studies in the second half of the twentieth century. As Fran Brearton and Allan Gillis point out, by the time Heaney and other poets published their first collections, Irish poetry had become the genre most closely associated with Ireland's fascination with the past (cf. Brearton/Gillis ix) and the enormous rise in academic interest in twentieth century Irish poets and their negotiation of history reflected on and contributed to this development.[1] Irish poetry studies as a discipline, in

1 Out of the plethora of studies, only a few examples shall be mentioned: see e.g. J.G. Simms' "The Battle of Aughrim: History and Poetry" (1977), Stuart Hirschberg's "The 'Whirling Gyres' of History" (1979), Maurice Riordan's "Eros and History: On Contemporary Irish Poetry" (1985), Ruth Niel's "Digging into History: A Reading of Brian Friel's 'Volunteers' and Seamus Heaney's 'Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces'" (1986), John McDonagh's "Imagi-Nation in Brendan Kennelly's 'Cromwell'" (2002), Ronald Schuchard's "The Legacy of Yeats in Contemporary Irish Poetry" (2004), Bernhard Klein's *On the Uses of History in Recent Irish Writing* (2007), Jeannette E. Riley's "Eavan Boland's 'The Lost Land': Altering the Cartography of the Irish Poem" (2009), Benjamin Keatinge's "Responses to the Holocaust in Modern Irish Poetry" (2011), James Byrne's "Seamus Heaney, Francisco Goya and Unveiling the Myth of History" (2016); Neal Alexander's "Remembering the Future: Poetry, Peace, and the Politics of Memory in Northern Ireland" (2018).

other words, also turned history into a central object of its analysis and thus mirrored and confirmed the significance that the past had gained in Irish poetry. In fact, with academia reinforcing the significance of history in Irish poetic productions, during the 1970s and 1980s the union between the past and poetry had become such a dominant component in the Irish poetry canon that the term 'Irish poetry' was used as a synonym for poetry dedicated to portraying Ireland's historical struggle (cf. Falci 17). This narrow focus gave poets such as Derek Mahon, who did not meet the demand of the 'Irish history poem', a hard time finding any public or academic attention (cf. Zamorano Llena 100).

During the mid-1990s and early 2000s, however, when a new generation of Irish poets appeared on the scene, things began to change. Most significantly, the academic interest in the relationship between poetry and history, which had dominated the field in the years before, suddenly decreased. The "new Irish poets" (Guinness, "Introduction" 14), who started their poetic career during the Celtic Tiger years, broadly expanded the thematic spectrum of Irish poetry by more prominently addressing present-day issues such as everyday life in Celtic Tiger Ireland (see e.g. Dennis O'Driscoll's *Reality Check*), international politics (see e.g. Kevin Higgins' *Time Gentlemen, Please*), technology (see e.g. John Redmond's *MUDe*) or changing paradigms of gender and sexuality (see e.g. Leanne O'Sullivan's *Waiting for My Clothes*). In Irish poetry studies of the Celtic Tiger period this move towards a more inclusive thematic canon was predominantly interpreted as the end of the strong link between national history and Irish poetry, as they argued that the new poets have "thrown off the weight of an encumbered past and have injected a new outward-looking confidence" (Kirby/Gibbons/Cronin 9). Thus, Michael Parker, for example, claims that "among the defining characteristics of the new poetry […] [are] an alertness to wider geopolitical concerns, and a preoccupation with domestic and family, rather than national history" (Parker 177). In a similar vein, to name a second example, Justin Quinn argues in his survey on the development of Irish poetry since 1800 that the new Irish poets, who began publishing poetry collections around 2000, break with the former poetry tradition by orchestrating the "disappearance of Ireland" and a "gradual abandonment of the nation as a framework for Irish poetry" (Quinn, *Introduction* 1); an abandonment that also includes turning away from Irish national history, which by now, as some research suggests, seems rather irrelevant for a new generation of poets.[2]

Although the euphoria of the Celtic Tiger years quickly ebbed down, as the roaring tiger became a tame kitten again, this dominant academic discourse of a "post-national generation" (Brearton 629), that no longer remembers the nation's past, still echoes in many Irish poetry studies up until this day. Over the past two decades, many new Irish poets, such as Iggy McGovern, Martina Evans, John McAuliffe, Lorna Shaughnessy, Paul Perry or Anne Fitzgerald, have been ignored and, if they have found some attention, academic discussions of their poetic work have mostly ne-

2 Similar accounts can be found in Broom (2006) and Jarnewicz/McDonagh (2009).

glected Irish history as an object of research. In fact, most existing studies on the new Irish poets have turned their research focus to other thematic concerns (cf. Cusick 2005; Sullivan 2011; Johnston 2012; Flannery 2014) and in the few studies that tackle the issue of the past in the work of the new writers (cf. Schrage-Früh 2009; L. Collins 2015; Eide 2017; McDaid 2017; Kirkpatrick 2017) national history often plays a marginal role.[3] Compared to the plethora of studies on the representation of history in the works of earlier poets such as Heaney, Muldoon or Boland (as in footnote 1), current research on the new Irish poets, thus, indeed reinforces the impression that Irish poetry since the Celtic Tiger is no longer concerned with Ireland's past.

Yet, this impression is misleading, as the present study will show. Although it is undoubtedly important and legitimate to analyse the broad range of (new) thematic concerns addressed by a new generation of poets in Irish poetry studies, one should nevertheless not leave the 'old war horse' of national history out of academic considerations: it still finds its proper place in the work of many new Irish poets, who, far from "throw[ing] off the weight of an encumbered past", often showcase different and most innovative ways to negotiate Ireland's history; ways that, so far, have not been examined carefully and that require a long-overdue analysis. The present study can be regarded as a first attempt to fill this research gap. By analysing selected poems by Iggy McGovern, Tom French, Vona Groarke, Martina Evans, Leanne O'Sullivan, Paul Perry, Lorna Shaughnessy, Paula Cunningham, as well as the more intensively-researched writers Paula Meehan and Paul Durcan, this study will examine one of the most dominant ways of remembering national history in contemporary Irish poetry: the negotiation of Ireland's past via *liminal remembrance*.[4] It will be argued that

3 Lucy Collins' *Contemporary Irish Women Poets: Memory and Estrangement*, for instance, takes a look at cultural memory and "the relationship between individual and shared versions of the past" (2) and thus indicates that national history is anything but absent in the work of newer (female) poets. However, in this context, national history rather fulfils an 'instrumental' function: Collins is less interested in the different poetic means of remembering Irish history *per se*, than in seeing the remembrance of the national past as *one* element in the work of contemporary Irish women poets to alter the Irish poetic tradition, as "[t]heir handling of poetic temporalities is of fundamental importance for exploring […] their place in the tradition" (1). Collins also follows a similar argument in "A Way of Going Back: Memory and Estrangement in the Poetry of Paula Meehan" (2009); Keating (2017) looks at memory in the sense of poetic influences of prior generations on contemporary Irish poetry.

4 Like the topic of history in the works of the new Irish poets, aspects of liminality have not yet gained much attention in Irish poetry studies, especially not in combination with memory. So far, the concept has mostly been used to explain the position of the poet between self and world (Rui Cavalho Homem's "'Neither Here Nor There': Representing the Liminal in Irish Poetry" [2005] or Irene Gilsenan Nordin's "'Betwixt and Between': The Body as Liminal Threshold in the Poetry of Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin" [2006]), between creative expression and motherhood (Katharina Walter's "'Suspended between the Two Worlds': Gestation Metaphors and Representation of Childbirth in Contemporary Irish Women's Poetry" [2010]) between different cultural expressions and arts (Anne Karhio's "The Familiar and the Foreign: Finish Landscapes in Contemporary Irish Poetry" [2014]) or between different geographical and ideological spaces (Megan

many Irish poems written since the Celtic Tiger represent aspects of Irish history in between being remembered *and* being forgotten at the same time. 'Liminal remembrance' therefore describes a poetic memory practice in which national history is neither fully included in a speaker's memory nor completely excluded from it. Instead, it is both and exists on the very threshold of memory where processes of remembering and forgetting constantly interact. As such, in the works of many new Irish poets, national history often appears as a strangely ephemeral, 'ghost-like' entity that is somehow graspable and present in memory and yet is often presented in such an indistinct and vague manner that it simultaneously lingers on the verge of being absent and 'lost' in the dark of the past. In Tom French's "Commute", to take a brief look at one example, the Easter Rising of 1916, which the speaker remembers when he passes a plate dedicated to the remembrance of the event on a train ride back home from work, obtains an in-between position in the speaker's personal memory: as underlined by the spatial liminality of the commemorative plaque's "sentence scribbled between stations" (l. 5), the speaker remembers the historical figures of James Connolly and Padraig Pearse, who gain a haunting presence in his recollection, while he simultaneously distances himself from this era in Irish history: by commenting on the fact that the commemorative plate "looks like it was written by somebody else" (l. 6) he emphasises that the event is not related to his personal everyday horizon.

With this prominent phenomenon in mind, the poems discussed in the following study have been chosen for three reasons: first, they share a liminal memory practice, as they display 'in-between' representations of history in one way or another. Second, the corpus of poems chosen for this study is defined by its personal memory perspective: as will be argued below, liminal remembrance is closely related to a speaker's personal perspective on national events in the past. For that reason, all poems analysed in the following chapters display speakers that relate to Ireland's history from within their own everyday realm. Finally, since remembrance in these poems is a highly personal matter, the span of history being remembered in the chosen text selection is mostly limited to historical events of the twentieth century (i.e. the struggle for independence, the World Wars, the Troubles etc.). These three features help to narrow down the selection of poems from a larger body of contemporary poetic works from Ireland that still actively remember national history (yet not in a liminal mode). As such, the chosen poems are supposed to serve as examples of a changing trend in poetic remembrance. More specifically, next to mentioning a plethora of poems throughout the book, the following poems will be at the centre of analysis: Vona Groarke's "To Smithereens" (2006), Iggy McGovern's "The News in 1974" (2005), "The Jeep" (2005), "The Skip" (2005) and "Arrival" (2010), Paula Meehan's "Manulla Junction" (2000) and "At Shelling Hill" (2009), Leanne O'Sullivan's "Townland" (2013) and "Safe House" (2013), Tom French's "The Scar" (2001), "Red"

Buckley's "'The visionary place, the obstructed monument': Mediations of the Liminal in the Poetry of Eavan Boland and Mary O'Malley" [2008]; Lauren Rebecca Thacker's *'Every Move Is Punctuated': Writing Identity and Space in Irish Poetry 1963-2016* [2016]; Alibhe McDaid's *The Poetics of Migration in Contemporary Irish Poetry* [2017]).

(2001), “Commute” (2009) and “Moss” (2009), Paula Cunningham’s “The Hyacinth under the Stairs” (2013), Paul Perry’s “Of the gas stove and the glimmerman” (2003), Joan McBreen’s “The Photograph of My Aunts” (2003), Lorna Shaughnessy’s “Shelter (May 1976)” (2015) and “Dogged” (2015), Martina Evans’ “Mallow Burns, 28th September 1920” (2009), Kevin Higgins’ “Clear Out” (2009), John McAuliffe’s “A Pyramid Scheme” (2007), David Wheatley’s “Misery Hill” (2000) and Paul Durcan’s “Politics” (1999).

As the analyses of these poems will show, the prominent phenomenon of liminal remembrance more specifically occurs in *four different types* in contemporary Irish poetry. The first type will be labelled *indirect memory*. The central aspect of this type lies in the fact that national history is exclusively remembered via a ‘second hand’ perspective. The prototypical speaker of this type does not remember a national event directly, since he/she has not personally witnessed this event first-hand, but rather recalls a *public representation* of the event he/she encountered at a later point in time (e.g. in the form of news reports or memorials). As such, the speaker indirectly accesses the national past by remembering how the public sphere remembered an event. In other words, he/she remembers the remembrance of history, not the actual event.

The second type will be named *family memory*. This type assembles poems in which the speaker remembers a past moment of national relevance via stories shared by his/her relatives in the family. In different ways such poems deal with the possibilities and limits of transferring memories from one family member to another. While in some poems the speaker is so emotionally invested in his/her relative’s version of the past that he/she ‘adopts’ these memories as his/her own, in other poems the speaker needs to realise that any transfer of memories is prone to re-interpretation and imagination, which creates a distance from the relative’s past experience. Thus, this type often somehow insinuates an interaction between a speaker’s proximity to and distance from a family member’s version of the past and the national aspects he/she recalls.

The third type is labelled *authentic memory*. This type is characterised by the speaker’s attempt to reconstruct the ‘original’ experience of a national event or context as minutely as possible. Put differently, this type initiates a ‘direct access’ to the past, in which the discrepancy between experiencing a moment and remembering this moment later on is levelled. Such poems recall the past as if the speaker travelled back in time to relive a moment while it is happening. In order to achieve this direct access, speakers of this type apply a photographic or video-graphic gaze on the past, as they ‘zoom in’ on sensory details of a past scenario.

The fourth and last type differs from the first three in so far as it grants a *metaphorical access* to national history. While the first three types deal with a speaker’s concrete memories, the last type negotiates Irish history as a liminal entity in terms of another concept which reveals liminal properties itself. More precisely, liminality becomes the *tertium comparationis* in the metaphor of *history as waste*. As will be shown, waste

cannot be clearly categorised but often exists in a state between familiarity and unfamiliarity as well as between processes of devaluation and revaluation.

In order to properly analyse these four types in all their nuances and facets, the present study will not only make use of theoretical notions of liminality but additionally draw on concepts from memory studies – especially Harald Welzer's, Sabine Moller's and Karoline Tschuggnall's concepts of the *album* and the *lexicon*. With the help of these concepts it will be shown, how liminal remembrance is closely linked to the *personal* memory perspective used in the relevant poems. More to the point, it will be demonstrated that liminal remembrance of national history always relies on an interaction between, first, recalling sensory experiences personally made in a national context and, second, reconstructing learned knowledge about said context, acquired after the events took place (e.g. learned from history lessons at school). As such, this study uses a new framework for analysing contemporary poetry which will help to discuss liminal remembrance as a complex phenomenon based on the intersection of a double interplay between remembering/forgetting and experience/knowledge.

Finally, based on this framework, liminal remembrance will not only be examined on a textual level but also a contextual one: since liminal remembrance has become such a dominant phenomenon in Irish poetry during the Celtic Tiger, the question arises which specific cultural, social or political factors influence the sudden occurrence of this phenomenon at this particular moment in time. It will be argued that the liminal representation of national history is a response to three major ruptures in Irish cultural memory: over the past few decades, Ireland has radically shifted its ways of looking at the nation's past several times, ranging from the revisionist debates of the 1980s to the Celtic Tiger society and its euphoric abandonment of any relationship to the past altogether, to Post-Celtic Tiger austerity and the sudden return of a more traditional interpretation of national history. As a result, it will be argued, Ireland manoeuvred itself into a 'memory crisis' and liminal remembrance becomes both an *expression of* and a *reaction against* this critical situation.

With its focus on the liminal memory practice and its complexities, the present study makes a contribution to continuing the long-lasting tradition of looking at history in Irish poetry. It does so by complementing the extensive body of work on twentieth-century poets with a look at how twenty-first century Irish poetry handles matters of history. However, this study, to some extent, also leaves the traditional pathway paved by earlier Irish poetry studies: it provides new insights into the poetic remembrance of history by drawing on concepts (album/lexicon) that have not been used by other critics of Irish poetry. In addition, it also avoids many of the categories routinely used in analyses and interpretations so far, such a clear distinction between Northern vs. Southern Irish poets, male vs. female poets or Celtic Tiger and Post-Celtic Tiger poets. Rather, it delivers a re-reading of an important topic with a long tradition by casting a more inclusive perspective on the matter that shows the all-pervasiveness of the liminal mode of remembrance and its different variations in contemporary Irish poetry. In that sense, the present study analyses a broad corpus consisting of poems

by different writers from the North and the South, representing different age groups and genders as well as different poetic styles and voices, who lyrically represent different historical epochs that range from the war of independence (see e.g. Martina Evans' "Mallow Burns, 28th September 1920") and the Great War (see e.g. Tom French's "Red") to the Second World War (see e.g. Harry Clifton's "Grandfather") and most recent political events surrounding the Troubles (see e.g. Paula Cunningham's "A Dog Called Chance").

With these goals in mind, the study will proceed in three major steps: in a first step (Chapter 2), the notion of liminal remembrance will be discussed on a theoretical level in order to provide a conceptual framework for the following analysis. For that purpose, the underlying concepts of liminality, remembering and forgetting as well as the album and the lexicon will be introduced. Based on this conceptual foundation, in a second step (Chapter 3), exemplary Irish poems will be analysed in detail in order to show the various types and forms of liminal remembrance in contemporary poetic texts from Ireland. Finally, in a third step (Chapter 4), the analysis will move from the textual level of individual poems to the contextual level of Irish society to show how liminal remembrance can be read as a response to recent developments in Irish cultural memory. In this context, first the three ruptures mentioned above will be briefly explained and then linked to the liminal representation of history in contemporary Irish poetry.

2. WHAT IS LIMINAL REMEMBRANCE?

> I've always loved thresholds, the stepping over,
> the shapechanging that can happen when
> you jump off the edge into pure breath and then
> the passage between inner and outer. (Meehan, "Six Sycamores" ll. 110-113)

The new Irish poets are poets of the in-between. Much like the speaker in Paula Meehan's "Six Sycamores" (2009), they love thresholds, especially when it comes to addressing the traditional topic of Irish national history. Thus, what poems such as Tom French's "Commute" (mentioned above), Paula Cunningham's "The Hyacinth under the Stairs" or Anne Fitzgerald's "Storm Over Manhattan" have in common, is that they make remembering Ireland's past an exercise in ambiguity: they take a familiar poetic topic and paint it in the most ambivalent colours, as they experiment with "the passage between inner and outer", remembering and forgetting. As such, in the work of the new poets, the representation of history is indeed characterised by its "shapechanging" as historical phenomena constantly meander between being there and not being there, and between leaving a trace and disappearing into oblivion.

Before thoroughly analysing forms and functions of this liminal representation in the selected poems below, the present chapter will introduce current theories of memory, that help to conceptualise the phenomenon of liminal remembrance, and discuss some of the key concepts associated with this way of remembering the past.

2.1 *Liminal* Remembrance: The Concept of Liminality

To begin with, one cannot understand the phenomenon of liminal remembrance without the central notion of liminality. In recent years, this concept, which was first used by the anthropologists Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner[5] to describe a stage of transition in tribal rites of passage, has gained a prominent position in many academic disciplines and, as Bjørn Thomassen points out, "currently appears in myriad applications within practically all branches of the social and human sciences and is now also spreading to social media and popular culture" (39; also see Achilles/Bergmann 4).[6] As such, liminality, much like 'identity' or 'narrative', has lately achieved the status of a traveling concept (cf. Thomassen 39; Bal) that is variably used with differ-

5 See van Gennep's *Les rites de passage* (first published 1909) and Turner's "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage" (1964).

6 Achilles sees the reason for the recent boom of liminality in the fact that the concept strikes a universal chord in a globalised, postmodern world: he points out that "liminality as a concept of both demarcation and mediation between different processual stages, spatial complexes, inner states, and multiple identities is of obvious importance in an age of global mobility, digital networking, interethnicity, transnationality" (35). Similarly, Kay et al. define the use of liminality as a way of understanding the modern-day world, in which simple binaries successively need to be complemented with thinking about the 'in-between' (cf. 7).

ent connotations in different disciplinary contexts (cf. Achilles/Bergmann 3). This recent versatility of the term begs the question of how liminality is to be understood in the specific context of Irish poetry studies to describe the in-between status of history in the poetic works of Shaughnessy, Higgins, O'Sullivan and others.

To keep matters simple, following some general convictions in contemporary liminality research, liminality can be defined by three basic features: first, a phenomenon existing in a liminal condition, which can be a person, thing, place, event, or idea (cf. Achilles 35), is a phenomenon that exists in a *hybrid* state situated in between two different states of being. Entities in a liminal state thus move "beyond simple binaries" (Holm/Stene/Svensson 11), as they become an amalgam of both states involved.[7] The liminal state then, as Bernhard Giesen points out, becomes a "third possibility" of existence (61), as seen in how historical events are treated in poems such as Leanne O'Sullivan's "Townland" (see Section 3.2), where they are neither simply remembered nor simply forgotten, but exist in a state in which they are *both* being remembered and being forgotten; this also becomes apparent in the figure of the homeless professor of history in Paul Durcan's "Politics" (see Section 3.5), who cannot be clearly categorised by the speaker into either the status of a homeless man, nor into the status of the renowned and respectable professor. Instead, he becomes a figure somewhere beyond the speaker's simple binary view of the world.

Second, as already visible in Durcan's example, in this hybrid in-between state, phenomena become highly *dynamic* entities that challenge the fixed categories and structures they might have had before entering a liminal state: as best described by the metaphor of the sea used in Vona Groarke's "To Smithereens", once elements become liminal they enter a "state of flux" and movement (Nordin/Holmsten 7), in which they become "ultimately fluid and unfixable" (Kay et al. 8), as they are being constantly negotiated and re-arranged. A liminal existence, therefore, is defined by "the dislocation of established structures, [and] the reversal of established hierarchies" (Horvath/Thomassen/Wydra 2), as phenomena become structurally flexible and open towards change; the liminal, in the words of Paula Meehan's "Six Sycamores", indeed becomes a state of "pure breath", since phenomena are no longer restrained by any fixed rules. Thus, in Paula Cunningham's "The Hyacinth under the Stairs" (see Section 3.3), for example, the speaker recognises that events in her family's history cannot be fixed in memory, but seem to exist in a constant state of liminality in which they are highly flexible and constantly adapt new meaning and life once she attempts to reconstruct them in the present.

Third, phenomena in a liminal state are defined by *ambiguity and uncertainty*. As Arpad Slakolczai argues, existing in a liminal state resembles "a genuine Alice-in-Wonderland experience, a situation where almost anything can happen" (17): since

7 It is the interaction of two states in an in-between space that distinguishes liminality from the concept of marginality. While marginality refers to the relationship between centre and periphery *within one* state of being, liminality only exists in the convergence of *two* states as they transcend their boundaries towards each other.

the liminal avoids fixed structures and instead provides an ever-changing amalgam of different states (see above), phenomena in this condition always become the "unclassifiable remainder" since they exist in the ambivalent realm of "the 'neither...nor' or the 'as well as...'" (Giesen 61). Liminal entities might take any in-between shape at any time and, as such, there is always an inherent "uncertainty […] about future outcomes" involved (Horvath/Thomassen/Wydra 2). As Birte Heidemann claims, this state of uncertainty about how a certain entity might develop in the future can become a "*disabling* condition" (10; emphasis original), as the openness of the liminal state does not allow any clear directions to be followed. The dog in Lorna Shaughnessy's "Dogged" (see Section 3.5), for example, which becomes a personification of the past itself, is neither inside nor outside the speaker's house (symbolically it lies on the threshold) and the speaker does not know if it will stay or leave. In this context, the dog becomes a highly ambiguous figure the speaker cannot define any further, other than a presence in between familiarity and unfamiliarity, which makes the speaker stagnate in the present circumstances, with no clear path to follow.

These three basic features of liminality discussed in current liminality research provide a preliminary framework to more closely describe what is meant by a *liminal* remembrance of history in contemporary Irish poetry. However, to further capture what a liminal *remembrance* entails, one needs to take a closer look at the two key processes involved in recreating the past in recent Irish poetry: the processes of remembering and forgetting.

2.2 Liminal *Remembrance*: Remembering and Forgetting

In Kevin Higgins' "Clear Out", the speaker sets out to build a new life and a new identity for himself. For that purpose, he gets rid of all his old furniture, as he is led by the conviction that the creation of something new always requires the discarding of the old and unwanted. In the process of renovating his house and his self, he thus understands that the development of his present self is as much a matter of what he wants to keep and remember in his house as it is a matter of what he wants to forget. While the speaker utterly fails in his attempt of a personal re-invention (see Section 3.5), the interrelation between remembering and forgetting, upon which he builds this re-invention, is most relevant for understanding the liminal agenda in this poem, as well as many others. But what exactly do these processes of remembering and forgetting entail?

The liminal interaction between remembering and forgetting hinges on contemporary definitions of memory. Even though 'memory' is one of the most active travelling concepts and the vast field of memory studies is as complex as it is contested,[8] recent

8 For an overview over different memory concepts and the development of memory studies see e.g. Astrid Erll's *Memory in Culture* (2011) or Christian Gudehus, Ariane Eichenberg and Harald Welzer, eds., *Gedächtnis und Erinnerung: Ein interdisziplinäres*

definitions are based on the assumption that processes of memory cannot retrieve past experiences as they 'actually' happened. Rather, memory is understood to be a constructive act of sense making which involves the selection and interpretation of past phenomena and is influenced by personal, political and/or cultural factors in the present. The past, therefore, "is not an immutable or independent object. Rather it is endlessly revised from our present position" (Crang quoted in Collins/Caulfield 5); the same historical event can be represented in different manners, depending on who does the remembering in the present (cf. Olick/Robbins). As Barbara Misztal registers, "what we call the past is always already and irretrievably a profoundly altered version of the contents that were potentially available to consciousness when that past was present" (22). This ultimately leads to an "unavoidable gap between experiencing an event and remembering it" (Misztal 6). It is exactly this gap between actual experience and retrospective reconstruction that lies at the very heart of many liminal poems.

Recent contributions to memory studies more specifically define this active process of making sense of the past as an interaction between *two* equally important processes: remembering and forgetting. This perception of memory has dominated academic discourses to such an extent that scholars speak of a 'turn' in memory studies over the last two to three decades. Since the publication of studies such as Paul Connerton's *How Societies Remember* (1989) and *How Modernity Forgets* (2009), Harald Weinrich's *Lethe: Kunst und Kritik des Vergessens* (1997) or Gary Smith's and Hinderk M. Emrich's edited volume *Vom Nutzen des Vergessens* (1996) memory studies began to more dominantly regard the aspect of forgetting as an integral part in processes of memory. Thus, whereas, before the 'turn', forgetting was often negatively portrayed as a failure of memory that needs to be fought at any cost (cf. G. Smith 16),[9]

> [r]ecently, the peculiar and elusive phenomenon of forgetting has been more prominently recognised, […] especially in the social sciences, humanities and cultural studies […]. Right now, not only does forgetting witness an increase in theoretical and analytical attention but also is the prioritisation of remembering before forgetting re-negotiated and at least partially relativised. Based on the hypothesis that forgetting is necessary, both for societies and individuals […], more recent approaches challenge the common stigmatisation of forgetting as failure and moral misdemeanour. (Dimbath/Wehling 7, 11; trans. D.B.)[10]

Handbuch (2010). For the 'memory boom' in an Irish context see Emilie Pine's *The Politics of Irish Memory: Performing Remembrance in Contemporary Irish Culture* (2011).

9 For a full account of the (negative) history of forgetting see Weinrich (2000) and Behrens (2005).

10 German original: "Das eigenartige, nur schwer greifbare Phänomen des Vergessens ist neuerdings ins Rampenlicht gerückt und erregt große Aufmerksamkeit [...] gerade in den Sozial-, Kultur-, und Geisteswissenschaften […]. Vergessen stößt gegenwärtig nicht alleine auf verstärkte theoretische und analytische Aufmerksamkeit, zugleich wird auch die normative 'Bevorzugung' des Erinnerns vor dem Vergessen zur Diskussion gestellt und wenigstens partiell relativiert. Mit der These, das Vergessen sei notwendig, sowohl für die Gesellschaft als auch für das Individuum […] [wendet man sich] gegen

In contemporary memory studies remembering and forgetting are no longer perceived as strict antagonists, existing in an 'either/or' dichotomy, but as *complementary* parts in the act of re-constructing a meaningful past (cf. Musiol). In this context, current studies speak of "a dialectics of remembering and forgetting" (Climo/Cattell 1), thus perceiving them in a mutual interaction, in which forgetting is not just "a process of an involuntary and regrettable 'draining' or 'fading'", but a "productive process" (Keller 117-118)[11] in its own right. This process lies at the heart of Paula Cunningham's "The Hyacinth under the Stairs", for example, where the speaker explicitly leaves out, that is to say forgets, certain events of the past to actively shape a more positive picture of her family's history. Forgetting then becomes "the other [side of the] coin of memory" (Della Sala xiii), as the one cannot exist without the other.

At a closer look, this interdependence between remembering and forgetting generates dynamic interplay of inclusion and exclusion, as well as valuation and devaluation: a meaningful relationship with the past is created by remembering those past events and phenomena that are considered valuable in the present while forgetting other aspects that are presently useless or even harmful. In the interaction between remembering and forgetting then, "anything that is not included in the current perspective, the current spotlight of attention, will disappear in the darkness of oblivion" (Sebald 90; trans. D.B.).[12] This process is lyrically enacted by many 'waste poems' discussed in Section 3.5, where things that are meant to be forgotten appear in the shape of waste thrown away by the speaker, as, for instance, can be seen in the form of the clutter discarded from the speaker's house in Iggy McGovern's "The Skip" (see Section 3.5). Ultimately, memory functions like a stencil that is put onto the past: the interaction between remembering and forgetting becomes a dynamic negotiation of value and non-value that 'carves out' and contours a certain image of the past by drawing the line between the "'memorable' and 'forgettable'" (Misztal 11; cf. Jörissen/Marotzki 95). This demarcation of value and non-value provides a clear focus for present actions (cf. Endreß 62) thus making memory a necessary cultural practice (cf. Lachmann): since one cannot recall everything that happened in the past, the reconstructive process of memory is the cultural means to actively shaping a meaningful path from the past to the present, much like the road the speaker looks back upon in John McAuliffe's "Hedge", where some things can be clearly seen while others, in-

die geläufige Stigmatisierung des Vergessens als Versagen oder moralische Verfehlung".

11 German original: "Vergessen und Erinnern […] stehen danach in keinem Gegensatzverhältnis, sondern werden zu komplementären, in einem dialektischen Verhältnis zueinanderstehende Modi des Präsenten […]. [Vergessen ist kein] Prozess des unbeabsichtigten, bedauernswerten 'Absickerns' und 'Ausblendens', des mehr oder weniger bewussten 'Löschens' von Erfahrungen […]. Vergessen im weiten soziologischen Verständnis ist vielmehr ein produktiver Prozess".

12 German original: "[w]as nicht in der Perspektive des aktuellen Problems, des aktuellen Blickstrahls der Aufmerksamkeit liegt [...] verschwindet in die Dunkelheit des Vergessens".

cluding a national monument, are left to be forgotten on the roadside "beyond plantations of fir and rowan" (l. 16).

According to the studies discussed so far, in memory an individual event or phenomenon can exist in two states: it is either remembered or forgotten, meaning it is either included in the spotlight of memory, or excluded from it and left in the dark. Events of the past then gain their meaning and value in a dialectic relationship with other events, which are also either included or excluded from memory. Yet, the question arises if the attribution of value and meaning is necessarily based on a binary 'either/or' decision between "the things worth keeping and forgetting" (Keller 117; trans. D.B.).[13] This question is especially relevant in the context of this study, since such a binary understanding of memory can hardly describe what happens in poems such as John McAuliffe's "A Pyramid Scheme" (see Section 3.5), where elements of the past, materialised in the form of an old car wreck, are displayed as being located somewhere in between the binary divide: the past is both part of the speaker's suburban community and not part of it at the same time, thus meandering between remembrance and oblivion. In McAuliffe's poem then, as in many other Irish poems, there is a "third possibility" of existence in memory, which is established in between the processes of remembering and forgetting. In the following paragraphs, this liminal position will be conceptualised in more detail.

Judging from what has been said about liminality, remembering and forgetting so far, what would a liminal state between these two processes imply? Using the three basic features of liminality discussed in Section 2.1, one might describe this state as follows. First, considering remembering and forgetting as a dynamic interaction of including and excluding items or events from recollection, a liminal entity is neither included in nor excluded from memory and yet comprises aspects of both inclusion and exclusion in its in-between position. Second, as such, a liminal memory item exists in a 'state of flux' and constant negotiation where it is not shaped along clear lines of valuation and devaluation but, third, creates a "third possibility" of existence in the realm of memory: it exists in a mode of vagueness and indecision that transforms any element that enters a liminal state into an amalgam of being remembered and being forgotten simultaneously. The last aspect can for example be seen in Paul Perry's "Tonight, the Sea" , where the historical event of the Spanish Armada being defeated is both part and not part of the speaker's memory, as symbolised in the appearance of "a barrage of ghosts" (l. 7) that can both be seen ("envisioning the fear the mariners felt"; l. 17) and not be seen ("Is there anything to salvage from the sea?"; l. 20).

This liminal state of a memory item between being remembered and being forgotten can be more carefully theorised with the help of Dimbath's and Wehling's more dynamic definition of forgetting: next to the complete loss of an element ("Verlust"), they also include the possibility of a memory item's fading from memory ("Verblassen";

13 German original: "dem Be-*wahrens*-werten und dem Vergessen".

17). This definition allows a more dynamic conceptualisation of the term than theories that merely perceive forgetting as one side of a binary opposition. According to Dimbath and Wehling, forgetting does not only entail the actual exclusion of an item from memory, but also its *gradual movement* towards complete exclusion. As such, they introduce a dynamic scale which can register various different stages in between remembering and forgetting or between being fully included and being fully excluded in memory.

Harald Weinrich advocates a similarly dynamic understanding that is already entailed in the etymology of the word 'to forget': he points out that 'to forget' is best paraphrased as 'to get away from something' or 'to distance oneself from something' (cf. 11). The spatial implication of a distance can also be applied to the process of forgetting according to Dimbath and Wehling: forgetting is not merely the total exclusion but also the process of distancing an item from memory to variable degrees that does not necessarily end in absolute oblivion. Rather, one may think of the 'in-betweenness' of liminal memories as a complex space of 'partial forgetting/remembering' (cf. Dimbath/Wehling 17). Remembering needs to be defined accordingly: it is also conceptualised as a gradual movement yet directed towards the opposite end, the centre of memory. The liminal space circumscribed by the extreme poles of being remembered/included and being forgotten/excluded therefore is a space in which the two gradual movements of remembering and forgetting dynamically overlap and balance each other out. It is the space of various shades of 'fading' framed by two forces that equally 'pull' an item into opposite directions, ultimately leaving it in an in-between position. This fundamental liminality of all memory items becomes obvious, for example, when Günter Butzer and Manuela Günter claim that every remembered item already latently entails the potential to be forgotten and vice versa (cf. 9). The liminal interaction that characterises the memory process can thus be depicted as follows:

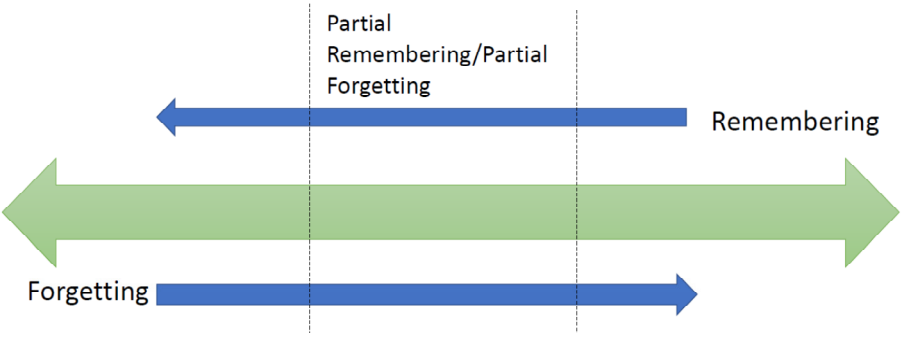

Fig. 1: Liminal Interaction in Processes of Remembering and Forgetting

2.3 Liminal Remembrance, the Album and the Lexicon

As already argued in the introduction, the liminal representation of national history in contemporary Irish poetry is closely linked to and influenced by the personal perspective many poems use to reconstruct the past. Be it in the form of a speaker reflecting on her aunts while looking at a private photograph in Joan McBreen's "The Photograph of My Aunts" (see Section 3.4) or of a speaker reminiscing about an evening spent with friends in Iggy McGovern's "The News in 1974" (see Section 3.2), national history is usually remembered through the lens of an individual's personal memories rather than the perspective of cultural memory. Seen through the personal lens, national events are often reconstructed on the basis of a speaker's individual experiences and concrete sensory impressions he/she witnessed in the past, as becomes apparent in John F. Deane's "The Wild Meadow" (2003), where a speaker remembers Ireland's struggle for independence by contemplating over the grandfather's old "RIC uniform/ wrapped in its residue of bitterness" (ll. 34-35) or in Paula Cunningham's "Geography and Sweetshops" (2013), where a child-speaker remembers the Troubles through the experience of seeing broken pieces of glass in front of her aunt's sweetshop. Typically, these personal experiences and micro-insights into broader historical contexts are then supplemented by what a speaker has retrospectively learned about these events, thus turning the remembrance of national history through a decidedly personal perspective into an interaction between individual experiences and acquired public knowledge.

The question of how private individuals remember national history has been given little theoretical attention so far (cf. Gudehus/Eichenberg/Welzer, eds.).[14] Indeed, there are hardly any concepts that might help to describe this facet of liminal remembrance. However, one study proves to be very useful in this regard: Harald Welzer's, Sabine Moller's and Karoline Tschuggnall's *'Opa war kein Nazi': Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (2012) provides concrete theoretical explorations of personal memories about national history, as it perceives personal memory as an interaction between sensory experiences (the album) and semantic knowledge (the lexicon).

Aiming at an analysis of how private individuals and their families remember German history during the *Third Reich* period, Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall start their study with a more general examination of how private individuals can reconstruct national

14 In contemporary memory studies, analyses of how national history is remembered are often limited to examining the public cultural perspective only. In this context, as Hirst and Manier argue, most studies focus on the ideological function that 'official' versions of national history fulfil for particular political elites. The private individual, on the other hand, is often left out of the analytical frame: "the emphasis in the sociological literature on power and state hegemony seems to ignore in its discussions more intimate collective memories such as those between friends or among family members" (40).

history in the first place. For the authors, the main question to be answered in this context is,

> how human beings compose representations and images of the past using different pieces of information from such diverging sources as history books, feature films and their own experience […]. (9; trans. D.B.).[15]

In their opinion, personal reconstructions of the national past[16] are complex memory activities: each personal recollection is a multi-faceted composition ("komponieren") made of different pieces of information ("Versatzstücken"/"disparaten Quellen") that interact in a certain way to construct concrete images ("Bilder") or interpretations of the past. These various pieces of information, as Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall specify, stem from two main memory sources: personal perspectives on national history draw their information from personal experience and emotion ("emotionaler Vorstellung") on the one hand and cognitive historical knowledge ("kognitivem Geschichtswissen") on the other hand (10). Welzer and his colleagues use the metaphors of the album and the lexicon to label these two interacting sources (cf. Welzer/ Moller/Tschuggnall 10).

The album and the lexicon must each be interpreted as complex structures. Although they are mutually dependent, generally they differ from each other in three respects:

	Album	**Lexicon**
Cognitive Basis	episodic memory (experience)	semantic memory (knowledge)
Memory Perspective	communicative: biographical interpretation in the everyday horizon	cultural: normative interpretation in the cultural horizon
Addressee	concrete, private individuals; families; peer groups	abstract, public collectives; e.g. nations

Fig. 2: Differences between Album and Lexicon

First and foremost, album and lexicon differ regarding the *kind* of cognitive information they rely upon. Like many approaches in the field of cognitive memory studies, Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall follow the general argument that "human memory operates within different systems for cognitive and emotional memories" (10; trans. D.B.);[17] or, in the terminology of the field: human memory is constituted of the *episodic* and the *semantic* memory system (cf. Tulving). Endel Tulving classically de-

15 German original: "wie Menschen Vorstellungen und Bilder über die Vergangenheit aus den unterschiedlichsten Versatzstücken aus so disparaten Quellen wie Geschichtsbüchern, Spielfilmen und eigener Erfahrung komponieren […]".

16 Throughout their study, they mostly use the terms *Vergangenheit* and *Geschichte* as synonyms for describing (German) national history.

17 German original: "das menschliche Gedächtnis mit unterschiedlichen Systemen für kognitive und emotionale Erinnerungen operiert".

fines episodic memory as a dynamic cognitive container "concerned with unique, concrete, personal experiences dated in the rememberer's past" (v), such as the sound of bombs stored in the speaker's memory in Paul Perry's "Of the gas stove and the glimmerman" (see Section 3.3). Episodic memory can be defined as the collection of any "personally experienced events, places, or things" in the past (Hirst/ Manier 42), which have been mentally stored as 'memorable'. In the context of the present study, 'experience' shall exclusively be defined as the emotional and sensory (i.e. visual, acoustic, olfactory etc.) perception of an event in "a specific time in a specific location" in the past (Haselmo ix). This sensory impression might have been made by an individual directly acting in the event (see the WWI poems by Tom French depicting the perspective of actual soldiers) or by an individual merely witnessing the event as a passive observer (see the speaker's contact with media reports seen on "the new big/ Colour TV in the corner" [ll. 12-13] in Macdara Woods' "Coffee at the Café Rimbaud" (2006); cf. Kormi-Nouri/Nilsson 97).

Semantic memory, on the other hand, consists of elements that have been intellectually acquired rather than sensually and emotionally experienced. The semantic memory system is more abstract as it contains "factual information without any feeling of where or when this information was gained" (Schrijnemakers 1). Hence, it is about "abstract, timeless knowledge of the world that he [the individual] shares with others" (Tulving v). This knowledge is stored in different categories (cf. Izquierdo 7), including the category of knowledge about national history. This knowledge consists of general, mostly public interpretations of historical events that an individual learns[18] in history lessons in school/university (as in Iggy McGovern's "The Cartographers" [2010] in which pupils get to know about the Troubles via a "giant map of our town" [l. 1]), by watching TV or listening to radio programs (as in Vona Groarke's "To Smithereens"; see below), or by attending commemorative festivities (as in Martina Evans' "The 50th Anniversary of the Easter Rising" [2009] in which the speaker talks about her experiences of "the old IRA closing one eye to fire shots over the monument" every year [l. 15]). These pieces of information are not emotionally tied to the individual (as they are not founded upon his/her own experience), but rather stored according to their inherent logic and their semantic coherence. The knowledge found in the semantic memory, therefore, is independent from the event itself. The temporal gap between the event and learning about the event can vary greatly, from listening to a news report only minutes after the event to reading about an event that took place centuries ago in a history book; this temporal range will play a major role in analysing the poems of the 'indirect memory' type (see Section 3.2).

18 In this context, 'learning' is exclusively understood as an intellectual process in which an individual adds or modifies units of abstract, semantic information (provided by others, ranging from other private individuals to public institutions) to the already existing cognitive network. Regarding the matter of national history, the process of learning is thus distinct from experiencing as it lacks the physical/sensory relationship to the learned matter (i.e. historical event).

Next to these differences in their cognitive foundation, album and lexicon differ regarding the memory perspective. Influenced by a common distinction in the field of cultural memory studies, Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall associate the album with the *communicative memory* mode and the lexicon with the *cultural memory* mode (cf. J. Assmann: "kulturelles Gedächtnis"). Communicative and cultural memory describe the two main perspectives through which societies usually recall the past (cf. Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis* 126). They differ from each other in their temporal range as well as in their memory practice and way of looking at the past.

Communicative memory can be seen as a society's "short-term memory" (Welzer/Moller/Tschuggnall 12; trans. D.B.),[19] in the sense that this perspective is built on concrete experiences made by concrete individuals. Thus, its range is naturally limited by an individual's life span: "it is bound to the existence of the living carriers and communicators of experience and covers a time span of roughly 80 years" (Welzer/Moller/Tschuggnall 12; trans. D.B.);[20] this might be one of the reasons why in Irish poetry the Irish struggle for Independence of a grandparent generation is often the most distant historical context that is remembered. In contrast, cultural memory, according to Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall, cannot only depict the lived past of contemporaries but also illuminate the distant past outside an individual's memory reach. Rather, cultural memory is an "institutionally shaped and sustained memory" (Misztal 12), which is independent from an individual's experiences.

Furthermore, communicative memory is established in everyday (mostly oral) communication, in which individuals share their own past experiences with others in their everyday environment. Astrid Erll labels this immediate environment the "alltagsweltliche Nahhorizont" (*Kollektives Gedächtnis* 130; hereafter: 'everyday horizon'). Cultural memory, on the other hand, is a thoroughly structured and institutionalised mode of accessing the past addressing more abstract collectives, such as 'the nation'. With this addressee in mind, it is established mostly in institutions such as "schools, courts, museums and the mass media" (Misztal 20), as exemplified in Lorna Shaughnessy's "Standing Ovation in 'The Crum'" (2015), where the speaker visits the "Crumlin Road Gaol" (l.3), which has been turned into a museum. As such, with its "timeline[s]" (l. 7) and its "[h]eritage kitsch" (l. 19), this former prison has become part of a renewed cultural memory practice. Cultural memory then can be labelled as the "officially sanctioned memory" (McBride 40) that builds upon the "kulturelle[] Fernhorizont" (Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis* 130; hereafter: 'cultural horizon').

In the end, Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall's terms of the album and the lexicon are complex concepts, in so far as they each combine different cognitive (i.e. type of information; experience vs. knowledge), cultural (i.e. mode; communicative vs. cultural)

19 German original: "Kurzzeitgedächtnis".

20 German original: "[e]s ist an die Existenz der lebendigen Träger und Kommunikatoren von Erfahrung gebunden und umfasst etwa 80 Jahre".

and social (i.e. different addressees) dimensions with each other. These concepts become an ideal foundation for analysing the various facets of personal memory in contemporary Irish poetry, especially since they provide a differentiated perspective of how national history is negotiated by an individual.

The album and the lexicon constantly interact, which makes national history a matter of internalised knowledge *as well as* personal experiences (cf. von Petersdorff 136). More to the point, the interaction between album and lexicon can be described as a relationship of mutual dependence. in which the one serves as an interpretative frame for the other. Thus, on the one hand, the album serves as a frame of reference through which information from the lexicon is filtered and, if necessary, altered and assimilated. The album thus provides "the frame […] for how learned historical knowledge is interpreted and used" (Welzer/Moller/Tschuggnall 13; trans. D.B.).[21] This sort of framing will most obviously become apparent in poems of the 'family memory' type (see Section 3.3).

On the other hand, the lexicon also serves as an interpretative frame for an individual's album. As an example, Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall mention the wide-spread public narrative in Germany about the *Third Reich* as a "universe of horror", which serves as a matrix according to which individuals interpret their own experiences at the time; namely, in a way "that this horror does not cast a shadow on them" (13; trans. D.B.).[22] As such, next to embedding official 'facts' into the framework of the album, one also needs to consider the "deep influence and long-lasting effect of history on individual biography" (A. Assmann, *Geschichte* 32; trans. D.B.):[23] the reconstruction of one's encounter with national events in the past is equally going through a parallel process of justifying where and how these experiences can be positioned within the public version, as can be seen in Harry Clifton's "Grandfather", where the speaker questions the role his grandfather played in the public interpretation of World War II.

In the end, the personal reconstruction of national history is a process of double framing between the album and the lexicon. Personal remembrance of national history is defined by the simultaneity of two acts of 'justification' unfolding at the same time. While the album is emotionally and biographically relevant for the individual as a private being, the lexicon gains a normative relevance for the individual as a public agent in society (cf. Misztal 40). In personal recollections of national history, therefore, the rememberer needs to mitigate between two roles (i.e. public and private) and, with them, two value systems stemming from two modes of accessing the past. This complex interaction between album and lexicon lies at the very core of the limi-

21 German original: "den Rahmen dafür […] wie das gelernte Geschichtswissen gedeutet und gebraucht wird".

22 German original: "Universum des Grauens […] dass von diesem Grauen kein Schatten auf sie fällt".

23 German original: "tiefe Prägung und nachhaltige Einwirkung von Geschichte auf individuelle Biographie".

nal representation of national history in so many contemporary Irish poems, as the album and the lexicon pair up with processes of remembering and forgetting in various ways to construct indeterminate memory spaces and “passage[s] between inner and outer”, as the speaker in Meehan’s poem, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, indicates.

3. Liminal Remembrance in Contemporary Irish Poetry

The following chapters will provide an in-depth literary analysis of liminal remembrance as a dominant phenomenon in contemporary Irish poetry. To this end, by analysing selected poems, each of the following chapters will deal with one type of poetic memory (i.e. *indirect*, *family*, *authentic*, *metaphors*) and its textual strategies and features used to depict national history in a liminal state between being remembered and being forgotten. Yet, before each type and its different characteristics will be analysed individually, a few remarks on some features shared by all four types are in order, to set a 'common ground' for the analysis below.

3.1 Some General Features of Liminal Remembrance

Despite the various differences between the ways in which each type achieves a liminal representation of history, the four kinds of poetic memory nevertheless share three main aspects that define the phenomenon of liminal remembrance in general. As indicated in Chapter 2, in all four types, the liminal representation of history, in one way or another, always derives from a *personal* memory perspective on national history, in which an individual speaker reconstructs the past via events from his/her *everyday* horizon. In this context, every type contains an interaction between experience (album) and knowledge (lexicon) which influences an interaction between processes of remembering and forgetting, as displayed in particular textual strategies. With these aspects in mind, liminal remembrance must be seen as a complex poetic practice that can be depicted as follows:

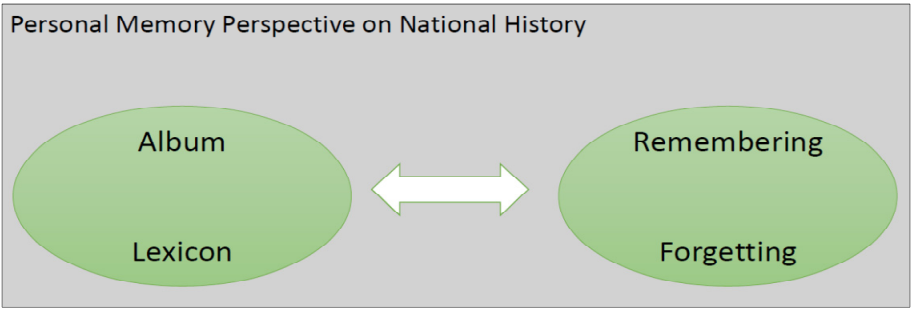

Fig. 3: Liminal Remembrance as Complex Poetic Practice

This introductory chapter will provide some general insights into how each of these three shared aspects of liminal remembrance appears on a textual level.

In the context of the poems to be analysed below, the term 'personal memory perspective' can be most generally described as a form of accessing the past with the help of events (or, in the metaphorical type, things) that have been experienced in the past by an individual in his/her personal, everyday environment (cf. Section 2.3). On

a textual level, this personal perspective manifests in four kinds of communicative situations: first, in indirect memory poems, a concrete individual functions as the poem's speaker, who remembers national history via his/her own (second-hand) experiences. Second, in family memory poems, a concrete individual functions as the poem's speaker, who remembers national history via experiences made by family members that, in one way or another, are related to his/her experiences and biography. Third, in authentic memory poems a non-specific, 'covert' speaker functions as a heterodiegetic device to 'neutrally' reconstruct national historical events as if they were happening in this very moment.[24] Finally, in 'waste poems', the personal access to the past is translated into an everyday character and/or speaker, who personally encounters thrown-away objects (shoes, bottles, posters etc.). This encounter, in turn, serves as a metaphor for the individual's relationship to the past.

Seen from this personal memory perspective, each type displays some form of interaction between experience (album) and knowledge (lexicon). Although each poem displays its very own interactional pattern, one can nevertheless argue that there are some tendencies in the four types overall. While in all four types the notion of experience tends to be more dominant, in the first two, experience and knowledge still appear to somehow complement each other – whether in the form of lived semantic memory and a speaker's relationship to landscape in the type of indirect memory (cf. Section 3.2), or in the form of familial transfers of memory in the type of family memory (cf. Section 3.3). In contrast, in the types of authentic memory and the metaphorical access to the past, experience and knowledge are more strongly opposed to each other, with content of the album almost entirely 'eradicating' elements of the lexicon. Thus, in authentic memory, for example, this can be seen in the fact that the speaker applies a hyper-focus on sensory details of a past scene, while information on the broader context is blurred (cf. Section 3.4). Similarly, in the chapter on the metaphor of history, the figure of the ragpicker, as an individual who collects discarded objects and revaluates them, revives the past via his/her own sensory experience of a discarded entity, while his/her social surrounding follows the learned Celtic Tiger knowledge that the past is useless (cf. Section 3.5). As will be shown below, these different interactions between experience and knowledge influence the liminal position of national history in different ways.

Last but not least, all four types share certain textual strategies of remembering and forgetting. In the realm of representing forgetting on a textual level, for example, many poems of different types use strategies of what Ute Gerhard labels "literarische Zerstreutheiten" (151). This term is an umbrella term for all forms of textual fragmen-

24 Although the individual communicative situations cannot be exclusively ascribed to one type of poetic memory, one can nevertheless already mention that certain communicative situations tend to correlate more with certain types of poetic memory, as will be shown below.

tation.[25] Gerhard claims that a fragmentary presentation of a past event, as many poems below show, is a concrete expression of textual forgetting (cf. 153). By only giving information of a national event in bits and pieces (in one or more parts of the text), these texts deny the reader a coherent remembrance of the event as the textual focus only remains on these aspects for a short time. Forgetting here becomes visible in the act of suddenly turning the textual focus away from a specific event towards other memory items. Thus, for example, in the type of indirect memory and family memory, the reader often finds brief references to national history being placed in one line of a stanza, only to be 'forgotten' again through a shift of focus to an entirely different aspect of personal memory. Forgetting, therefore, is 'seen' in the gaps and absences of the textual space, as the fragment presented in the text already implies what is *not* remembered and left out.

In the realm of textual remembering, the four types have in common that national history, if it is explicitly referred to in a text at all,[26] regularly appears in the poems in one of two forms: it is remembered either via key terms of Irish national history or individual sensory impressions made in a particular national context. Thus, in some poems references to the national past are restricted to the official 'label' an event/context has gained in Irish cultural memory (e.g. the Easter Rising, Black 'n' Tans, the Second World War, the Troubles etc.). In these cases, the personal memories of a private individual integrate the semantics of the public sphere to describe events that somehow have become personally relevant. In other poems, an event/context is referred to via individual visual or acoustic components that a speaker associates with said event/context: a 'car bomb' representing the Troubles, the grandfather's old RIC uniform reminding the speaker of the Anglo-Irish War in John F. Deane's "The Wild Meadow", or an old "Donegal tweed/ jacket" (ll. 2-3) worn on the day of the Omagh massacre in Anne Fitzgerald's "Storm Over Manhattan" (2012). These individual impressions, derived from a speaker's personal experience, describe the event from the level of the personal, everyday horizon. Often, in different combinations the two forms of public terminology and private impressions interact, which, in turn, interact with different interplays between the album and the lexicon.

With the help of these introductory remarks on some key aspects that define liminal remembrance in general, the four types of poetic memory can now be described in more details individually. In each type, the liminal reconstruction of national history is shaped by the three aspects just mentioned. While they all share a common background in some form of personal memory perspective, an interaction between experience and knowledge, and a set of textual strategies of remembering and forget-

25 Including, in the metaphorical type, the literal fragmentation of objects (e.g. broken furniture), where the broken appearance supports their forgotten and devalued status in the public sphere.

26 In some poems, national events merely appear in the form of indirect allusions to an event. Through this perspective, national history is both part of the text and yet not mentioned in the text at all.

ting, the four types differ in the specific nuances and shades of how these aspects come together and relate to each other.

3.2 Type I: Indirect Memories of National History

The first type of memory, in which national history is presented in a liminal position, shall be labelled *indirect memory*. This type is defined by speakers remembering the *aftermath* of a national event, rather than the event itself. Thus, in these poetic memories speakers avert the 'spotlight' from the moment when the event happened toward recalling a moment set at a later point in time, when the event is once again addressed in the public sphere. As such, the poems to be discussed below display *second-hand experiences* of national history: since the speakers have not witnessed the relevant event with their own eyes – either because they were not geographically present at that moment or simply because the event happened before they were even born – they remember it indirectly by remembering how the event was remembered afterwards. More specifically, in each text of this type, the speaker remembers a specific past situation from his/her personal biography, in which he/she, in one form or another, experienced a *public representation* of a national event that had happened in a more distant past. Thus, in Vona Groarke's "To Smithereens" (2006), for example, the speaker remembers spending a day at the beach in the 1970s, when, while not experiencing the event itself, he was suddenly confronted with a radio report about a terror attack in the context of the Northern Irish Troubles. Similarly, in John McAuliffe's double sonnet "Hedge" (2007), the speaker remembers helping his father trim hedges in front of his childhood home, when he, looking around the countryside surrounding the house, perceived a roadside monument, commemorating men who died in Ireland's struggle for independence in the early twentieth century.

Within the frame of this general 'memory structure', one can more specifically differentiate individual poems according to two interrelated aspects: first, poems of this type differ in the temporal 'gap' between the event itself and the moment when the speaker is confronted with its public representation at a later point in time (e.g. only a few minutes in Groarke vs. decades in McAuliffe). Second, the exact form of public representation in which a national event indirectly appears in the speaker's everyday realm of the past (e.g. radio news in Groarke vs. official memorial in McAuliffe). Regarding the first aspect, it needs to be noted that in all poems to be discussed, the remembered moment from a speaker's personal past is always, temporally speaking, set after the moment when the event itself happened. Yet, the poems differ in the temporal range that lies in between the event itself and the moment when the speaker first came into contact with a representation of the event. Thus, by taking a closer look at the poems, the poems can be conceptualised in three positions along a dynamic temporal scale, ranging from a *minimal discrepancy* of only minutes or hours between the two moments in the past (e.g. Iggy McGovern's "The News in 1974") to a *'mid-range'/medium discrepancy* of months and years (e.g. Paula Meehan's "At Shelling Hill") and a *large discrepancy* consisting of decades lying in

between the event and the speaker's personal confrontation with its public recollection (e.g. Tom French's "Commute").

Related to this distinction, one can, secondly, also differentiate between different forms of representation in which national history publicly appears in the speaker's everyday horizon: with a growing temporal distance from the event itself, its subsequent recollection also changes in appearance. Thus, once again, one can differentiate between three forms of representation that correlate with the three temporal positions mentioned above: at the minimal end of the scale, the speaker is confronted with breaking news reports on the radio, in newspapers or on TV, reiterating a very recent event of national significance that happened on the same day. These media reports serve as the earliest public instance to forge a particular version of what happened in the immediate past. In the 'mid-range' of the temporal scale, it is the (Irish) landscape itself that keeps a relatively recent national past underneath its surface to be detected by the speaker. He/she discovers this 'hidden' past when wandering through the landscape, for example in the context of a personal holiday trip. At the distant end of the scale, representations take the form of official, institutionalised commemoration in public. The speaker encounters this form of representation in the guise of official memorials or even, as will be shown, in public portrayals of historical events designed for touristic purposes in recent Celtic Tiger Ireland.

In sum, poems of this chapter can be categorised as follows:

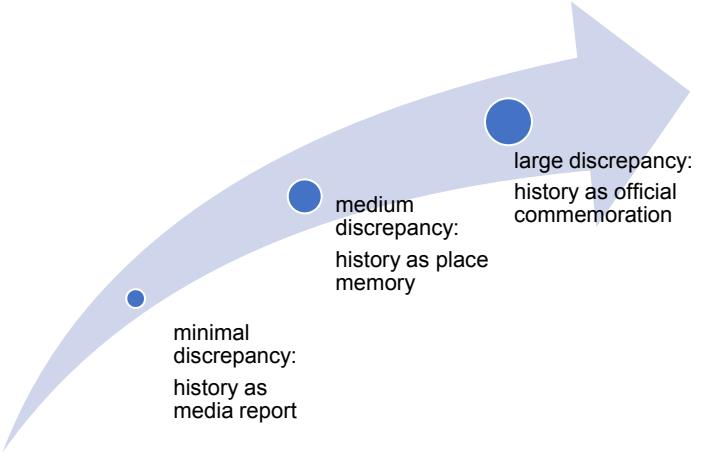

Fig. 4: Three Positions of Indirect Memory

In moving from one end of the scale to the other, one can detect a transition from an event being part of the communicative memory to an event becoming part of cultural memory (cf. Section 2.3). This transition is most forcefully shown in the degree of how affected the speakers are by a representation. Whereas on the minimal end events still obtain an aura of immediacy that somehow affect the speaker's everyday

life, on the other end of the scale public representations are rather met with distance, as these representations have become a regular part of everyday life that no longer 'disturb' the speaker's everyday routine.

Poems of Minimal Discrepancy

"To Smithereens" (Vona Groarke)

As indicated above, at the minimal end of the scale, events appear within the time frame of only minutes or hours from the moment when a speaker was first confronted with its public representation. As such, given the immediacy of the underlying event, the subsequent public representation has a disruptive effect on the speaker's everyday situation. Most commonly, this disruptive effect is shown in the speaker's way of remembering the representation: it is recalled as a form of menace that, because of its threatening nature, can neither be fully remembered nor simply forgotten.

In Vona Groarke's "To Smithereens", for example, the past moment being remembered is a day spent at "[a] sunlit Spiddal beach" in "August 1979" (l. 3). Like the speaker in Macdara Woods' "Coffee at the Café Rimbaud" (2006) who remembers a peaceful situation from his holidays in which he was suddenly confronted with the TV news, the speaker in "To Smithereens" initially paints an idyllic and peaceful picture of that day, as he[27] recalls the sight of some children playing on the beach. As they "ruffle the shoreline" (l. 4), the speaker remembers how, in their innocent, carefree attitude ("They hardly care", l. 7), they seem to suffuse the entire beach with joy. Thus, as they cast their fishing nets into the shallow water around their feet, their childish happiness is instantly adopted by what is caught in the nets. More specifically, the speaker recalls how in their presence the foam on the water appears as "a marvellous haul" and how the sand becomes "iridescent" (l. 5), a mirror to their own glistening existence. Furthermore, the water itself transforms into a joyous and playful participant in a game of tag with the children: they encounter "water that laughs at them as it wriggles free" from their nets (l. 6), only to be caught again in the next round. The children's joy then spreads throughout the beach and 'colours in' the entire scenario. Thus, the speaker remembers, the children "are busy spilling buckets/ of gold all over the afternoon" (ll. 7-8).

In this idyllic scenario, the speaker is confronted with a public representation of a national event, as the "white-hot voice of the radio" reports on the latest development in the Troubles (l. 10). In the speaker's personal memory, as indicated above, the radio news is depicted as a menace that threatens to utterly disrupt the peaceful atmosphere of the afternoon. Suddenly, it appears to the speaker, the innocent everyday

27 Throughout the analysis, speakers will be gendered as follows: if their gender is not explicitly or implicitly stated in the text, they shall be referred to by the gender of the author. This decision is merely made for the sake of simplicity and readability and shall in no way imply that the instances of the author and the speaker are directly related to each other.

horizon is 'invaded' by the atrocious political events of the time. Thus, in the middle of line 8, right after the description of the golden afternoon, the speaker recalls:

> But further back,
> something spreads over the beach like scarlet dye. (ll. 8-9)

The harsh bilabial and plosive sounds of the short, mono-syllabic "[b]ut" disrupts the calm and steady rhythm of the previous lines and introduces the transformed atmosphere on a phonological level. In an instant, the children's innocence is countered by another 'force' that likewise unfolds on the beach and that, "like scarlet dye", threatens to drain all the bright colours from the afternoon. In contrast to the softness of the "marvellous" foam and "iridescent" sand at the beginning, "the news […] falls in slanted beats/ like metal shavings" (ll. 15-16): the news, like a bomb, tears the innocent fabric of this everyday scene apart and brings the joyous rhythm of the afternoon into disharmony ("slanted"). All activities on the beach stop instantaneously and attention is fully gravitating towards the voice on the radio: as the voice "showers them" with the news (l. 13),

> [t]he mams
> and aunts pinned onto Foxford rugs put down
> their scandalous magazines and vast, plaid flasks. (ll. 10-12)

The innocent momentariness of the scene is broken, as the radio report brings back the immediate past to the present moment and adds a dark vision of the future to the situation: these "metal shavings", the speaker points out, become the "future tense of what they fall upon" (l. 18). Past and future now collapse in the present moment and envelope it in the bigger currents of the painful course of Irish national history.

In this setting, the event itself (i.e. what actually caused this disturbance) is only remembered in a liminal position. Thus, while the *impact* of the radio news on the afternoon is remembered in some detail, the event as such remains a rather vague memory entity throughout the poem. Most of all, on a textual level, this liminal presentation becomes apparent in the speaker's fragmented manner of remembering what the radio voice actually reports. Vona Groarke explains in an annotation to the poem, that the radio report refers to the IRA attacks on Lord Mountbatten in August 1979, which cost the lives of several people. Yet, in the speaker's version, this event is merely addressed through a selection of three individual words from the report: the radio voice uses "words like *rowboat*, *fishing*, *smithereens*" (l. 14; emphasis in original). As will be shown in the following paragraphs, by using only these three words, the speaker both remembers and forgets the event.

In the short selection of words, the final term "*smithereens*" obtains a double function as it both refers to the actual smithereens left of the boat after the attack and the speaker's way of remembering the event: as much as the boat has been blown into pieces and no longer exists as a whole entity, the radio report is also reduced to fragments in the speaker's memory. Although the event is not directly referred to in the text (and needs the author's annotation to be clearly identified), the smithereens of the boat nevertheless become implicitly 'visible' as they seemingly dictate the

fragmentary composition of the text in this part of the poem. Thus, the fragmentation of the text into "*smithereens*", in combination with prior allusions to exploding bombs and violence more generally (e.g. "scarlet dye" upon a golden afternoon, "white-hot"; "metal shavings" etc.), is a device for remembering the event, since it echoes its destructive violence on a textual level. In that manner, although the speaker has not witnessed the event as such, it is still implicitly recalled as a menacing presence.

However, while implying the event in a fragmented manner, it is simultaneously too painful and shocking to be fully integrated into his memory. As suddenly as the people on the beach were surprised by the 'shower' of news of violence, the speaker also seems to be caught by surprise that his initially peaceful memory of this "one fine day" also harbours an unforeseen reminder of Ireland's painful history (l. 3); a history, of which the speaker does not want to be reminded. Yet, the event practically forces itself into the speaker's memory. In this context, the poem's use of light and darkness is significant. The speaker's memory focus is strictly limited to the "sunlit" space of the beach itself. In this scenario, at first, the news report comes 'out of the dark' as a threatening "swell from over the rocks" (l. 13), a place outside of the confined space of the beach and, hence, the speaker's memory focus. Yet, once inside the speaker's spotlight, the news develops a powerful radiance of its own. Thus, as the news spreads over the beach, the speaker recognises that the report is "sprayed from a single,/ incandescent point" (ll. 16-17). In its "white-hot" glow (l. 10), this "incandescent point" becomes a dangerous furnace that successively outshines and blinds all other elements of the speaker's memory.

Given this sudden appearance of the event in the speaker's memory, the fragmentary presentation of the event simultaneously becomes a tool of forgetting (cf. Olinder 234). As shown in Section 3.1, textual fragmentation can also serve as a strategy to exclude elements from a literary memory: by merely remembering fragments of information from the radio report, the speaker likewise points towards what is *not* remembered and, hence, left forgotten in his memory account. As much as the event is implicitly remembered, it is also kept at a mnemonic distance in the speaker's memory. The textual fragments obscure the full scope of the event and prevent the speaker from remembering aspects that might be too painful: the three words provide a skeletal structure of the event in memory, while its most dreadful aspects such as the bomb or the casualties are left unmentioned. In that sense, the fragments only indicate "what the text cannot say" (Onega/Ganteau 10).

Since the memory of the event that destroys the peaceful atmosphere on the beach is too painful, the speaker quickly turns the memory focus away from this personal experience to forget the incident in favour of remembering something less frightful. Thus, once the radio report has been incorporated in fragments, he leaves the "Spiddal Beach"-episode behind, in order to be

> lifted clear of the high-tide line
> into another order of silence. Exchange the year. (ll. 19-20)

Instead of continuing the remembrance of the radio report about the IRA attack, the speaker "silence[s]" this memory by turning to another personal memory that is devoid of any political connotation. In that sense, the speaker is "lifted clear" from the intrusion of national events in his life then and now: he counters this memory of political violence with a more peaceful memory. Returning to the safe realm of private intimacy, he remembers watching "*Gandhi* at the Ritz" with a girlfriend (l. 22; emphasis in original), in a cinema that is "almost empty" (l. 21). During the movie, the girlfriend is "nodding off" (l. 24) and "[h]er head falls back on the crimson plush" of the seat next to the speaker (l. 25). It is in the memory of this intimate situation that, for the speaker, "every single thing casts itself off" (l. 30), including, one might argue, the atrocities of violence attached to the "Spiddal Beach"-episode. In this memory scenario, the beach 'invaded' by the news is replaced by the cinema and the IRA violence is replaced by Gandhi's more peaceful philosophy of resistance. The conscious shift into another temporal frame of the past ("[e]xchange the year") becomes an active act of forgetting, in which the speaker's memory is being 'cleansed' in the 'waters' of oblivion: the second memory moreover revolves around the river "Shannon" (l. 23), as observed on the movie screen that night. In remembering the river on screen, the speaker once again returns to the light/darkness metaphor. The river establishes a "slipknot/ of darkness" (ll. 23-24), which stands in contrast to the "sunlit" day on the beach. The river's darkness is a signpost for forgetting as it is the place "where all journeys terminate" (l. 28), including the speaker's prior memory journey to Spiddal beach. Finally, with the shift from one memory episode to the other, the connotation of the word "smithereens" also changes. The association with violent destruction in the beach-situation is "cast[] off" and replaced by its opposite: when the girlfriend awakes by the end of the movie, she points out:

> To smithereens?
> she says. I'm pretty sure it's Indian. It means
> to open (like an Albertine), to flower. (ll. 36-38; emphasis in original)

The threat of violence and destruction is replaced by the promise of new life and creation. Thus, at the end of the poem, the speaker returns to the peaceful atmosphere of the beginning and the violent political sphere that disrupted a moment of innocence in the past is once again pushed into the 'darkness' of oblivion.

As this analysis has shown so far, the assassination of Lord Mountbatten, as an event of national significance, holds a liminal position in the speaker's personal recollection. This liminal presentation, in turn, is closely tied to the threatening character with which the event manifests itself in the speaker's memory. On the one hand, it almost 'forces' its way into the speaker's memory as an event that cannot be ignored, while, on the other hand, the speaker, as shown in the shift in memory episodes above, actively works against remembering the event too closely. In this ambivalent position, the speaker's handling of the event in memory resembles the way traumatic events are usually remembered. As Peter Messent, for instance, points out, a traumatic experience made in the past is, by definition, turned into a liminal entity in memory which can neither be accepted nor simply denied (cf. 137). In the words of

Climo and Cattell, the traumatic experience is ultimately a two-edged sword: it is "too terrible to remember […] and too terrible to forget" (Climo/Cattell 28). As such, the traumatic event can neither be fully included nor fully excluded from memory but lingers in an indefinite limbo in between the two states, where it is neither the one nor the other, but both at the same time.

In the poem, this indefinite position within memory is most clearly revealed in the metaphor of *memory as the sea*. "To Smithereens" starts with a meta-reflection on the process of remembering the past: thus, the speaker indirectly compares browsing through the myriads of past moments stored in one's personal memory to sailing on the open sea. Like in Paula Meehan's poem "Deadwood" (2009), in "To Smithereens" water becomes the liquid 'transmitter' that connects the past and the present. In this liquid medium, no clear boundaries exist and, with waves moving back and forth, nothing is ever stagnant. Rather, in the memory sea 'good' and 'bad' memories fluidly shift their positions and "backward drift[s]" might suddenly re-direct the 'memory ship' to undesirable places (l. 2). In contrast to the image of the river that signifies a directed movement toward soothing amnesia and oblivion (cf. the "Shannon"), movement on sea is less predictable. On this terrain, in which dangerous aspects of the past can resurface suddenly, "[y]ou'll need a tiller's hand to steer this through" in order to arrive at the intended destination in the past (l. 1). Ultimately, the traumatic experience remains present and may suddenly reappear. As such it cannot be completely ignored, since it is an integral part of this memory journey 'at sea'.

A brief glimpse at the specific interaction between personal experience and learned knowledge in "To Smithereens" shall conclude the present analysis. Groarke's poem is a perfect example of the interplay between experience and knowledge, album and lexicon, at the minimal end of the scale introduced above. This interaction can best be described by referring to William Hirst's and David Manier's concept of *lived semantic memory*. Like Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall, Hirst and Manier are most interested in how "more intimate" and private perspectives on the past function. In order to define the specific 'anatomy' of these more intimate forms of memory (i.e. the question of *how* rather than *what*), Hirst and Manier follow Endel Tulving's classic distinction between the episodic and the semantic memory as the cognitive basis of any memory process (cf. Section 2.3). Yet, in their study, the two sociopsychologists sub-divide the second concept into the lived semantic memory and the distant semantic memory (cf. Hirst/Manier 43). The distant semantic memory contains knowledge (about history) that is of little to no relevance to the remembering individual's personal life. Knowledge of this kind is usually learned in institutionalised contexts and is stored in the form of abstract units that no longer contain any reference to the specific context in which they were learned in the first place.[28]

In contrast, the lived semantic memory contains knowledge entities that "are more personally relevant to an individual than the 'distant semantic memories'" (Hirst/Manier

28 Hirst and Manier point out, these are often historical facts that "people recite without necessarily remembering where they learned them" (43).

43). This increased relevance is closely related to the specific setting in which knowledge about these events is learned. In contrast to the institutionalised setting of the distant semantic memory, knowledge about historical events stored in the lived semantic memory is usually learned more spontaneously via media outlets such as radio or TV news, with which an individual is confronted regularly as part of his/her everyday routine. Thus, although the event was not experienced first-hand by an individual but in the form of media representations (and, hence, in the form of learned knowledge), it still affects the individual's personal life. As such, the knowledge about an event stored in the lived semantic memory obtains a "lived quality" (Hirst/Manier 43). The lived semantic memory, one might argue, thus transcends Tulving's original binary conceptualisation: it is positioned in between the spheres of the episodic and semantic memory by combining the conventional elements of learned knowledge with elements of personal experience.

This interrelatedness of knowledge and experience also manifests itself in how the speaker remembers his second-hand experiences of the news' impact. Although the poem focuses on reconstructing the speaker's personal experiences of hearing the news for the first time, knowledge about the event nevertheless still informs the speaker's recollection of his personal experiences that afternoon in an indirect manner. In the speaker's memory, therefore, the line between what he has actually experienced himself, and what he only 'heard of' in the news, becomes less distinct, which ultimately is reflected in the liminal position of the event in memory as described above. The event is in between being remembered and being forgotten as much as it is in between being experienced and not being experienced at the same time.

"The News in 1974" (Iggy McGovern)

Another example of a poem displaying a minimal discrepancy between event and representation is Iggy McGovern's "The News in 1974" (2005). Like in Groarke's "To Smithereens", in "The News in 1974" the speaker remembers an everyday situation from his personal past, in which he was implicitly confronted with most recent events in 1970s Northern Ireland via "the news" (l. 8). Formally speaking, this poetic memory appears in the form of an English sonnet, in which each of the two formal units (i.e. sestet and octave) fulfils a specific compositional function: the initial sestet describes the general setting of the situation, while in the octave the impact of "the news" on this moment in the past is remembered (l. 8). In the first six lines the speaker remembers playing a match of soccer with his friends on "Rathlin Island" in 1974 (l. 2), which eventually ends with the friends getting drunk and 'borrowing' the local farmer's tractor:

> Remember when we played that match
> on Rathlin Island, and the pitch
> had to be cleared of someone's sheep:
> victor or vanquished, all drank deep,
> staging a midnight lap of honour
> aboard McCuaig's old tractor! (ll. 1-6)

Right from the start, the communicative situation of the poem underlines the speaker's personal access to the past: the speaker directly addresses this memory to his friends, "*Peter, Paul & Tony*" (paratext; emphasis in original) and invites them to "[r]emember" this celebratory evening in a shared act of recollection. Through this direct paratextual reference to the addressees at the beginning, this poetic memory becomes a typical example of communicative memory (cf. Section 2.3). The speaker shares a personally relevant memory from his own everyday horizon with his friends, who all personally experienced this past moment, too. The tenor of the sestet reflects the speaker's close relationship with the addressees. In remembering this setting, he stresses the friends' mutual bond: whether "victor" or "vanquished", they all re-unite in celebration after the match ("all drank deep") and, as a collective "we", they appear as a private bastion against the sectarian division in the political sphere of the time.

In this intimate setting, the speaker, as pointed out above, then remembers his indirect encounter with political events in Northern Ireland. Once again, as in other poems of the indirect memory type, within the personal memory frame of "The News in 1974", national history occurs in a liminal position. To begin with, the speaker seems to exclude national history from personal memory as is generally reflected in his choice of remembering *this particular moment* from the past. Here, the nature of the speaker's implicit encounter with "the news" is significantly different from the speaker's encounter with the radio report in Groarke's poem:

> We woke, for once, without the news,
> no radio, just last week's Sundays –
> how many dead or disappeared?– (ll. 8-10)

The speaker remembers this past situation as a moment in which, "for once", he was *not* confronted with the daily routine of learning about the "dead and disappeared" and in which national events did not interfere with the private realm. Thus, much like the speaker in Paula Cunningham's "A Dog Called Chance" (2004) who remembers the strange continuation of everyday life without any news of the Omagh bombing in 1998, the speaker in McGovern's poem remembers this ordinary moment *just because* national history is completely absent from it. In the speaker's memory therefore, the choice to remember this singular 'innocent' moment of private enjoyment becomes an act of forgetting the atrocities of Ireland's political past in favour of focusing on a moment remembered for being free of any national interference.

Yet, despite stressing the absence of "the news" (and national history) from this memory episode, the national circumstances of the time still show a haunting presence in the speaker's recollection of this moment. Thus, for example, the ghosts of the "dead and disappeared" meander between being part and not being part of the speaker's memory. This is particularly reflected on a syntactical level: the mentioning of the dead in line 9 appears in a syntactical apposition separated from the rest of the text by two dashes ("–/ How many dead or disappeared? – "). In this position in the text, the "dead and disappeared" are in a liminal position: on the one hand, line 9 is one of the fourteen regular lines that constitute the sonnet form and is thus an inte-

gral part in this poetic memory. Yet, on the other hand, framed by two dashes, it is marked as an apposition which as such is also separated from the rest of the text.

Moreover, as the only question ("how many dead or disappeared?") in a set of interconnected declarative statements, this line is in more than one way the 'odd one out'. In its special syntactical position, the question introduces a moment of uncertainty into the speaker's private recollection. The "dead and disappeared" cannot be ignored easily. The line disrupts the steady rhythmical flow of the one-sentence octave and thus the reader is demanded to temporarily linger on and acknowledge the victims of the Northern Irish conflict. Thus, what appears to be marginalised in the text as a merely additive element at first, gains a recognisable presence. Hence, in contrast to the speaker's tone of stressing the welcome absence of political events (see above), the political sphere, on a syntactical level, literally intrudes once more into this private moment, as the ghosts of "last week's Sundays" still trouble the speaker in memory.

The liminal status of national history in the speaker's memory is furthermore reflected in the last five lines of the sonnet. Once the friends become aware that the morning following their celebration is "without the news", they are reminded of the sixteenth-century prince of Ulster, Sorley Boy McDonnell, and the Rathlin Island massacre in 1575.[29] They

> thought how Sorley Boy endured
> the wind-borne sounds of massacre
> while he stood on the farther shore. (ll. 10-12)

This memory within the memory combines both elements of remembering and of forgetting national history. On the one hand, the shift towards a sixteenth-century massacre becomes a 'surrogate memory' to indirectly remember the 1970s-conflict. By recalling Sorley Boy McDonnell's tragic fate in the grander context of an on-going conflict between England and Ireland, the speaker also implicitly recalls the violence of the Northern Irish conflict, without letting the atrocities of the 1970s become an overt part in his memory.

At that point, the indirect remembrance via a sixteenth-century massacre also entails a clear moment of forgetting. The temporal shift to a more distant context of the past

29 In the continuing struggles between Ulster families and the English Crown, Rathlin Island, due to its geographical position, was regarded as a sanctuary that, according to common belief, could not be invaded by the enemy. In the light of this shared conviction, royal Ulster families, including Sorley Boy McDonnell's family, would send more 'vulnerable' family members to the island for safety during the height of conflict. Yet, the myth of the unconquerable sanctuary not far from the Northern Irish coast was broken in 1575, when, under the leadership of national icon Sir Francis Drake, English soldiers captured Rathlin Island against all expectations and more than 600 people of Scottish and Irish descent were consequently killed. Sorley Boy McDonnell, who was not present on the island when the attack occurred, was unable to intervene from the mainland and was thus forced to helplessly endure the slaughtering of his family and "the wind-borne sounds of massacre" coming over the sea.

can be read as the speaker's way of personally and emotionally distancing himself from the remembrance of the Troubles. This distancing process can best be explained by drawing on the concepts of the lived and the distant semantic memory once again. From this perspective, the temporal shift taking place in between lines 9 and 10 correlates with a shift from remembering an item stored in the lived semantic memory to remembering an item belonging to the distant semantic memory. What does this shift in the memory system imply? As pointed out above, a major difference between the two systems concerns a difference in how relevant an item is for the remembering individual in his everyday life. By shifting from one system into the other the speaker uses the 'colder', historiographical perspective of the lexicon to indirectly remember the Troubles without getting too close. The semantic knowledge about Sorley Boy McDonnell and the massacre of 1575 becomes a blueprint for reflecting on the Troubles of the 1970s that allows the speaker to temporarily forget his personal and affective ties to the events in question. The 1970s atrocities are simultaneously remembered and distanced in the speaker's memory.

Ultimately, the 'memory-within-the-memory' stresses the fact that an 'escape' from the national sphere is impossible. The gap left by the absent news is instantly filled by a memory of the place's terrible past. In the same vein, the juxtaposition of the two temporal levels (i.e. Troubles in the 1970s and fighting for Ulster in the sixteenth century) allows the conclusion that not much has changed in the course of Ireland's historical development: it still 'produces' victims as a result of the on-going conflict between Britain and Ireland and there are still witnesses who, despite not having actively participated in the conflict themselves, have to bear the weight of learning about the death of their fellow Irishmen. In this context, the victims of the Troubles stand in for all victims in Ireland's long and conflictual history. The moment of waking up "without the news", therefore, is merely a temporary anomaly in an environment in which national violence cannot but be remembered constantly. With this knowledge the speaker remembers in the last two lines that upon "hearing just the seaward breeze/ we were strangely at ease" (ll. 13-14); an ease, ambivalently shifting between the realisation that they do not have to confront their historical reality for once and the realisation that the singular absence of the news serves as a reminder of its usual presence. In the end, the speaker and his friends cannot be liberated from the burden of national history, since the breeze (like the waves in the sea), that might have taken the voices of the victims far away, might change its direction and bring the news back.

Poems of Medium Discrepancy

"At Shelling Hill" (Paula Meehan)

In poems that occupy a medium position on the scale, national history is often negotiated through the notion of landscape. The idea that a geographical space can serve

as a 'memory medium' is firmly established in contemporary memory studies[30] and is deeply rooted in the Irish poetic tradition since the eighteenth century. Famously, in the 1970s Seamus Heaney coined this poetic tradition *dinnshenchas*.[31] Commenting on Heaney's essay "The Sense of Place", Carmen Zamorano Llena describes this tradition as follows:

> In his landmark essay 'The Sense of Place' (1977), Heaney describes the sense of Irishness as a spiritual and imaginative connection with the Irish land through the knowledge of history that the geography holds in its inner layers and which is appreciated through the poetic imagination. (99)

In the *dinnshenchas* tradition, the act of remembering equals an act of uncovering a past that is still present, rather than an act of reconstruction and interpretation. The connection between the past and the Irish landscape is founded upon the basic assumption that history is not an absent referent but an entity 'encoded' in the present-day landscape, waiting for a poet to (figuratively) dig into the ground and find what is stored underneath (or: what is hidden "in its inner layers"). As such, in this tradition the concept of space as a memory medium is significantly different from, for example, Pierre Nora's influential notion of *lieux de memoires*: while Nora's concept of a 'memory site' is strictly limited to "designed sites" (Matsuda 14) – meaning initially 'blank' spaces that become successively 'charged' with memories *from the outside* (e.g. by a political elite as part of its political agenda) – the 'memory site' of the Irish landscape already entails memories. As such, in the *dinnshenchas* tradition, space and time are inseparable as the temporal dimension of the past is transferred onto the spatial plane of Ireland's landscape. By interacting with the Irish land, one can thus gain access to the nation's historical development.

Yet, in order to access the "inner layers" and "the knowledge of history" preserved in Irish nature, a writer's "poetic imagination" is required. By looking at poems from this tradition, ranging from W.B. Yeats to Patrick Kavanagh and John Montague, it becomes apparent that not everybody can gain insights into the treasures buried in the Irish landscape. Rather, influenced by the role of the poet in the Romantic tradition of the late eighteenth century, the 'true' access to "the Irish land" is a privilege reserved for the figure of the gifted genius-poet. 'Blessed' with a heightened sensory and emotional awareness for his/her surroundings, the poet is able to perceive what the 'ordinary' person does not see. In this scenario, the interaction between experience and knowledge plays a particularly important role: by physically interacting with the land, the poet gains access to its hidden knowledge. As the poet personally experiences the land of which he/she is an organic part, this knowledge, stored underneath, en-

30 For further details, see e.g. Olinder/Huber, eds., *Place and Memory in the New Ireland* (2009); Tolia-Kelly, *Landscape, Race and Memory: Material Ecologies of Citizenship* (2010); Eigler/Kugele, eds., *Heimat: At the Intersection of Memory and Space* (2012); Violi, *Landscapes of Memory: Trauma, Space, History* (2017) or Bowring, *Melancholy and the Landscape: Locating Sadness, Memory and Reflection in the Landscape* (2017).

31 Anne Karhio translates the term as "place lore" ("Place" 206).

ters his/her personal experience and grants him/her an individualised access to Ireland's past (cf. Vendler).

Aspects of this tradition still resonate in some poetry written since the Celtic Tiger. Thus, in Paula Meehan's 2009 poem "At Shelling Hill" the depiction of space and memory is indebted to the notion of 'place lore'. In the poem, the speaker remembers a family holiday spent at Shelling Hill, a beach adjacent to the Northern Irish border. During this holiday, as recalled in stanzas 3 and 4, the speaker took the occasional, solitary stroll around the area. It is in the remembrance of these solitary walks that the poem's affiliation to the *dinnshenchas* tradition becomes most apparent. Like the speaker in John Montague's "The Rough Field", the speaker in Meehan's poem takes up the role of the 'lonely wanderer', who, by walking up the hill, gains access to the physical remnants of the past:

> Sometimes, I'd walk off alone up Shelling Hill
> to muse on how the earth gives back at last
> all that circumstance or happenstance would conceal:
> grave goods, those offerings to help the dead cross over,
> torcs, eagle bones, beads of amber, arrowheads of flint. (ll. 25-29)

As a figure that can perceive what otherwise "circumstance or happenstance would conceal", the speaker is a reincarnation of the gifted poet who, in the words of Zamorano Llena, has a "spiritual and imaginative connection with the Irish land" (99): as she "muse[s]" on the land's rich heritage, the ground reveals (or "gives back") its "inner layers", reaching deep into prehistoric times ("arrowheads of flint").

Furthermore, the poem's affiliation to the 'place lore' tradition is shown on an intertextual level. Thus, the "beads of amber" recall the speaker's uncovering of a "bog girl" in Heaney's poem "Punishment" (1975), a typical representative of the *dinnshenchas* tradition. In "Punishment", the 'bog girl' is recovered to the surface, where her "nipples" have been blown to "amber beads" by the wind (ll. 5-6). In the same vein, as another 'debt' to Heaney's work, the very motif of a buried female body as an embodiment of the history hidden beneath the surface, is reproduced: in the last stanza of "At Shelling Hill", the speaker remembers how she "walked to where Bláthnat/ […] she who was lover of Cú Chulainn, is buried" (ll. 69-70); a figure of Celtic mythology, that, like everything else buried in the ground, is stored in the 'archive' of Irish landscape, waiting to be recovered.

Yet, the poem does more than merely copy a gifted poet's spiritual connection to the land. Rather, in "At Shelling Hill" the *dinnshenchas* tradition is subverted to the extent that the poem shows the limits of what the speaker can retrieve from the ground. More specifically, the recovery of the past from landscape ends with the notion of trauma. Thus, whereas the speaker can easily recover various remnants of a distant past (e.g. the arrowheads), other "things [are] made complex by time" (l. 30). In that sense, the ground also harbors the memories of another female body that can and shall not be retrieved so easily: it is "that woman's body found by a father out with his son" (l. 31) of "Jean McConville, widow, disappeared mother of ten" (l. 39). Jean

McConville was one of numerous civilian casualties of the Troubles. Accused of collaborating with the British forces, McConville had been abducted and executed by the Provisional IRA in 1972, before they secretly buried her upon Shelling Hill.[32]

Whereas the more traditional poet figure in the *dinnshenchas* tradition is able to fully expose everything buried in the ground for others to be remembered, the speaker in "At Shelling Hill" cannot fully 'lay bare' her discovery. The Jean McConville incident can neither be fully remembered nor fully forgotten; or, in the spatial terms of the poem, the speaker encounters a body that can neither be recovered nor remain hidden in the ground. Thus, on the one hand, the speaker cannot help but let the incident become part of her personal memory, since, like the traumatic experience in Groarke's "To Smithereens", it 'forces' itself into the speaker's recollection as an element to be reckoned with. When she remembers walking on the ground where McConville was buried, an additional temporal layer is instantly added to her memory: by physically interacting with the land, the knowledge about McConville's fate, stored in the "inner layers", enters her own personal experience and she indirectly re-experiences the scene of McConville being "killed/ by a bullet to the back of her head over thirty years past" (ll. 31-32). The place connects the personal with the political and, confronted with McConville's tragic death, the speaker also gains a deeper insight into the anatomy of Ireland's political violence: she has to acknowledge that it is "[h]ere where she was laid bare/ of her humble shroud of bramble and scutch" (ll. 35-36) and that here the IRA "played/ out again and again covert manoeuvres of that savage war" (ll. 36-37).

Yet, as pointed out above, in the confrontation with this traumatic moment inscribed in the landscape, the speaker's ability to uncover what is hidden underneath reaches its limits. Thus, while Jean McConville becomes part of the speaker's own personal experience and memory, on the other hand, she also feels a moral responsibility toward her children to not let this painful experience become part of their shared holiday recollections. Thus, after recalling this experience in her personal memory, in the rest of the poem, the speaker refuses to remember McConville any further:

> We say nothing to the children about her. Safer the ancient lore.
> We show them rainbows in a harrowed field, a magic cauldron
> where the rainbow ends, brought back from the shadowy city,
> Dun Sceith, the city of the dead. Safer the aboriginal gore. (ll. 40-43)

The speaker's personal remembrance of the Shelling Hill landscape, in which Jean McConville is an undeniable part of the buried heritage, is immediately countered by conceptualising an alternative connection to the land, in which the speaker's discovery of recent traumatic events must be forgotten. While she gains exclusive insight into the horrors of McConville's personal tragedy, in the context of her family there is no mention

32 Like Rathlin Island in McGovern's "The News in 1974", the speaker in Meehan's poem is thus confronted with a nationally significant place in Ireland's geography.

> [o]f the spooks who ran her, those who sanctioned her execution,
> who bundled her into a car, who executed the order,
> who cleaned up after, who dug the whole to put her body in […]. (ll. 45-47)

Instead, her children's relationship to Shelling Hill is of a more innocent nature, where the concept of history is replaced by the concept of myth. As such, since the children "[s]oon enough [have] to be doing with history, to be doing with truth" (l. 62), the speaker 'glosses over' the harsh historical 'reality' of Ireland's recent history in favour of focusing on a "safer" mythological past, mainly reconstructed through the children's vivid imagination:

> […] we played at Cu Chulainn on the strand
> dressed in flotsam the tide washed in; fishing net, coils
> of trawler rope, a broken float, a scrap of tarp pulled
> to shape a warrior's cloak, styrofoam shields, wooden spears; (ll. 18-21)

In this scenario, the landscape becomes a participant in the children's game. It provides materials ("flotsam the tide washed in") the children need to imagine a past in which violence is only a matter of play-acting ("styrofoam shields, wooden spears"). As soon as any signs of actual violence start to hamper their innocent play, the speaker diverts their attention to other mythological stories and characters:

> When they grew fractious and began to really fight
> […]
> we'd light a fire, we'd conjure Scáthach, warp spasm, the red hand. (ll. 22-24)

In contrast to the speaker's individual connection to the land, in the children's version of the past, factions and sectarianism do not exist, but are immediately dissolved in harmony (i.e. they re-unite in "light[ing] a fire"). The children are protected from making any horrible discoveries, and, as the speaker remembers, become admiring observers of a natural environment that exists in perfect symbiosis with the place:

> The children loved to watch the hares at play
> in the meadow; mornings they loved to track moonshaped
> hoofprints along the wet strand.
> […] They'd
> pick the earliest blackberries, they'd traipse
> with purple lips across freshwater streams, the hems
> of their jeans soaked, they'd come home in a daze. (ll. 49-51; 55-58)

This alternative approach to the land, carefully composed and guided by the speaker for her family, marks the return via mythology to an idyllic (or pastoral) connection to Shelling Hill, and thus a connection more in line with the traditional *dinnshenchas* forebears.

From a more general point of view, therefore, in this poem the speaker reconstructs the holidays from two perspectives that foster two distinct concepts of what is 'stored' in the Irish landscape. First, from the speaker's *personal memory perspective*, with discovering Jean McConville's burial ground, the land turns into a dangerous ter-

rain,[33] on which the speaker needs to tread carefully. Second, as a direct result of the need to repress certain elements, in the *family's version of the holidays* at Shelling Hill, the representation of the Irish landscape counters this threatening image: here any notions of the Troubles and Ireland's painful history are excluded. From this perspective, Shelling Hill is depicted as a return to the mythological, idyllic and ultimately pastoral world that offers opportunities for adventure and the imagination and, as the paratext points out, provides "a playground for children".

It is due to the interaction of these two perspectives on the past that the remembrance of the Jean McConville incident (and the Troubles more generally) appears as a liminal entity in the poem. In the speaker's double role as both a wandering poet and a mother, aspects of remembering and forgetting the incident converge: as a poet she recovers McConville from the ground, but as a mother she instantly excludes her discovery from memory. In the same vein, coinciding with her double position, the landscape itself turns into a spatial embodiment of both the album and the lexicon: it is a public 'container' of information relevant for Ireland's national development (i.e. the lexicon), and a 'safe haven' in the family's more intimate memory realm (i.e. the album). Although it is the same landscape (geographically speaking), it comprises a dual gateway to the past in which, depending on the perspective, access to certain elements will not be granted. In that sense, the line between what is remembered and what is forgotten is drawn alongside the line between history and myth: the family's album does not contain any references to Ireland's painful history, while, as part of Ireland's public lexicon, the McConville incident is still inscribed in the land. The poet, therefore, is a truly liminal figure as she must negotiate both.

"Townland" (Leanne O'Sullivan)

Another example of a poem in which the past is accessed through landscape is Leanne O'Sullivan's "Townland" (2013). Like "At Shelling Hill", "Townland" bears aspects of the *dinnshenchas* tradition: here as well, the speaker remembers wandering through a forsaken place, in search of the past hidden underneath. More specifically, in O'Sullivan's poem the speaker recalls walking with her father through "*Gorth* and *Ahabrock*" (l. 3; emphasis in original), two small towns in county Cork that used to contribute to Ireland's copper mining industry in the nineteenth century, before local mines were closed during and after the Irish Famine. As such, the speaker strolls through an *urban* environment, which is of utmost importance for the interpretation of the poem: by replacing the natural idyll of traditional *dinnshenchas* poems with a man-made townscape, "Townland", like Meehan's poems, undermines the 'place lore' tradition. The speaker, as will be shown below, is somehow alienated from the place she encounters. As a result, the elements of the past retrieved from the ground in Gorth and Ahabrock are remembered as liminal entities that are there – e.g. the act of pronouncing the towns' names in the present establishes a palpable sensation of

33 As such it resembles Lorna Shaughnessy's "country known only to the bereaved of that time" (l. 1) in the poem "The Dark Topography" (2015).

the past as it triggers "[a] hankering in the skull, uttered and worked,/ the stagger of heather beds cleaved in the throat" (ll. 1-2) – yet cannot be fully grasped.

More to the point, compared to Meehan's poem, the speaker depicts her relationship to the land not in form of a concrete visual and tactile connection but shifts to recalling the past as a more indistinct acoustic experience.[34] As such, for instance, the speaker remembers how her father, upon

> […] walking there
> thought he'd heard the ghost of Norah Seer [a local legend],
> the border streams swelling to the sound
> of her steel crutch tapping out the hours. (ll. 5-8)

In the speaker's memory of walking the land, the physical embodiment of the past is replaced by the past as an 'otherworldly' and liminal phenomenon: it is shown in the form of a ghost, that is no longer visibly manifested in the landscape, but still maintains a faint, audible presence. In this liminal position, the past can still be vaguely perceived, yet is too far removed to be fully graspable: with the sound of the "border streams swelling" and "the sound/ of her steel crutch" intermingling, the speaker and her father cannot even be entirely sure if the sound of "the ghost of Norah Seer" is actually there: the father only "*thought* he'd heard" an echo from the past (emphasis added).

The speaker's representation of the past as a fleeting existence also becomes apparent in other passages of the poem. Thus, for example, when the speaker and her father continue to "prowl the lanes" of these industrial towns (l. 10), they perceive the ghostly sound of

> the underground all moan and winnow
> with disappearing streams and passages […]. (ll. 11-12)

In contrast to the clearly-contoured bodies of other *dinnshenchas* poems – such as the well-preserved body of the bog girl in Heaney's "Punishment" – what is stored in the ground in "Townland" is of a more fluid and volatile nature (cf. "streams") that defies a clear localisation in any singular place. As such, the past hidden underneath is an entity in between absence and presence. Thus, when the speaker perceives the sound of the streams, they are already in the process of "disappearing". The speaker therefore can only capture a momentary glimpse of what is stored in a ground that "moan[s]" with its fading past. Hence, the speaker recalls the past stored in the ground as an element that is both remembered and fading into oblivion at the same time.

34 Like in "At Shelling Hill", past and present co-exist in the act of walking the land. Yet, the ground in "Townland" lacks both the physical bodies that can be uncovered and voyeuristically examined (cf. Jean McConville's body being "laid bare/ of her humble shroud of brambles and scutch") as well as the graphic reincarnation of past scenes in the present (cf. the speaker suddenly encountering the vision of McConville being shot in the head).

Similarly, next to other distant sounds such as “the waning lift and turn of a gate” that lies “beyond” the two towns (l. 15), the speaker also encounters the sounds of swallows nesting “in the old stone walls” of the derelict houses (l. 3). Situated within the walls (where they are invisible to the speaker), the swallows are literally integrated in the landscape and seem to become the houses’ own voices: as the speaker enters the towns at the beginning of the poem, the houses ‘speak’ in the form of “the swallows going like windborne rumours” (l. 4). Like the “disappearing streams”, the sounds of “windborne rumours”, as the very first impressions the speaker gains of this place, contribute to the ghostly and liminal character of the past in the poem. Thus, as early as in line 3, the permanence of what is buried and preserved in solid earth (as found in other *dinnshenchas* poems), is countered by the realm of the momentary that is inherent to the element of wind (and water as seen in “streams”). In that sense, the past appears as an ethereal matter that, like “the windborne sounds of massacre” in McGovern’s “The News in 1974”, is a fleeting entity which can be perceived, yet, in the moment of perception, already passes on towards a more indistinct distance.

As pointed out above, and as these examples already indicate, “Townland”, like “At Shelling Hill”, challenges the *dinnshenchas* tradition and reveals limitations in the speaker’s ability to read the land. More specifically, with the past appearing as a collage of ghostly and liminal sounds that temporarily resurface here and there, in this poem the fundamental paradigm of the ground as a ‘grand provider’ of “historical truth” is questioned. The mining towns of Gorth and Ahabrock do not grant access to their “inner layers” and the voice of a single ‘truth’ emanating from the ground is countered by the polyphonic orchestration of “rumours” and “a half remembered word of mouth” (l. 9), which only provide a vague content to rely upon. The certainty of the ‘actual’ past has vanished. Instead, this townscape only harbours the uncertainty of hear-say interpretations that, as much as they shift between absence and presence in the speaker’s perception, also constantly linger in between truth and fiction. Consequently, the connection between space and the past in “Townland” is significantly different from more traditional ‘place lore’ poems. In contrast to other representatives of this tradition, in which a speaker explores an untouched landscape that still waits to be discovered, in this poem the speaker encounters a landscape in which all the mining (as a metaphorical equivalent to ‘digging’) has already been done. The speaker, therefore, as a second generation ‘miner’, merely imaginatively reworks the land that (quite literally) has been worked upon before. As such, she has lost her privilege as a poetic pioneer engaged in an innocent communication with the ‘truth’. In this place, next to the ghostly sounds, the past lacks any geographical substance and where there were once rich copper resources, now there is only a “yellowing furze” left to be discovered (l. 13).

Poems of Large Discrepancy

"Commute" (Tom French)

In poems displaying a large discrepancy between an event and its representation, national history appears as an institutionalised element of cultural memory. These poems feature speakers who remember an everyday moment in which they were confronted with an official public memorial (or other form of public commemoration) that commemorates key events/figures in Irish national history. In John McAuliffe's "Hedge", for example, the speaker remembers encountering "the roadside monument for the killings/ of 1918 and 1921" (ll. 17-18), in Martina Evans' "The 50th Anniversary of the Easter Rising" (2009) the speaker recalls the first time she did not go to the annual public parades for the celebration of the Easter Rising and in Tom French's "Real Estate" (2009) the speaker comes into contact with official historiography in the form of "paperbacks, including *Roger Casement's 1916*" (l. 3; emphasis in original). Similarly, in French's "Commute" (2009) the speaker remembers an everyday train ride back home from work, during which he noticed a commemorative plate, commissioned by the Irish railway company *Iarnród Éireann*, that reads "*This train is for Connolly and Pearse*" (paratext; emphasis in original). As in other poems of the indirect memory type, the speaker's reconstruction of his indirect encounter with two of Ireland's leading revolutionaries results in a liminal presentation of national history. Thus, while Ireland's revolutionary period is still implied in the speaker's mentioning of the memorial, in the way this memorial is personally remembered, Connolly and Pearse lose significance. In the following paragraphs, both textual processes of remembering and forgetting shall be examined in closer details.

The analysis of aspects of forgetting in "Commute" can benefit from a return to the distinction between the 'everyday horizon' and the 'cultural horizon' of memory, as discussed in Section 2.3. In poems situated at the minimal end of the scale, recollected national events still belong to the speaker's everyday horizon and, as such, still make an impact on the speaker's personal life (such as in "To Smithereens"). In poems situated at the opposite end of the scale, however, the national events in question belong exclusively to the 'cultural horizon': these events had no impact on a speaker's personal life whatsoever and, therefore, are not immediately related to his personal biography. Instead, they are more relevant for the national sphere of remembrance. This is also the case in French's "Commute": by remembering his confrontation with the memorial of Connolly and Pearse, the speaker indirectly recalls an historical event/context that left no mark on his personal realm. Quite on the contrary: as a participant in the Celtic Tiger commuter-culture, the speaker belongs to a generation that is too young to have witnessed Ireland's struggle for independence.

This personal distance is reflected in how the speaker remembers the memorial. Commenting on the commemorative plate, the speaker recalls that it "looks like it was written by someone else" (l. 6). The memorial (and the figures/events it commemorates) is still being addressed in the speaker's recollection, but it is remembered as an alien element that sits uneasily in his personal memory frame. This un-

ease is a result of the fact that, at this end of the scale, knowledge dominates experience: Connolly and Pearse can only be remembered through the public lexicon, since their 'story' indeed "was written by someone else": remembered as long dead forerunners of the modern Irish nation, they belong to the realm of cultural memory. The speaker thus encounters an "exceptionally organized and mostly institutionalized mnemonic manifestation" that is shaped and maintained by Ireland's cultural and political elites, yet is not directly related to his private life (Levy 93; trans. D.B.).[35]

Rather, in the speaker's personal realm, Connolly and Pearse already partake in a process of forgetting, as the poem signals in a sudden shift of the speaker's memory focus away from national history in the rest of the text. Thus, immediately after this brief detour to the national level, the speaker narrows his focus to everyday trivia. Instead of continuing to remember the memorial, the speaker stresses his shallow sense of selfless altruism by "letting everyone be seated/ before me" (ll. 3-4). As such, he is busy with "[g]lancing up to offer someone my seat" (l. 11) only to realise that "I find no one older nor more pregnant than I" (l. 12). In a similar manner, the turning away from a remembrance of the national past becomes obvious when the speaker, towards the end of the poem, narrows the focus even further to the most intimate realm of reflecting on his own person: here, forgetting the national context is analogously mirrored in the aversion of the speaker's gaze from the memorial to the display of his phone, which grants a brief insight into his personal life: he remembers

> texting back the name of the last station
> in reply to the question about the time I'll be home. (ll. 15-16)

In the course of the poem, therefore, the cultural horizon is first kept at a mnemonic distance, as an alien element, and then replaced by more familiar elements from the speaker's, successively more intimate, everyday horizon of memory. With this shift from cultural to everyday horizon, the speaker rejects the dominance of public knowledge over personal experience: instead of reproducing any knowledge on Connolly and Pearse, the speaker reverses the interaction between album and lexicon by limiting memory to recalling only the experience of seeing the memorial in this past moment, while excluding public knowledge on the historical context itself from recollection. When the speaker then turns to other personal experiences in this moment, the official knowledge of cultural memory is forgotten, since the speaker's mnemonic gaze turns from the commemorative plate outside the train to the more familiar space within.

On a more general level, the commuter train, as a prototypical representative of a changed lifestyle in Celtic Tiger Ireland,[36] can be read as a metaphor for the Celtic

35 German original: "äußerst organisierte und größtenteils institutionalisierte mnemonische Manifestation".

36 During the Celtic Tiger years, the distance between work space and living space became more distinct. With higher wages being provided, a significant number of the working population acquired property in expanding suburban areas that rapidly enlarged the periphery of town, while work was still dominantly placed at the city centre.

Tiger society, which, like the people in the train, has turned its gaze away from the past (cf. Section 4.1). Thus, for the individual commuters the national past no longer appears as a valid frame of reference: as the train passes the memorial, next to the speaker, none of the other passengers seem to even notice the reference to Connolly and Pearse. Rather, they are fully immersed in their present personal space. As such, for instance, the speaker describes how a woman

> leans in to the pane on which is etched
> *In Case of Emergency Please Break Glass*
>
> to reign in a stray hair and apply foundation
> a hint of rouge to make her look more human. (ll. 7-10; emphasis in original)

The woman is merely concentrating on her own reflection in the window pane without seeing the memorial outside. Celtic Tiger society is described as a culture of surfaces, where people focus on "[a] *jpeg* of a new arrival [that] does the rounds" (l. 13; emphasis in original) and limit their perspectives to "imagining where the doors will be" once the train arrives (l. 1).

Connected to this depiction of the other passengers, in the speaker's memory the train *as a space* also furthers the notion of forgetting national history on a cultural level. More specifically, in the speaker's recollection, the train becomes what Marc Augé calls a *non-lieux*, a 'non-space', in which national history is reduced to a mere text. In contrast to 'anthropological spaces' (e.g. traditional memory sites, home towns etc.), non-spaces, such as airports, supermarkets, or, in this case, trains do not allow any form of profound identity formation and offer no connection to the past (cf. Augé 83). As such, non-spaces challenge the concept of space underlying the *dinnshenchas* tradition (see above): non-spaces are inherently transitional spaces related to permanent movement and change that prevent the individual from 'settling down' and from engaging with space in a more profound manner. In place of a deeper connection to space, Augé's non-spaces feature textual surfaces guiding an individual's interaction with its transitional environment: "negotiation, which establishes the tie between individuals and their environment in the realm of the non-space functions via words and texts […] In the end, [they are] their manual that is expressed in the form of regulations, […] prohibitions, […] or information" (95-96; trans. D.B.).[37]

The speaker's description of the train matches Augé's general considerations. Thus, the image of "spikes on girders to stop pigeons settling" provides a fitting analogy for the commuter train as an example of such a non-space (l. 17). There is no chance of identifying with this locale, since, like the pigeons, one is not meant to linger. In the same vein, the speaker wonders about the absurdity of trains providing "seats for us who have no intention of staying" (l. 18). In the speaker's personal memory frame, the train, like other non-spaces, does not offer any chances for deeper identification,

37 German original: "Die Vermittlung, die das Band zwischen Individuen und ihrer Umgebung im Raum des Nicht-Ortes herstellt, erfolgt über Worte und Texte […] [Sie sind] ihre Gebrauchsanweisung letztlich, die in Vorschriften […], Verboten […] oder Informationen […] zum Ausdruck kommen".

but dominantly appears as a patchwork of fleeting images (cf. the "*jpeg*" catching everyone's attention) and texts (cf. "*In Case of Emergency Please Break Glass*"; "[t]exting back") which are devoid of any deeper meaning. As such, the train is a space of surfaces, in which, for example, the surface of the mobile phone, as the medium of representation, replaces the actual object it represents. The commuters interact with the "mobile phone ogled over, like a pram" but not with an actual child in a pram (l. 14). In other words: the train as space fosters the individual's connection to the image rather than the connection to the thing itself.

In this environment of textual and visual surfaces, (national) history becomes an equally superficial textual surface. A non-space

> also leaves no place for history, which, in the end, is transformed into an element of spectacle, mostly in texts and notes. All power belongs to the 'right-now' and the requirements of the present. (Augé 104; trans. D.B.)[38]

In the non-space of the train, history is devoid of its own temporal depth as it is turned into a textual marker. When referring to the memorial therefore, the speaker does not recall Ireland's 'birth' as a modern nation, but first and foremost, identifies *a text* he perceived at this moment: it is described as "[t]he sentence scribbled between stations" (l. 5). As text, in a space that promotes a sense of eternal present ("ewige Gegenwart"; Augé 105), the memorial hints at an image of the past but does not obtain the power to make commuters actually *remember* the past. Rather, through the memorial, the past turns into an asset of the present that adds a superficial sense of heritage to the place, without forcing the individual to leave his present realm. In a space saturated with all sorts of texts, the individual can recognise the past in passing, but, at the same time, cannot and does not want to stop in this moment (cf. Augé 98), and, as the speaker in Lorna Shaughnessy's "Standing Ovation in 'The Crum'" (2015) points out, "[d]ifferences dissolve/ in the safe branding of something called 'the past'" (ll. 23-24). Elements of the past can be noticed, but not remembered.

And yet, despite their integration into a non-space of forgetting, the two leaders of the Irish revolution do not accept their fate of being completely forgotten but rather occupy an indefinite position in between remembrance and oblivion. In this context, the interaction between the poem's main text (i.e. the speaker's memory described above) and the paratext preceding the speaker's personal recollection plays an important role. Whereas the main text is concerned with displaying national history as irrelevant, the full reproduction of the memorial's commemorative sentence ("*This train is for Connolly and Pearse*") in the initial paratext puts the national context in a prominent position. In that sense, the poem's overall composition negotiates an inherent conflict. As the first sentence to appear below the title, separated from the main text in an italicised layout, the explicit reference to Connolly and Pearse turns into a recognisable textual presence that counters the speaker's (and other passen-

38 German original: "gibt auch der Geschichte keinen Raum, die sich am Ende in ein Element des Schauspiels verwandelt, zumeist in Texte und Hinweise. Die Herrschaft gehört der Aktualität und den Erfordernissen der Gegenwart".

gers') own distance from Ireland's past in the main text. As such, the initial paratext becomes an interpretative framework against which the poem as such is read. In that sense, while the speaker is reluctant to remember the memorial in more detail, on the compositional level, it is nevertheless 'inscribed' in the memory text from the start. At first sight all experiences recollected in the poem appear of equal importance (each is represented in one couplet). Yet, the third couplet dedicated to "[t]he sentence", fully quoted in the paratext, gains a greater mnemonic weight in the composition overall, since this text is ultimately singled out and, with the names of Connolly and Pearse 'looming' over the speaker's memory, the alien element of the memorial becomes a force to be reckoned with.

In conclusion, the poem accentuates a complex interplay between processes of remembering and forgetting early twentieth century Irish history on different levels of the text. This liminal position of the historical key figures in the speaker's memory is finally summarised in the spatial liminality of the memorial itself: it is described as "[t]he sentence scribbled between stations" (l. 5). The observation that national history is caught in between remembering and forgetting is physically manifested in the fact that the memorial does neither belong to the one nor the other station, but to both at the same time. It is positioned at a place that is neither here nor there, thus reflecting the remembrance of Connolly and Pearse being both rejected as an alien element, and yet still holding on to its seat in the speaker's personal recollection.

"Arrival" (Iggy McGovern)

Another example displaying a large discrepancy between a historical event and its public representation is Iggy McGovern's "Arrival". "Arrival", taken from his second collection *Safe House* (2010), is the first sonnet in a five-sonnet cycle called "The Five-Day Break". In this cycle, each sonnet provides a brief day-to-day glimpse into the holiday experiences of an anonymous 'you'-character. The first sonnet, as the title suggests, describes the initial reflections when first arriving at "The Grand Hotel" (l. 2) at the beginning of the holidays:

> O happy accident to have discovered
> the Grand Hotel, the kind of place where gents
> will don a jacket and tie for Dinner,
> and waiters dance around on tippy-toes
> with trays of hall-marked silver and good delft.
> Authentic re-creation of 'The Big House'
> where your grandfather was head gardener,
> his child – your mother – buffing each stair-rod
> till she could see in it the very face
> you meet these days at every turn-about:
> here, playing Patience on the sunny terrace;
> there, linked as far as this low seaside-fence,
> now threatening a round of Crazy Golf,
> if it keeps good, before the week is out. (ll. 1-14)

In contrast to French's "Commute" and McAuliffe's "Hedge", "Arrival" implicitly recalls national history not in form of a public memorial, but through the hotel as a historical site itself, which is advertised as an "[a]uthentic re-recreation of 'The Big House'" (l. 6). With the shift from official state commemoration to commemoration in the context of a holiday resort, this poem, like Anne Fitzgerald's narrative poem "Welcome to Seligman Birthplace of the Historic Route 66" (2006), in which a tourist-speaker describes all the tourist attractions along the road, adds another dimension to the discussion of indirect memory on the far end of the scale: it depicts a turn from history as part of cultural memory to history as part of a 'heritage industry'. As will be shown in the following paragraphs, the connection between history and tourism plays an important part in the liminal remembrance of Ireland's 'Big House' past in the poem.

During the Celtic Tiger boom, Ireland gained an international reputation of economic and cultural success. Consequently, the heightened global interest in the small nation led to a flourishing tourist sector and, in turn, an increasing commercialisation of Irish history for touristic purposes (cf. M. McCarthy 38). As critics remark, this commercial shift coincided with re-writing certain aspects of Ireland's past. Thus, Seamus Deane, for example, argues that during the Celtic Tiger years the past became "a kind of supermarket for tourists" (239) in which only the 'attractive products' of the past are offered to the customers, while any components that do not meet the consumer's taste, are kept off the shelves. As Marc McCarthy points out, this new "form of popular history" (3) applies a strongly selective, economic filter on the past which preserves only those elements of history that increase the present market value of Ireland's tourist sector. Ireland's history then, as Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin argue, is mostly displayed in a sanitised version that simply "massages conflict out of representations" (7) and transforms an often controversial Irish past into a commodity; or, in reference to Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall: tourists are offered a 'lexicon lite' of Irish history in which no entries on the more conflictual constituents of the past are to be found.

This notion of remembering a 'lite' version of Irish history for touristic purposes can be applied to "Arrival", a poem that criticises Ireland's heritage industry. Here, the perspective on the Big House past offered by the speaker to a nameless you-addressee – who presumably has Irish roots ("grandfather", "mother" working for the Big House) but does not seem to have any connections to his familial past – indeed "massages conflict out of representation[]". In Irish cultural memory, the Anglo-Irish 'Big House' traditionally serves as a symbol for all the injustice and pain caused by the British dominance over Ireland. Yet, in "Arrival" none of these 'darker' aspects of the 'Big House' tradition are remembered. Rather, the speaker presents a sanitised version of the past that ultimately enhances the present-day value of the "Grand Hotel". As indicated in the apostrophe in line 1 ("O happy accident"), being at the hotel offers an exciting spectacle, dazzling the you-persona (in the role of the nameless Celtic Tiger tourist) with its sheer elegance and luxury:

> […] the kind of place where gents
> Will don a jacket and tie for Dinner
> And waiters dance around on tippy-toes
> With trays of hall-marked silver and good delft. (ll. 2-5)

With waiters dancing around, men wearing suit and tie, and "trays of hall-marked silver" being presented, this hotel is a sight to see in every single visual detail. The speaker's glimpse at the past in lines 7-9 adapts this notion of visual beauty and underlines the hotel's present appearance from a historical perspective: in connection to the visual appeal of the present place, the memory presented by the speaker accordingly only contains information related to the visual beauty of the original Big House, while excluding the more severe political dimension usually associated with the Anglo-Irish mansion. Thus, the grandfather and mother of the you-character are remembered for their contributions to making the original place as beautiful and classy as it is in its reconstructed state today:

> where your grandfather was head gardener
> his child – your mother – buffing each stair-rod
> till she could see in it the very face […]. (ll. 7-9)

As one might argue, the speaker functions as the voice of the hotel's brochure by promoting all the advantages of staying in this particular place to a passive consumer. Hence, in the three parts of the sonnet, the speaker shows that next to displaying a classy design (ll. 1-5) and offering numerous free-time activities (ll. 10-14: "Patience on a sunny terrace", l. 11; "a round of Crazy Golf", l. 13), the hotel can also score with a rich and "authentic" (yet 'cleansed') cultural heritage (ll. 6-9).

This commercial representation of the Big House by the speaker, as a mere heritage asset for the present hotel, is based on a genuinely liminal treatment of Irish history. Thus, in the way the speaker remembers the past in the overall context of the "Grand Hotel", he creates what might be called a 'comfort liminality': in the interplay between remembering and forgetting the speaker shapes a version of the past with which the you-persona/tourist can feel comfortable, since history is kept in balance between personal proximity and safe impersonal distance. In this regard, "Arrival" is similar to Vona Groarke's "The Game of Tennis in Irish History" (2006), in which the more threatening implications in the diary of "Lady Alice Howard" (l. 1), especially the "Spring 1921" volume (l. 10), are counter-balanced with the description of a leisurely game of tennis "between politics and tea" (l. 5). In that way, in "Arrival", on the one hand, this sanitised version implies an opportunity for personal identification with the past: the heritage of the hotel is not presented as abstract semantic knowledge but through the lens of the you-character's family history ("your grandfather"; "your mother") to which he can personally relate. As the child of an Irish family, the you-character can find a sense of home in this place and his visit to the hotel is now more than a mere holiday stay – it resembles a journey to recover the historical traces of his family.

Yet, inviting the you-persona to recognise the familial ties to the Big House era is only one side of the speaker's memory practice in the poem. The way the speaker re-

members the past equally fosters the impression of keeping the same addressee from getting too close to the family's experiences in the original Big House. Thus, as soon as the speaker has recalled the addressee's grandfather and mother in their professional connection to the Big House, he instantly shifts the focus away from them in mid-sentence in the enjambment between lines 9 and 10:

> Till she could see in it the very face
> you meet these days at every turn-about: (ll. 9-10)

Next to signalling a shift from the past (line 9) back to the present (line 10), the enjambment furthermore initiates a turn away from the mother's face: the turn from line 9 to 10 carries a moment of suspense, since one might expect the reflection of the mother's own face in the polished stair-rod. Yet, the speaker denies this specific reflection to appear and, instead, covers her exact appearance with the general everyday face to be found at "every turn-about". The mother literally remains faceless and, like the you-persona in the present, utterly voiceless in the speaker's account. The speaker uses the mother as a vantage point for the you-persona to identify with, but her actual experiences will not be seen or heard; this includes experiences of being an Irish Catholic housemaid, who finds herself in a conflictual situation when serving in the house of the Protestant master and landlord. Instead, the mother's own experiences are 'massaged out' as she becomes depersonalised and reduced to a happy member of the band of those who help to 'sell' the beauty of the present hotel. Her personal history disappears behind the veil of careless everyday faces of modern-day tourism.

In the end, the speaker utilises only a strictly limited fragment of the Big House past and re-contextualises it in a touristic setting. As such, he counters the knowledge of the old nationalist narrative through the momentary experience of the Big House's architecture. In this context, the past becomes a depoliticised asset among others and, after being briefly remembered (from a safe distance), it is forgotten again in favour of advertising other things the you-persona could do "before the week is out" (l. 14):

> here playing Patience on a sunny terrace;
> there, linked as far as this low seaside-fence,
> now threatening a round of Crazy Golf
> if it keeps good, before the week is out. (ll. 11-14)

Once again, any conflict that might linger in recalling this symbolically-loaded episode of Irish history is sanitised and translated into present-day 'threats' of a surprisingly unthreatening nature: the present offers a safe, apolitical terrain in which the only threat is "a round of Crazy Golf" and the possibility that the weather might change ("if it keeps good").

3.3 Type II: National History and Family Memory

The second type of liminal remembrance can be seen in poems that remember Ireland's past through the perspective of *family memory*. In comparison to the other types discussed in this study, the type of family memory can be positioned in between indirect memory and authentic memory, since it combines elements of both. Thus, on the one hand, poems representing the family memory type are also 'indirect' in their access to national history: here too, the prototypical speaker has not personally experienced first-hand the national event/context that he/she addresses in the poem. Rather, the speaker's recollection is based on someone else's *representation* of an event/context. However, on the other hand, in contrast to the *public* representations in the poems discussed above, representations in family memory poems are of a genuinely *private* kind, as the speaker indirectly remembers national history via another family member's personal account of the past. It is this shift from public encounters with history to private negotiations of the national past that distinguishes family memory from indirect memory and brings it closer to the type of authentic memory. As will be shown below, the affective, familial ties existing between the speaker and the relative who originally experienced a past moment serve to transcend the boundaries between experience and knowledge: in the poems to be discussed, the speaker at times gets so emotionally invested in a relative's representation of the past that this relative's experience is 'adopted' as the speaker's quasi-own experience, resulting in the impression that the speaker had a direct, first-hand connection to the represented events, too. Yet, as some speakers realise in the course of their reconstructions, there is no first-hand access after all.

In contemporary Irish poetry, there are two different ways in which this type of liminal memory is expressed: in a simple manner, in some poems the speaker exclusively centres the memory 'spotlight' on *a single moment* of the past in which a family member personally experienced a historical event. As will be shown, this isolated and detailed view on a single incident in the familial past is used by the speaker to critically reflect on the limits of reconstructing the past through another family member's experience. In a more complex manner, other poems counter this detailed focus on a single incident with a fragmentary view on a *family collage consisting of many past moments* shared in the familial sphere. In this collage, a family member's memory of his/her experience with national history is depicted as merely one memory fragment among many others that predominantly deal with private, everyday matters. It shall be argued that by using this collage structure, these poems comment on the complex, fragmentary access to the past generally found in family memory, in which national history occupies an *en passant* position.

National History in Single Family Stories

Structurally speaking, poems that apply a detailed focus on a single moment can be described as follows: they all feature an individual speaker persona who reconstructs a specific situation from the biography of another family member – usually belonging

to an older generation – that he/she has not personally witnessed but only heard about in the family. As such, they conceptualise family memory as a form of remembrance founded upon an intra-familial transfer of memories from one family member to another. More specifically, as shall be argued, these poems initiate a meta-reflective and critical perspective on this process of memory transmission by using the detailed gaze at a single moment of the past to more thoroughly reflect on the pitfalls and limits that the familial transfer of memories entails; the liminal representation of national history is directly linked to these limitations.

In their endeavour to scrutinise the intra-familial transmission of memories, these poems echo recent discussions in contemporary memory studies. Especially in the field of Holocaust and trauma studies, the question of how (and if) memories of past experiences can be transferred within the family has become a prevalent issue of late. Next to concepts such as 'inherited memory' or 'belated memory', it was especially Marianne Hirsch and her discussion of 'postmemory' that contributed to a more detailed understanding of how past experiences are passed on in the family. In her study *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (2012), Hirsch defines postmemory as "the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to […] experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up" (5). In its most general sense,[39] therefore, 'postmemory' refers to the (familial) memory practice of how a younger generation connects to, adapts and remembers past experiences made and shared by the parent or grandparent generation.

This memory practice is a complex and ambivalent matter: on the one hand, the relationship to another member's experiences is characterised by what Hirsch calls a "fantasy of witnessing" and a desire to adapt a relative's memories and experiences as intimately as possible (20). Accordingly, Hirsch points out that experiences that one has not personally witnessed in the past, in postmemory often gain episodic memory qualities, since "these experiences were transmitted to them [i.e. the younger generation] so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" (5).[40] The experiences of another relative seemingly lose their semantic quality (i.e. as knowledge about the past learned from another family member) to be 'revived' as the following generation's quasi-experience. Hence, the 'post' in 'postmemory', Hirsch continues, does not merely indicate a temporal aftermath but also establishes a promise of continuity: the younger generation attempts to "maintain[] and perpetuate[]" a "sense of living connection" to past experiences that are shared in the family context (1).

39 Although Hirsch takes her examples of postmemory exclusively from Holocaust memories, she repeatedly states that the concept is also valid to describe other memory settings. It can therefore also be applied to intra-familial transfers of memory.

40 It is important to note here that Hirsch uses the term memory in the specific sense of what Tulving labels "episodic memory", meaning a memory based on sensory experience (cf. Section 2.3).

On the other hand, this desire for an intimate relationship with the familial past is countered by the acknowledgement that any memory transfer is inevitably a *re-interpretative* transfer. Thus, although Hirsch affirms that "memory *can* be transferred to those who were not actually there to live an event", she emphasises that "a 'post-generation' also [needs to] acknowledge that their received memory is distinct from the recall of contemporary witnesses and participants" (3; emphasis in original). While a younger generation might emotionally relate to experiences of their parents and grandparents, they relate to their own projected *version* of these experiences. In the process of creating this version, aspects of interpretation and even imagination play a seminal role, as they invariably alter the experiences told in family stories – which, as stories, already present an altered version of the 'actual' experiences made in a past moment. Ultimately then, a younger generation's relationship to another relative's experiences in family memory is a constant interplay between the desire for proximity and the recognition of distance.

The poems to be discussed below share this ambivalent relationship of a younger generation to the familial past: in one way or another, the speaker is caught in between the attempt to reconstruct a singular past moment in a detailed manner to closely 'revive' an experience and the personal realisation that this reconstruction is merely a matter of interpretation. On a textual level, this ambivalence is more concretely realised in the following manner: the speaker presents his/her version of events, as originally experienced by another family member, when, at some point in the text, he/she takes what might be called a 'reflective turn': he/she steps back from his memory construction to reflect on the validity of the remembered version, only to recognise that his/her own take on the past is a fallible interpretation. More generally then, the poems operate on the basis of an interplay between two processes. They become the textual location where immersing oneself in a past moment and retreating from it again in a meta-reflective move interact. As shall be shown in the following analyses, in this very interaction between a close gaze at the past and a more critical distance from it, national history is turned into a liminal entity in between being remembered and being forgotten.

"The Hyacinth under the Stairs" (Paula Cunningham)

In Paula Cunningham's "The Hyacinth under the Stairs" for example, from her 2013 collection *Heimlich's Manoeuvre*, the liminal representation of national history results from the duality between the speaker's detailed reconstruction of a specific incident in her father's life and the meta-critical evaluation of her version of this incident in the later course of the poem. The poem illustrates an intricate interplay between a vivid remembrance of the Troubles in the first half and a turn to relativising and forgetting the national implications of this familial story in the second half of the text. Thus, the first half of the poem is concerned with a minute reconstruction of her father's contact with two IRA members in balaclavas who hijacked his company car for presumably terroristic purposes. Her detailed descriptions commence with the general setting of the past situation at hand. In the speaker's memory, her father appears as a "Seven-

ties salesman", who "sells frozen food for a living" (l. 8) and who is about to wrap up his sales tour after a long day of work:

> This morning he's heading for Derry, a journey of forty-odd miles.
> He'll pop in on his customers as he goes by, takes orders, ensures that
> their freezers are full, and he'll stop at the pool in Strabane for his
> mid-morning swim.
>
> My father has had a long day and he's on his last call. Already he's
> hungry and thinking of dinner at home […]. (ll. 11-16)

In this general framework, the speaker remembers the exact moment when her father became aware of the two men surrounding his car:

> […] He's in a wee shop in the
> Bogside, it's gone half past four, when the old lady owner, named Mrs
> McCann, says 'Jesus Christ Jimmy, you're fucked.' He stares at her
> then; he's known her this years; he never heard her swear like this
> before. She motions, with the slightest of sideway nods, outside where the
> brand-new Avenger is parked. […]
>
> My father been filling an order, head down, but he straightens
> up now and turns around. Through the mesh on the window, he
> makes out two men with their hoods up. They're both wearing
> balaclavas, and sunglasses too. […] (ll. 16-21; 26-29)

Already in the description of this initial moment, the speaker's manner of presenting the past caters to the notion of a 'fantasy of witnessing'. Thus, in this scene the speaker creates the impression of being a first-hand witness who shares her father's past experiences in this very moment. In Cunningham's poem this effect of immediacy is achieved by using a free-verse, narrative style to exactly trace the chronology of individual actions and impressions as it unfolds in this past scenario, where even "the slightest of sideways nods" and the father's moment by moment reaction is registered. The use of the present tense and of direct speech (which is frequently used throughout the speaker's reconstruction) provide the impression of an immediate 'here-and-now', in which the acts of witnessing and telling overlap. Last but not least, the speaker's use of internal focalisation – she knows about her father's relationship to Mrs McCann ("he's known her this years") and his surprise upon hearing her "swear like this" – can be read as her way of adapting and sympathising with his experiences. She, in other words, narratively steps into her father's position and thus crosses the experiential boundaries between the different family members. The speaker reconstructs the past in a manner which appropriates her father's album as her own.

This immediacy is then continued at the centre of her memory, when she describes her father's actual encounter with the two men outside:

> […] My father frisks his pockets. Unable to
> find his Reactolites, he steps out into the glare. He squints towards
> the Avenger, his right hand shielding his eyes. A thick Derry accent,
> the taller man shouts:
> 'Mister, is this your car?'
> 'It is, aye.'

> ‘We need it.’
> My father is cool as a choc-ice or a frozen fish:
> ‘Not as badly as I do lads,’ the sales course on empathy coming in
> handy, ‘I’ve a job to do too, I’ve a wife and six children expecting
> me home, could youse not find somebody else’s car to lift.’ (ll. 32-42)

In this passage, it is important to notice the textual arrangement used to present the father’s conversation with the IRA members. By formally separating the beginning of the dialogue (ll. 36-38) from the rest of the text-block (for the first and only time in her entire reconstruction) and by positioning each direct utterance in a single line of its own, the speaker typographically re-establishes the momentariness of the men’s initial verbal exchange in the past. Hence, in this passage, the break with the regular narrative flow of the textual surrounding awards the individual utterances with a lingering presence. The line-by-line utterances, one might argue, resemble a theatrical performance that is currently re-enacted on the ‘memory stage’. The speaker (as well as the reader) is positioned in the role of the ‘live audience’ to perceive this past conversation unfolding once more. Like the pauses in a theatrical dialogue, the blank spaces following each short utterance provide a temporary weight to each part of the initial exchange, since they allow the “thick Derry accent” to become audible and to resonate through the remaining line.

The speaker’s version of the past provides many more examples for her detailed style of remembering. Yet, it is not the concern of the present study to provide a complete account of these individual instances in the text. Rather, it is important to point out that this close observation of the father’s personal experiences is directly linked to how national history is portrayed in the first half of the poem. In the speaker’s detailed version of events, like in other family memory poems, private and public aspects of the past overlap and can no longer be separated from each other. More concretely, the action of hijacking a car in Derry during the 1970s becomes the emblematic point at which everyday life and the larger political currents of the time intersect. The detailed remembrance of the father’s specific experiences with the two masked men becomes a micro-historical reflection on a life of insecurity during the Troubles. As she adapts her father’s perspective, the speaker delivers an immersive first-hand account of the Troubles that conceptualises national history not as a semantic item but as an experiential matter. Seen from this angle then, national history is no longer solely located in the more distant cultural horizon of the past but becomes a concrete experience to be integrated in the family’s communicative memory practice. Ultimately, with national history becoming part of the family’s everyday horizon, the first part of the poem advocates a close remembrance of the national past by positioning the emotional fabric of the Troubles era right at the centre of the speaker’s memory.

However, the poem does not end at this point. Rather, in the second half the immersive description of a politically charged moment in her father’s life is opposed by the speaker’s retreat to a critical meta-position from which she challenges her previous recollection. This critical retreat starts with the speaker, who now more overtly adapts

the role of the poet Paula Cunningham, reproducing one passage from a poem called "Hats", also published in *Heimlich's Manoeuvre*. This passage from "Hats" might be seen as a more compressed lyrical version of the event vividly remembered in the first half of the "They Hyacinth under the Stairs". In this shorter version, the speaker stresses the political dimension of her interpretation even more by prominently foregrounding the linguistic aspect of the encounter:

> One day in Derry/Londonderry my father's car was hijacked.
> The men wore hats pulled down with holes for eyes and mouth,
> they held a gun, they nudged his hat,
> they asked my father where we lived
> and ordered him to spell it. (ll. 107-111)

Next to the naming of "Derry/Londonderry" in the first line, which already indicates the political divide and sectarianism of the time, it is especially the last line's notion that the hijackers "ordered him to spell" the name of his hometown that implies the link between language and political affiliation. As the speaker recalls earlier, her father was fully aware of the significance of the 'correct' pronunciation in a divided Northern Irish society: working as a "Northern Ireland diplomat" for "a Dublin firm Hughes Brothers or H.B." (ll. 100-101), her father's sales tours would become "a studied discipline" (l. 102), since "to some [customers] he'd sell Haitch/B, to other's Aitch B" (ll. 105-106). In the same context, by ordering him to spell his address, the hooded men attempt to find out if the speaker's father comes from the 'correct' side of the sectarian divide. The poem in the poem thus weaves the incident more dominantly into the larger political currents of the time and underlines the significance of the "Derry accent", mentioned earlier in "The Hyacinth under the Stairs". Thus, in both versions, she positions the incident in a decidedly national context.

When her father reads the poem "Hats" for the first time though, and subsequently tells her "what actually happened" (l. 119), the speaker's memory version falls apart and she feels guilty for unwillingly misrepresenting the familial past:

> I'd honestly thought this version was true. When I find out it
> didn't quite happen like that I am gutted; I feel that I've let people
> down. (ll. 112-114)

The 'fantasy of witnessing' is dismissed at this point, as her representation is exposed to be a mere interpretation, and not the 'real thing'. Faced with the fallibility of her version, the speaker wonders how her interpretation came into being in the first place and, in this context, reflects on memory as a highly subjective and imaginative access to the past:

> […]. I can only suppose that I pieced it together from whispers,
> and dreamt up the rest in the silence which fell on that day.
>
> But silence is not a deep-freeze. A silence breeds stories, like hyacinths
> under the stairs. Secrecy's soil for their roots, but for flowering they
> need warmth and light. (ll. 114-118)

As pointed out above, intra-familial transfers of memory are always *interpretative* transfers. In this passage of the poem, the speaker examines the conditions and

mechanisms underlying her interpretation of the father's past experience. As stated before, once a family member's personal recollections enter the familial space, they become flexible variables to be re-imagined in multiple ways by other members. The extent to which the 'original' story, told in the family context, becomes re-fabricated depends on the form in which a story enters the shared familial space, as for example Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall argue. They state

> that it is particularly the nebulous, fragmentary, contradictory and illogical stories that leave room for the audience to develop its own versions and create its own meaning out of what has been told […]. Especially stories, in which everything remains unclear – time, space, agents, causal links etc. – open a wide space for an individual process of imaginative re-enactment. (81; 200; trans D.B.)[41]

This also applies to the father's story. The incident, as the speaker recalls earlier in the text, was introduced to the family in a secretive manner, with the speaker and her sister Sheila, both children at the time, only listening to fragments of the father's story. When her father returned home after the incident, he argued with his wife about why he "arrives two hours late for his dinner" (l. 87). Soon, they started to "whisper" and immediately sent the speaker and her sister to bed "with our/ homework half-done" (ll. 90-91). Yet, out of curiosity, the children returned downstairs to "listen a while at the door", where they "hear 'balaclava' and 'young', and when Sheila hears 'gun' she coughs/ and my mother comes out" (ll. 93-95). Given this form of transmission, for the speaker the incident of the car hijacking remains shrouded in "the silence which fell on that day" in the family's memory. As a consequence, the speaker imaginatively develops her own version of events over time, where information obtained by the father and her own "imaginative re-enactment" intermingle.

How is this critical evaluation of her own memory construction linked to the liminal depiction of the Troubles in the poem overall? In order to answer this question, one needs to consider another question: given all these meta-reflective considerations of the speaker in the second half, in which her earlier recollection is exposed to be untrue, the question still remains what "actually happened" back then and to what extent her earlier version is not "true" to her father's original account. It will be argued that the liminal representation of the Troubles is closely related to the way in which the speaker handles this question in the second half of the text. To begin with, the speaker does not directly address what 'really' happened in the past. The moment when her father "tells me what actually happened" is not explicitly reproduced in "The Hyacinth under the Stairs". Instead, the speaker keeps her father's 'corrected' version in a nebulous realm of textual implications and hints that must be interpreted by the reader. Significantly then, the second half of the poem replicates the exact notion of a

41 German original: "dass es gerade die nebulösen, fragmentierten, widersprüchlichen und unlogischen Geschichten sind, die den Zuhörern Raum geben, ihre eigenen Versionen des Erzählten zu entwickeln und diese auch mit eigenem Sinn zu versehen […] Gerade Geschichten, in denen alles unklar ist – Zeit, Ort, Handelnde, Kausalzusammenhänge etc. – öffnen einen weiten Raum für die individuell imaginative Reinszenierung".

fragmentary transfer of memories as originally experienced by the child speaker in the past: to the reader the father's correction about what actually happened is transmitted in a fashion as secretive and open for interpretation as the father's original account was to the daughter immediately after the event took place.

Due to this nebulous presentation, the version of the incident presented in the first half of the poem is now replaced by the multitude of co-existing alternative versions. More specifically, one might infer two other readings of this moment in the father's life, depending on which indications are 'pieced together': one version that radically dismantles the national contextualisation of the speaker's previous interpretation and one version that still locates the set of events in the context of the Troubles. Regarding the first alternative version, at the very end of the poem, in a "postscript" to what happened immediately after the events (l. 122), the speaker briefly hints at an aspect that lets this situation shine in a different memory light. The poem ends with the speaker stating that

> [t]he Chrysler Avenger is found, burned out on a housing estate.
> A shiny new pillar-box red Ford Cortina estate is delivered the
> following week. (ll. 130-132)

This final triplet of the text reveals an interesting piece of information that links the postscript to something briefly mentioned at the beginning of the speaker's detailed recollection in the first half of the poem. Here, the speaker indicates that nobody in the family particularly liked the car her father got from the Hughes Brothers company. Quite on the contrary, by referring to her brother Joseph, the speaker stresses the fact that the car was actually a nuisance and a literal 'pain in the ass':

> […] It's a brassy gold colour that none of us
> like. We long for our old red Cortina estate; my wee brother Joseph
> who sits up in front on the handbrake complains the Avenger's is
> thinner, sticks into his bum, despite the red cushion my mother has
> made. (ll. 21-24)

In combining the two references to the family's car in the first and the second half, a new and significantly more incriminatory version of the past emerges. Suddenly, the father is no longer recalled as the brave victim in a national conflict but as the perpetrator acting to solve a familial 'conflict': under the guise of cars being frequently hijacked at the time, and for the sake of his family, the father might have just scored a new car from his employer by having the old and detested one hijacked. With this version in mind, the speaker's remark that she felt "gutted" upon hearing that the incident "didn't quite happen" like she imagined obtains a new semantic weight, since it signifies the speaker's painful realisation that her father turns out to be a fraudulent schemer. In this version, the IRA perpetrators and their political motives disappear out of the memory picture and the question of agency and personal guilt is revised. The "silence which fell on that day" is not a consequence of her father's personal trauma experienced in a national context but turns out to be an attempt to forget an incriminatory and shameful experience.

The second version less radically challenges the national contextualisation: given the fact that the father's surprise is only directed towards the version portrayed in the poem "Hats", which stresses the linguistic aspect of the incident, the speaker's remark that it "didn't *quite* happen like that" (emphasis added) might also indicate that only the small detail of the hijackers asking her father to spell his address might not have happened, while the rest of her interpretation remains adequate. Yet, the speaker does not comment on the 'correctness' of any of the two versions. The fragmentary implications of both co-exist in the text and none of the two alternatives is either verified or falsified. Rather, in the speaker's nebulous mode of presentation, one might argue, both exist simultaneously in a state of permanent potentiality: until stated otherwise, both versions are equally valid and invalid at the same time. In this in-between context, national history occupies a liminal position: since both versions are potentially possible interpretations, it remains utterly unresolved whether the context of the Troubles is relevant or irrelevant for interpreting the incident. Instead, in the nebulous sphere of multiple possibilities, it is potentially both and constantly meanders between being remembered as an important part for understanding the father's victimhood and being forgotten as a false and misleading framework that covers up the father's criminal action.

This in-between position of national history, as it becomes virulent in the second half of the text, also applies to the poem as a whole. With the realisation that her own version, as immersive as it might occur, mostly results from her own interpretation, the speaker also reaches a more profound understanding of memory in general. As such, she moves from the single witness account that conceptualises the Troubles as lived experience to the awareness that memory transfer within the family is founded upon ambiguities. After reflecting on the constructed nature of her own detailed account, the speaker reminds herself that even her father's retelling of the incident, as the one who actually experienced it, is merely "his/ version, refracted through memory's prism, and time" (ll. 119-120). She notices that no single account of the incident can tell the 'truth' about what happened to the father. The past remains a 'foreign country' and "what actually happened" is lost somewhere among the multitude of possible interpretations; or, as the speaker in Paul Perry's poem "Visiting Hours" (2009) points out: the fact "is that no matter how much we think/ about it, interrogate our pasts or actions/ […] we'll never really know" (ll. 77-78, 80)

The poem therefore can be read as a textual equivalent of "memory's prism": like a single light beam that travels through a prism and is instantly refracted into multiple directions, the single incident the speaker brings to the text is 'refracted' into multiple versions in "The Hyacinth under the Stairs". Thus, in the interaction between the first and the second half, the poem brings together four competing interpretations: first, the detailed witness report that paints a vivid picture of everyday dangers during the Troubles. Second, the poetic version in "Hats" that underlines this version by focusing on linguistic aspects of the encounter. Third, the version that questions the plausibility of "Hats" but still sets the event in a national context and, finally, the incriminatory version that dismantles the national context altogether by stressing the father's per-

sonal guilt. In this constellation therefore, national history is 'caught' in a liminal situation of indecision since, depending on the version, it is potentially both relevant and irrelevant for the family's memory. The presentation of national history ranges from a close remembrance of the Troubles as lived experience to the Troubles being forgotten as irrelevant for the father's incident.

"The Scar" (Tom French)

Like "The Hyacinth under The Stairs", Tom French's "The Scar" (2001) focuses on a single episode from the speaker's family history and, in doing so, reflects on the inevitable re-interpretation that occurs when one family member recalls another's personal experiences. More specifically, French's text deals with the transformative role the speaker's imagination plays in recollecting his father's experiences during the Second World War. To make this imaginative aspect of memory visible, "The Scar", like Cunningham's poem, relies on an interaction between proximity and distance, which is initiated by the speaker closely remembering the father's World War past on the one hand and critically distancing himself from his reconstruction on the other hand. In French's poem though, this interaction takes a different shape: in contrast to Cunningham's "The Hyacinth under the Stairs" and its sequential order of *first* remembering the incident *and then* reflecting on its constructed nature, in "The Scar" the two acts of remembering and evaluating are not formally separated from each other but constantly overlap in the three septet stanzas. The speaker reproduces in some detail how he used to recall his father on the battlefield when he was a child, and, while doing so, reflects on the constructed nature of this memory from today's point of view. The poem, therefore, displays a memory about a memory that combines multiple temporal levels. In the interaction between these levels, it will be shown, a liminal depiction of national history becomes visible.

Yet, before two examples of the poem's liminal remembrance will be discussed in more detail, first some general thoughts on the nature of the speaker's imagination are necessary. Generally speaking, the speaker's imagination of the past is a quasi-*filmic* imagination. Thus, the poem particularly shows that the child's image of the World War is less influenced by the father's personal experiences than it is by filmic representations of the war. As is well known from recent memory studies and didactic approaches to historiography,[42] filmic representations of historical events and contexts, which an individual has watched at some point in his/her life, can have a strong influence on how this individual personally remembers a specific era of the past; the early imagination of children, in particular, as well as their awareness of history is thus nurtured by pop-cultural media (dominantly filmic materials) and their fictional perspectives on the past. Jennie M. Carlsten and Fearghal McGarry have recently pointed out in *Film, History and Memory* (eds., 2015) that "the medium of film shapes, reinforces and subverts our understanding of the past" (Carlsten/McGarry 1). Films on historical subject matters should therefore be taken seriously as "a distinc-

42 See, for example Rüsen (1994) or Pandel (2009).

tive form of historiographical discourse with its own 'rules of engagement'" (5). More specifically, the 'language' of film often becomes a template for personal interpretations of the past, since films (unconsciously) provide the rememberer with character models, narrative frameworks and concrete audio-visual impressions in which one's own experiences (or the father's experiences) can be embedded and gain meaning.

The influence of film on memory can be seen in the way the child-speaker reconstructs his father's past alongside war movie tropes. Thus, in the second stanza, for example, the speaker remembers the father with the help of war-action hero clichés, as he alternately sees his father in the role of the superstitious sniper who "whispers a prayer before he squeezes the trigger" (l. 9), the brave, physically superior athlete "breaking records behind the lines" (l. 11), and the Green Beret type stealth warrior who observes "night-lines, armed with only flashlight and dagger" (l. 14). This juxtaposition of movie roles in a single stanza reveals the constructed nature of the child speaker's memory, as the father's past becomes a playground for creative invention, in which the speaker, as the 'director' of his invented war, can freely assign and debunk different roles for his father and thus change the 'movie' he imagines.[43] In this version, the moment of choice and the possibility of creating a new character prevail over the actual decision for one or the other outcome.

This filmic mode of memory in the poem is most interesting for the present study when it is directly linked to the interaction between album and lexicon and the liminal position of national history. Two examples shall be discussed here, beginning with the description of the father in the first stanza:

> Inventing the war I would send my father to
> I come upon him sheltering in a foxhole
> from a shower of shells or a shower of rain
> in the tentative, early days of the engagement,
> his weapon well greased and as yet unnamed,
> touching, for the umpteenth time, a sepia tint
> in his breast pocket of a woman I cannot name. (ll. 1-7)

Right from the beginning, the speaker comments on the active, transformative component involved in memory transfers. His earlier recollections of war "I would send my father to" are exposed to be acts of invention and imagination, in which the speaker becomes the 'memory director', while the father, as the original agent in the past, morphs into a more passive protagonist who is placed in, or "send […] to", film-inspired settings and roles. Thus, in reference to Aby Warburg's concept of the 'pathos-formula' as aesthetic "expressions of maximal internal affection" (quoted in Johnson 163; trans. D.B.),[44] the speaker's first 'encounter' with his father ("I come upon him") carries the visual aesthetics and filmic pathos of the terrified, young and

43 In this respect, French's poem is similar to John Redmond's "War and Peace" (2001) in which the speaker re-enacts the World war past with "toy forces" (l. 2), made of "[l]ittle grey men, little green men" (l. 5), who fulfil different roles in the speaker's childish game.

44 German original: "Ausdrucksformen des maximalen inneren Ergriffenseins".

inexperienced soldier who, while taking shelter in a dangerous environment, seeks a sense of security and familiarity by symbolically clutching a "sepia tint" with a picture of a woman who is literally close to his heart, in his "breast pocket".

In this filmic access to the past, aspects of the album and the lexicon, and of remembering and forgetting, interact. Thus, on the one hand, this proto-war scene becomes the interpretative template for the speaker to more closely connect to his father in "the early days of the engagement". The speaker embellishes the scenic image of his soldier-father with a sensual lexis ("well greased"; "touching") and thus, like the speaker in "The Hyacinth under the Stairs", temporarily creates an atmosphere of witnessing the father's experience in this very moment. In this context, references to confined spaces, such as the foxhole and the breast pocket, furthermore help to establish a sense of intimacy between the observer and the observed. Consequently, in the first stanza, the speaker applies an immersive gaze that combines sensory experience with the visual pattern learned from movies. Album and lexicon merge and aspects of national and family history interact.

On the other hand, the speaker's access to his father's experiences via a filmic imagination has its clear limits, too. The speaker can closely describe the prototypical image of a soldier, as just shown, but as soon as it comes to *personalising* the prototype by adding his father's personal traits to this – in Warburg's sense of the word – pathetic image, his proximity to the father's past fails: the close observation of the soldier touching the sepia tint significantly ends with the speaker's inability to name the woman his father loved at the time. The sensory closeness attached to the proto-soldier is suddenly confronted by the speaker's lack of knowledge about his actual father. In the same vein, he fails to provide the information if the father, at this moment, is sheltering "from a shower of shells or a shower of rain", making the setting exchangeable and non-specific. In a nutshell, the speaker can relate to the general representation of a soldier yet not to the 'flesh-and-blood' person behind the representation. As a result, the imagined scene of the cowering, young soldier, despite its components of sensory experience, remains a more abstract semantic affair learned from movies. This filmic image in the first stanza thus combines both aspects of remembering and forgetting. While it provides the tool to create an atmosphere of closely witnessing the father in the Second World War, it also embodies the speaker's insurmountable distance from his father, whose experiences remain obscured in the face of the speaker's imaginative approach to the past. In the end, the World War is at once graspable through and hidden behind a layer of filmic imagination.

The liminal position of the World War also becomes visible in the juxtaposition of the speaker's war movie version with the father's own version at the end of the poem. After the speaker, in the role of the 'memory director', has sent his father home "with a flesh-wound to his thigh" before anything worse happens, he remembers how, as a child, he would then listen to his father's own story about the scar:

> Before he sustains a head-wound or comes to grips
> with another petrified youngster like himself
> whose will to live has strengthened under fire,
> I must ask him to undo his heavy pants in order
> to send him home with a flesh-wound to his thigh
> and bear with him when [he] goes back in the future
> to retell his version of how he came by this scar. (ll. 15-21)

While the speaker already indicates in the first line of the poem that the version to follow is an invented reconstruction of the father's past (see above), he furthermore stresses the limits of a memory transfer in the very last line. As such, formally speaking, with the help of the first and last line, the speaker constructs a reflective frame for critically evaluating the child's version that is described in between. Yet, this critical frame lacks one important component: while the speaker opens the frame by clearly marking the child's version as an invention, he does not properly close it, since he does not elaborate on the exact content of the father's version and thus denies the reader any point of comparison to evaluate *to what extent* he invented the father's war experience. Instead, the brief mentioning of the father's version is immediately followed by the silence of the full stop and the end of the poem. Like in "The Hyacinth under the Stairs", this absence of a definite alternative version introduces a multitude of co-existing interpretations to the poem: regarding this open frame, it is either possible that his father was actually wounded during the war, or that his father fought in the war but obtained his wound in a completely different, non-national context or that his father was never in the war and never obtained a war wound. "The Scar" leaves the question unanswered which of these versions is the 'correct' one. Rather, as the exact origins of the father's wound remains in the dark of the familial past, all versions are equally valid and invalid, as they co-exist in a hazy realm of multiple versions. Most importantly, within this constellation, the poem introduces a moment of uncertainty about whether the World War setting is to be remembered or not. Depending on the version, it is both relevant and irrelevant for explaining the father's scar. As such, processes of remembering and forgetting interact: the speaker's close remembrance of the father in the national context of the war, as seen in the child's version, is countered by the possibility of a non-national version, in which the World War does not play a role at all and needs to be forgotten. Since neither of these versions can be ultimately verified it is both remembered and forgotten at the same time.

National History and the Family Collage

In contrast to the poems discussed above, the following poems establish a more complex relationship to the past, namely in the form of memory collages. These collages can be described as both multitemporal and polyphonic. Hence, firstly they combine multiple temporal dimensions that, in various combinations, can range from the present moment in which the speaker recalls the past, to past situations that display the personal experiences of different generations of the family. Secondly, the speaker's own perspective on the past is frequently interspersed with the perspec-

tives of other family members, either in the form of direct speech, or in the form of internal focalisation. In other words, in these poetic collages, the speaker enters a 'dialogue' with other family members and their experiences and, in between different temporal levels and perspectives, creates a highly fragmented image of the familial past.[45]

By using this complex collage form, one might argue, the poems below imitate the complexity of family memory, as it is often described in memory studies. In his classic study *La Mémoire Collective* (1950), Maurice Halbwachs defines family memory as one of the most crucial and influential collective manifestations of memory in modern societies. In his opinion, the family provides *the* pivotal 'social memory frame' (*cadre sociaux*) to define an individual's relationship with the past. As such, in the words of Nina Leonhard, one can perceive the family as a 'filter' through which the past is put into perspective and gains meaning for the individual family members (cf. Leonhard 219). Yet, while Halbwachs certainly is one of the first to point out the social significance of the family for remembering the past, he contributes less to illuminate the specific procedures and forms of *how* the past is typically remembered through this collective filter. In this respect, more recent approaches to family memory prove to be more helpful: in contemporary memory studies, the *cadre sociaux* of the family has been predominantly described as a collective filter that produces a genuinely fragmented image of the past. In her seminal study *Tischgespräche: Über Formen kommunikativer Vergemeinschaftung am Beispiel der Konversation in Familien* (1994), German sociologist Angela Keppler, for example, shows that family memory is not defined by one coherent narrative of the past: "for the members of a family, traditions do not consist of a unified story" (11; trans. D.B.).[46] Rather, she argues, "this big picture [of the past] cannot and does not exist", since family memory is fundamentally multitemporal and polyphonic (207; trans. D.B.).[47] It is a form of commemoration in which multiple participants (i.e. family members) from different generations, and with different personal experiences, co-construct the past simultaneously in repeated acts of shared remembrance. Family memory replaces the singular and linear with a multiple and fragmentary view of the past: family memory consists of a dynamic repertoire of remembered individual moments from the familial past that participants of the family tell and re-tell in different family constellations in the present (cf. Keppler 162).

Commenting on this repertoire of shared moments, in his study *Das kommunikative Gedächtnis: Eine Theorie der Erinnerung* (2005), Harald Welzer even goes one step

45 This communication between family members and the fragmented representation of the familial past does not always have to be limited to an individual poem. Martina Evans' collection *Petrol* (2012), for instance, can be read as one big family collage since it solely consists of a series of highly fragmented poetic memories of a speaker's family.

46 German original: "die eigenen Traditionen bestehen für die Angehörigen einer Familie nicht in einer einheitlichen Geschichte".

47 German original: "[d]ieses große Ganze [der Vergangenheit] gibt es nicht und kann es auch nicht geben".

further: he argues that it is not only the family's repertoire of individual family stories that is fragmentary, but that these stories themselves are often presented in a fragmentary manner:

> In this context, the communicated stories do not necessarily have to be complete, consistent or linear – quite on the contrary, they often consist of rather contradictory fragments. (165-166; trans. D.B.)[48]

Family memory therefore must be seen as a fragmentary access to the past on two levels: on the level of the individual moment that is remembered and re-told in the family context and on the level of the montage of all moments together. Welzer summarises this aspect as follows: "as little as the majority of stories shared in the family consist of closed narratives, there are also no family stories made out of 'one piece'" (166, trans. D.B.).[49]

As stated above, the poems at hand imitate this complex, fragmentary access to the past. Here as well, the past is not remembered in form of a linear, coherent account, but in a collage of fragmented past episodes about individual family members. It is in this collage-setting, as shall be argued, that national history is presented as a liminal entity in between being remembered and being forgotten. More specifically, in this fragmentary family collage the liminal presentation of national history results from the fact that national aspects of the past are merely remembered *en passant*. Keppler sees memory *en passant* as a typical phenomenon of family memory and defines it as any "memory sequences that are not actually the topic of conversation", but that nevertheless (spontaneously) occur in its course (168; trans. D.B.).[50] Adapting this idea to the poems discussed on the following pages, national history appears as a memory element that comes up 'in passing' in the speaker's collage-memory, which otherwise deals with private family matters exclusively. In this *en passant* status, national history appears on the verge of being forgotten as a minimal textual presence only mentioned 'on the side'. Yet, at the same time, in this minimal appearance, the reference to national events in a family's history still fulfils a certain function in the overall composition of the collage and thus must be regarded as an integral part in the speaker's memory nonetheless.

"Of the gas stove and the glimmerman" (Paul Perry)

A first example of a family collage can be found in Paul Perry's "Of the gas stove and the glimmerman", from his debut collection *The Drowning of the Saints* (2003). In 22 free-verse triplets, the poem offers a complex collection of various moments from the

48 German original: "Dabei müssen die kommunizierten Geschichten keineswegs vollständig, konsistent und linear sein – sie bestehen im Gegenteil häufig eher aus ziemlich widersprüchlichen Fragmenten".

49 German original: "[u]nd ebensowenig, wie das Gros der in der Familie kursierenden Geschichten aus geschlossenen Narrativen besteht, existiert auch keine Familiengeschichte 'aus einem Stück'".

50 German original: "Erinnerungssequenzen, die nicht eigens das Thema einer Unterhaltung sind".

speaker's familial past, which is both multitemporal and polyphonic. Thus, temporally speaking, the moments addressed in the collage range from the present (stanzas 1-2) to the speaker's childhood (e.g. stanzas 6; 15-17) and the grandmother's experience after the Second World War (stanzas 20-22). Regarding the communicative situation, next to the speaker's voice, the poem also features direct speech by the speaker's wife (stanza 14) and grandmother (stanza 17), as well as internal focalisation showing the grandfather's thoughts (stanzas 20-22).

Like other family collages, the collage in Perry's poem primarily deals with private family matters, while national history is merely mentioned 'in passing'. More precisely, in "Of the gas stove and the glimmerman" the speaker is predominantly concerned with personally reconstructing the figure of his absent grandfather. Thus, at the beginning of the poem, the speaker addresses a picture of his relative, "hanging in the hall":

> I'll have to ask some questions in the kitchen
> of the picture hanging in the hall, of the thin pointing nose
> and gentle eyes. I'll have to ask some questions
>
> of the civil servant, of the stranger
> with nine children. (ll. 1-5)

As the notion of "stranger" in the second triplet insinuates, the picture displays an ancestor the speaker has never met, since the grandfather has left the family, under circumstances the speaker can only guess:

> You must have left suddenly
> without warning even to yourself.
>
> You must have gotten up early for work
> and forgotten stupidly to come home.
> Silly man. (ll. 5-9)

The picture in the hall represents an element of the unfamiliar in the speaker's home. It is the pictorial reminder of the speaker's utter disassociation from his own grandfather and, in confronting the speaker with an unknown representative of the family, it becomes a challenging memory medium that presses the speaker to "ask some questions" about who this family member was.

After this initial confrontation with the picture, the speaker directly addresses the grandfather to find answers to his "questions". During this personal inquiry, he remembers different moments from his grandmother's and parents' past. Since the grandfather has been 'erased' from family memory ("as for you old man/ people don't talk about the dead", ll. 20-21), the speaker uses these various moments from the familial past as 'contouring devices' that help him to reconstruct the absent and silenced figure of the grandfather *ex negativo*. The speaker shapes the grandfather's absence, for example, by contrasting it with memories of the grandmother's general omnipresence in the family ("[s]he, on the other hand, never forgets/ a birthday", ll. 10-11; "[s]he tours her children's houses/ like a ring leader or a small storm", ll. 12-13). Similarly, he sketches the grandfather's irresponsibility for not taking care of his

"nine children" by confronting him with a past situation when the grandmother selflessly took care of her grandchildren under most dire conditions:

> or that when her mother died
> my parents were away,
>
> that she walked to our house
> to take care of us, her grandchildren,
> until my parents returned
>
> and said to them simply and sternly,
> 'We buried my mother today.' (ll. 44-50)

The speaker, therefore, uses his memories of the grandmother to retrieve the grandfather from the dark of the past.

As mentioned above, in the context of all these different family episodes, aspects of national history are merely mentioned *en passant*. More concretely, the *en passant* status of national history becomes visible in two ways: firstly, in the course of the speaker's 22-stanza illumination of the familial past, explicit references to Irish national history only appear in stanzas 6 and 12, while the other stanzas remain firmly anchored in the private realm of the past. In stanza 6, as the speaker remembers his grandmother's caring nature, he points out that she often enriched the family's collective memory by telling stories of Ireland's national past:

> […] her eyes hold the best
> part of a century. She'll tell you about the Black 'n' Tans,
> Dev, the gas stove and the glimmerman. (ll. 16-18)

In stanza 12 the speaker talks about "Stillorgan", a suburb of Dublin, and, next to recalling "the 46A" (l. 34) and "the bus she [i.e. grandmother] takes" (l. 35), also includes a reference to "the bombs that still/ wake us, the debris of our independence" (ll. 35-36).

Secondly, the *en passant* status of Ireland's past is mirrored in the poem's lexis and syntax. Lexically speaking, like in the overall composition of the poem, references to Irish history do not take a dominant position in stanzas 6 and 12 but are minimised to either single key words ("Black 'n' Tans") or a sensory impression (here: the sound of "the bombs that still/ wake us"). In the same vein, in the two triplets that refer to national history, the poetic syntax adopts a particularly enumerative style that depicts these minimal references as merely one item in a series of other elements being remembered by the speaker. Thus, stanza 6 positions the national reference in an enumeration that also contains references to the grandmother's "gas stove"-episode and in stanza 12, as already mentioned above, national history shares the poetic space with a description of "Stillorgan" and its surrounding ("the 46A"). National history, even on the level of the individual stanza, is portrayed as one minor item mentioned in passing in a longer syntactical stream that keeps drawing attention away from the national toward the private realm.

Still, this minimal textual presence must not be read as a sign of national history being just neglected and forgotten. Rather, this is only one side of the memory coin: as

argued above, memory *en passant* can be regarded as a form of remembrance with a liminal quality that operates with processes of forgetting *and* remembering alike. In the following paragraphs, two examples shall be discussed of how national aspects that are remembered *en passant* in the poem obtain a liminal quality.

To begin with, the liminal representation of national history can be seen in the *en passant* mentioning of "the bombs that still/ wake us". With this short reference, the speaker not only introduces the Troubles into the family memory discourse but also remembers a most traumatic time in Irish history. The trauma of the Troubles, one might argue, is reflected in the speaker's liminal handling of the matter. As described in the previous chapter, traumatic experiences made in the past are essentially liminal in nature as they can neither be fully integrated in nor fully excluded from memory. In the speaker's collage the *en passant* remembrance can thus be read as a reflection of the speaker's conflict between the obligation to remember and the desire to forget. Although the speaker does not intend to remember the Troubles, these memories nevertheless 'sneak' into the speaker's memory collage to confront him. On the syntactical level, the "bombs" in stanza 12 appear to 'explode' onto the speaker's recollections of "Stillorgan", to dominate the next line and immediately shift the focus from the private to the national past. The speaker now suddenly encounters the "debris of our independence" that, being positioned in an end-stopped line, gains a sense of finality in the triplet. This "debris" will not be discarded and forgotten but hauntingly re-appears and obliges the speaker to recognise its lingering presence (as much as the reader has to linger and pause after this line's full stop).

With this lingering presence, the sudden remembrance of the bombs constitutes an unpleasant and confrontational moment in the speaker's memory collage, as becomes visible in the speaker's following comment "[y]our presence is a gasp" (l. 37). This line cannot only be read as the speaker's direct address to the grandfather[51] but also as a form of commentary on the weighty presence the Troubles gain in the speaker's memory. In that reading, the memory of the Troubles appears to have a 'choking' effect on the speaker ("gasp") which additionally stresses its end-stopped, lingering presence in the previous line. As such, like other traumatic occurrences, it becomes a memory item that is too painful to be remembered and, hence, needs to be excluded from memory. Thus, in the rest of the poem, following his wife's advice, the speaker returns to "writ[ing] about the silence" of his grandfather (l. 40), as a way of 'silencing' the sound of the bombs that resonate from the past in the twelfth triplet. As such, the *en passant* remembrance of the Troubles is a liminal remembrance: the memory of the bomb cannot be simply forgotten, as it suddenly intrudes on the speaker's memory as a recognisable presence, yet it can also not be remembered as it is too painful to cope with.

Secondly, the liminal quality of an *en passant* treatment of history becomes visible on the level of the poem's overall composition. Although, as pointed out above, refer-

51 The speaker already used this exact utterance in line 9, after describing the picture in the hall.

ences to national history are strongly minimalised in the text of "Of the gas stove and the glimmerman", in this minimised appearance they nevertheless fulfil a function in the poem's repertoire of family recollections in general: national history gains a more prominent position 'in between the lines', since in the poem, family memory becomes the realm in which private and public aspects of the past intersect as co-dependent elements. By specifically remembering two moments of national conflict – implied in the "Black 'n' Tans" and "the bombs that still/ wake us" – the speaker stresses the fact that the private familial past is also genuinely a history of crisis; a history in which, for example, children grew up without a father (see above), parents were involved in arguments about their patriotism ("I think about my parents fighting/ about which of their parents/ was more patriotic", ll. 51-53) and a mother had to cope with the loss of her child ("I think of the car crash/ when my mother lost a child", ll. 55-56). As such, like the family collage in Anne Fitzgerald's "Mass Rock at Glenstal", where everyday experiences of the family meet the British survey ordinance, the family collage in "Of the gas stove and the glimmerman" offers an "existential convergence of the individual, family history and national history" (A. Assmann, *Geschichte* 74; trans. D.B.).[52] The public becomes the template for the private, and vice versa,[53] as both share the moment of conflict. This mutual dependence becomes clearly visible in the image of "the guns under the shopping trolley" (l. 54), for example, where political violence and everyday routine meet. In the same vein, to name one more example, the grandfather's and grandmother's marital crisis remembered in the last part of Perry's poem is simultaneously a reflection on the national crisis during the Second World War, when not only food and tea but also gas was rationed. Thus, the speaker's detailed reconstruction of a scene when his grandmother single-handedly managed the household, while the grandfather sat idly by to watch, becomes a vivid portrayal of the Irish citizen during the war, who had to manage the rationing while being watched by the 'glimmerman' (i.e. official inspectors assigned by gas companies of the time).

As this last example already shows, the intersection of national and family history goes hand in hand with an intersection of lived experience (album) and mediated knowledge (lexicon). In the family collage the album and the lexicon merge and elements that might have merely been learned in the first place can gain the aura of experience. Thus, by embedding references to Irish national conflicts in the family repertoire, the common *learned* narrative of Irish history, which consists of a prolonged series of hardships, becomes 'graspable' and its effect can be directly experienced due to the link to the private hardships that had to be endured in the family.

52 German original: "existentielle[] Verschränkung von Individuum, Familiengeschichte und nationaler Geschichte".

53 In a similar vein, other poems use moments from the private past as 'guidelines' for the political sphere in the present. In Moya Cannon's "Going for Milk" (2007), for example, the speaker remembers her mother repeatedly telling her as a child that she does not need to be afraid of cows since "[*m*]*ost of them are far more afraid of you/ than you are of them*" (ll. 42-43; emphasis in original). The speaker uses this advice from the past in the present to not be afraid of the young soldiers who are guarding the border between the two Irelands as she crosses from the South to the North.

The abstract knowledge of a history of hardship and endurance thus is no longer a strictly semantic matter but becomes translated into the personal realm, where it can be felt more immediately as part of the family's episodic recollections.

To conclude, next to the liminal presentation of the Troubles memory, the poem also more generally depicts national history as a liminal entity in the family collage overall. It uses typical aspects of family memory, such as an *en passant* remembrance, or the interaction between the album and the lexicon, to depict history in two ways: through key terms from the public lexicon and by activating past experiences within the familial sphere from the private album. As such, in Perry's poem history appears in a position between being remembered and being forgotten: it is distanced from memory (as it is constantly 'forgotten' in favour of more personal concerns) and included in memory (as it is inextricably linked to the personal hardships) at the same time. Despite the minimised appearance on the very fringes of the speaker's memory, therefore, national history is simultaneously firmly 'inscribed' in the family collage.

"The Jeep" (Iggy McGovern)

Another example of a poem that postulates a fragmentary access to the past via family memory is Iggy McGovern's "The Jeep" (2005). Like "Of the gas stove and the glimmerman", "The Jeep" offers a complex collage structure that combines multiple temporal layers with a polyphony of family voices. The poem, made of four stanzas with ten lines each, begins with the speaker's memory of the more recent past when he, during a vacation in the countryside, accidentally discovered his uncle's old jeep in a field:

> A summer-evacuee from town
> hunting the laying-out hen,
> I found the jeep in the lower field's
> camouflage of green and brown […]. (ll. 1-4)

The speaker's chance encounter with the jeep plays a pivotal role in the poem's memory collage overall. The jeep serves as the initial memory cue that triggers a series of other memories from the familial past, especially about situations in his uncle's and aunt's biographies. Hence, after remembering the jeep in the field, at the end of the first stanza the speaker is reminded of an evening when his uncle and aunt were dating in the jeep, then reflects on the young uncle's popularity with the local women in the second stanza ("the babes of Beragh,/ the sweethearts of Seskinore", ll. 19-20), recalls him "in uniform" during the time of the Second World War in the third stanza (l. 24), and finally recollects the moment when his uncle and aunt attempted to recover the jeep "off winter cobbles" (l. 37), with the help of "the big Clydesdale" tractor (l. 35). Like in other poems displaying a family collage, different voices by different family members co-occur in the reconstruction of these different moments. Thus, the individual recollections by the speaker are, at times, interspersed with fragments of direct speech by his uncle and aunt (cf. ll. 7-8; ll. 21-22; l. 38), through which once again family memory is portrayed as a form of remembrance founded

upon an inherent interweaving of individual voices in a repertoire of fragmentary family episodes.

It is important to note that, like in Perry's poem, within this complex repertoire of family episodes in "The Jeep", national history is once more addressed in an *en passant* fashion. Like in "Of the gas stove and the glimmerman", national history appears merely 'on the side' and is briefly remembered in a memory context predominantly concerned with private family incidents. Quantitatively speaking, references to national history in "The Jeep" are limited to individual, short passages that are instantly followed by private recollections in the rest of the text. More precisely, in the poem's four stanzas, the reconstruction of national contexts is confined to individual remarks in stanzas 1 and 3. In stanza 1, after remembering coming across the jeep in the more recent past, the speaker briefly wonders about the exact time and moment when this jeep had been abandoned in the field. He asks himself if the jeep "[w]as […] left behind on D-Day when/ the Yanks went off to die in France?" (ll. 5-6). Yet, in the very next line, he immediately shifts back from the larger historical frame to the intimacy of the private past: in the rest of the stanza, the speaker moves the memory focus from the broader notion of "France" to the highly restricted interior of the jeep and the uncle's and aunt's "sweet talk" therein. In a similar manner, in stanza 3, upon reconstructing his uncle in uniform at the time of the 'Emergency', the speaker briefly attempts to locate his relative in the Northern Ireland of the Second World War (his uncle lived in "sweet Tyrone", l. 26) and ponders upon the question if his uncle

> [w]as […] the only Ulster Catholic
> to hear a mass in battle-kit
> beneath the king-on-white-horse frieze
> of an Orange Hall billet? (ll. 27-30)

In this situation as well, the speaker does not explicitly follow the historical dimension of this private experience any further. In the transition between stanzas 3 and 4, for example, another shift from the national to the private occurs and the speaker immediately turns from this inquiry into the cultural horizon of the Northern Irish past, back to a situation firmly rooted in the everyday horizon of the family, when remembering his uncle and aunt having "difficulties finding parts" for the jeep (l. 32).

Most importantly in the present context, this *en passant* treatment of national history in "The Jeep" epitomises another instance of liminal retrospection at the nexus between remembering and forgetting. This liminal presentation is directly connected to the poem's juxtaposition of two competing versions of the Second World War: the family's private version, based on lived experience, and the national, public version, based on shared knowledge. In this regard, McGovern's poem differs from Perry's text. Whereas in "Of the gas stove and the glimmerman", the briefly mentioned national narratives of hardship become complementary parts to a conflictual family history – since both share the moment of crisis – McGovern's poem illustrates a clear *discrepancy* between private familial and public national perspectives on Ireland's past. In other words, in this poem, the album and the lexicon do not interact but are opposed to each other. In the poem, this discrepancy is most obviously embodied in

the figure of the speaker's uncle himself, who is remembered as a truly liminal character: his personal experiences during the Second World War do not match the official, national accounts about this era. As such, he can neither be included in the World-War-narrative of the Catholic minority, nor in the narrative of the Protestant majority in Northern Ireland. Rather, by asking if his uncle might have been the

> only Ulster Catholic
> to hear a mass in battle-kit
> beneath the king-on-white-horse-frieze
> of an Orange Hall billet

in the third stanza, the speaker retrospectively portrays his uncle as having been at odds with the two communities and their respective stance on the war. In the first two lines of this passage, the speaker insinuates a friction between the Northern Irish Catholic community's war agenda and the Catholic uncle's decision to enlist. The line "to hear a mass in battle-kit" emblematically bears an inherent tension between the images of the mass in the first, and the uncle's battle-kit in the second half, which becomes most palpable in the line's phonological and rhythmical pattern: the description of the mass starts in a slow, meditative rhythm developing out of the succession of two long vowels in a regular iambic metre ("to h*ea*r a m*a*ss"; emphasis added). Yet, in the second half, the "battle-kit" disrupts this sombre flow of the line with its contrasting short vowels and the accumulation of abrupt plosive sounds (*batt*le-*kit*; emphasis added) and introduces a harsher staccato pattern instead. Given this sudden rhythmical alteration and phonological contrast in the same line, the battle-kit seems to sit uneasily with the textual surrounding of the mass, which can be read as a metaphor for the uncle's personal deviance from his Catholic surrounding and the Catholic 'anti-war' discourse more generally. Hence, as a Catholic in battle-kit, who decided to enlist – he was even sent to New York for a "wet week" to be united with other allied forces (l. 23), before he, "the luck of it" (l. 25), returned home without seeing any front war action – the uncle is disassociated from other members of the Catholic minority in the North, who sympathised with the neutrality of the Catholic majority across the border. In fact, the discourse of neutrality became so dominant at the time that any 'dissenting' Catholic, who volunteered against Eamon de Valera's decision to stay out of the war, would be stigmatised as a 'traitor' to the greater cause of the Republic. In this context, the image of the uncle in battle-kit likewise becomes the visual marker of his social and discursive exclusion and of his 'disloyalty' to the rest of the Northern Irish Catholic community. By enlisting, he turns into the 'odd one out' among other mass participants, or, in other words, the one that does not fit the rhythm anymore.

As little as the speaker's uncle fits in with the Catholic community as a Catholic in *battle-kit*, as a *Catholic* in battle-kit he does not belong to the community of Ulster Protestants either. From the very start of the Second World War, the Unionist government under Sir James Craig propagated the necessity of conscription legislation for Northern Ireland. To legitimise this claim, Craig linked the current war situation to a long-lasting Protestant memory discourse, preponderantly circulated in public by

the influential Orange Order. In the company of Orangemen like Craig, the history of (Northern) Ireland was collectively remembered as a continuous project to protect and maintain the Protestant faith and loyalism to the Crown. Symbolically, this narrative finds its starting point in the 'Protestant Champion' William of Orange (i.e. "the king-on-white-horse"),[54] who, so the shared memory goes, by defeating Catholic king James II on Irish ground during the Battle of the Boyne (1690), restored Protestantism in England and secured the position of the Protestant Ascendency in Ireland.

In the poem, the Catholic uncle's personal disassociation from this Orange Order narrative is more concretely shown in the way he is recalled in connection to his physical environment in lines 29 and 30. This passage, which provides another instance of the speaker focalising the past through his uncle's eyes, shows him as being unable to relate to the iconography and memory culture of Ulster Orangeism, presented here in the form of "the king-on-white-horse frieze" that looms above him in an "Orange Hall". Thus, the speaker's uncle perceives the visual properties of the frieze (i.e. a king on a white horse), without acknowledging the memory dimension behind this memorial. In this memory, William of Orange remains anonymous and the notion of not identifying the king by name can be read as an implication of the uncle's own lack of identification with what this 'Protestant Champion' represents. Since the speaker's uncle is excluded from the Orange Order narrative during and after the Second World War, the "king-on-white-horse frieze" lacks any 'memory power' within the family context: it remains a merely visual stimulus in the remembered situation, while the official memory narrative attached to this memorial piece is not referred to.

This discrepancy between the uncle's experience and publicly shared memory narratives establishes the very foundation for the poem's liminal remembrance of national history. More specifically, the poem treats the national narratives about the Second World War as both part and not part of the family collage. This liminal position between inclusion and exclusion is expressed in the very form in which the narratives enter the memory collage: they are introduced in the form of questions (see stanza 1 and 3) – as the only questions the speaker asks in the entire poem – which unite elements of remembering and forgetting with each other. On the one hand, the questions temporarily broaden the memory focus and bring the speaker to reflect on the larger context in which the individual private experiences can be embedded. Yet, at the same time, in the act of juxtaposing these private experiences to broader national concerns, the question format also contains an element of interrogating these very narratives. Since the learned narratives from the public lexicon do not match with the content of the family's album, the question turns into a tool for dismantling them as incongruous elements that do not fit the family-repertoire and thus cannot be incorporated in the collage. As such, the learned narratives are both included and, in being included next to private accounts, pushed aside at the same time. More concretely, in addition to the Orange Order narrative that enters the memory collage in the form of

54 William of Orange is most famously depicted on a white horse in a painting by Jan Wyck in 1688.

the frieze, the speaker also dismantles the narrative of the "D-Day". He remembers D-Day in the context of "the Yanks" and thus reproduces the myth of the Normandy landing as a genuinely American endeavour and glory. Yet, as the speaker remembers his Northern Irish uncle traveling to New York to join the American forces, this American myth of the D-Day needs to be revised in the family collage: the jeep becomes the material evidence that it was not only "the Yanks" that responded to the call of arms, but also Irish men that exchanged their fields at home with the battlefields abroad to "die in France". The American narrative is thus yet another narrative that does not cover the uncle's personal war effort, and is inadequate to frame his experiences. In McGovern's "The Jeep" the uncle turns into a 'bastion' against both the Catholic narrative of neutrality and the Protestant narrative of loyalty, as well as against the American myth of the D-Day. In the form of questions, all these narratives enter the collage on the one hand and need to be forgotten as elements that get in the way of the uncle's actual experiences, on the other hand.

In conclusion, the poem's memory collage becomes a space of re-interpretation that provides a 'fresh perspective' on the national past. In their liminal treatment, traditional narratives are brought up but are instantly revised in the context of the speaker's family history. The liminal position of history, therefore, provides a space in which fixed structures become softened, old memory connotations are unravelled and new perspectives on the past can arise. As such, the speaker's act of uncovering the family's jeep from underneath the "camouflage of green and brown", simultaneously signals a revisionist act of uncovering the family's divergent voices from underneath the 'camouflage' of official commemoration: by closely focusing on the family's past experiences, the speaker revives the family members and their episodic memories as visible manifestations in the text that now 'speak up' against the official perspectives on the past. The poem inverts the memory hierarchy and turns into a poetic act of defiance that allows those private individuals to speak who are usually not represented in the official narratives. Thus, as the last two lines of the poem programmatically state, in this memory collage, the speaker re-ignites "bright fireflares [sic] of early battles" (l. 39) – here simultaneously referring to personal 'battles' between the uncle and aunt and the actual battles of the Second World War – to break the "silent truce" (l. 40) and start a new 'battle' against established versions of the national past.

3.4 Type III: National History and Authentic Memory

The third type of poetic memory that fosters a liminal remembrance of national history can be labelled *authentic memory*. In contrast to the first two types discussed above, liminal remembrance in authentic memory poems relies on a different interactional pattern between the album and the lexicon. Whereas indirect memory and family memory display experience and knowledge in a relationship that is at least somehow complementary, authentic memory is based on a more asymmetrical connection: the relevant poems dominantly rely on the album, to the extent of almost entirely excluding elements of the public lexicon. As such, these poems often apply a 'hyper-

zoom' on sensory impressions of a past scene, while the broader national contextualisation is presented in a blurred manner and is kept in a space between being remembered and being forgotten. As the terms 'zoom' and 'blurred' already indicate, this liminal depiction of national history is closely linked to the poems' reliance on aspects of photography and videography. More to the point, below three kinds of poems shall be discussed that all, in one way or another, recollect the past via photographic or video-graphic means, by which they achieve the impression of an 'authentic' access to the past.

To that end, and in order to properly analyse the three kinds in more detail, it is, first and foremost, important to define what 'authentic' means exactly in the context of these poems, and how this notion of authenticity is related to photography and videography. This is all the more important, since, over the last few decades, authenticity has gained momentum as a central concept in popular and academic discussions, and the term has witnessed its fair share of different definitions and applications accordingly. According to Susanne Knaller, in recent decades, the term quickly evolved to become one of today's "*catchword*[s]" in areas as diverse as "in sports, politics, economy, science, philosophy, religion and art" (*Ein Wort* 7; emphasis in original; trans. D.B.).[55] Similarly, Charles Lindholm argues that "[t]he quest for authenticity touches and transforms a vast range of human experience today" (1). He underlines his hypothesis by listing some of the areas in which the concept has been adopted as of late: "we speak of authentic art, authentic music, authentic food, authentic dance, authentic people, authentic roots" (1). To this list, Wolfgang Funk, Florian Groß and Irmtraud Huber add "the 'authentic' politician, and 'authentic' brand handbags […] authentic food-chains and 'authentic' tourist adventures" and, like Lindholm, conclude that "authenticity has obviously become a major selling point" in contemporary societies (Funk/Groß/Huber 10).

With all these areas in mind, it does not come as a surprise that a unified definition of authenticity does not exist and that the concept has become increasingly 'fuzzy' around the edges. Yet, despite the concept's context-sensitivity, many definitions, as Julia Straub points out, often share a common conceptual core nonetheless: it is the understanding that the concept of authenticity relies on a conflictual dichotomy "between inside and outside" (14). Thus, many definitions, in one way or another, construct the notion of an *inside*, where the 'pure' and 'unadulterated' is thought to reside, which is "controlled by and ultimately in conflict with" a fake *outside* that threatens to corrupt and disguise the pure nature of the internal (Straub 14; emphasis in original). There are manifold examples of this conflict between inside and outside, ranging from definitions of authenticity in self-help literature, advising its readers to protect an inner self (i.e. inside) against the manipulative force of society (i.e. outside; cf. Guignon 6), and authentic punk music maintaining its raw, rebellious spirit (i.e. inside) against the danger of being over-produced in studio recordings (i.e. outside),

55 German original: "in Sport, Politik, Wirtschaft, Wissenschaft, Philosophie, Religion und Kunst".

to authentic food that is marketed as unprocessed (i.e. inside), without any artificial additives being added in the process (i.e. outside).[56] In whatever area the dichotomy is applied in the end, what is most important in these and other examples is the fact that the attribution of authenticity to a person or thing within an inside/outside dichotomy generally goes hand in hand with an emancipatory gesture: the 'authentic' is linked to a notion of *uncovering* and/or protecting an internal element by peeling away the fraudulent external layers in which it is kept. In that regard, Straub continues, authenticity in its most basic conceptual sense refers to "the externalisation of the internal or the making visible and graspable of what is private and on the inside" (14)

With this minimal definition in mind, the term 'authentic memory' can be defined more properly. This type of memory is labelled 'authentic' because it also contains elements of uncovering and "making visible" an internal element which is hidden underneath external layers: authentic memory refers to a form of remembering the past in Irish poetry, in which, with the help of specific literary strategies, a speaker seemingly dissolves the temporal and interpretative gap between the 'original' experience in the past (i.e. the inside) and its subsequent reconstruction through memory in the present (i.e. the outside). As such, authentic memory poems aesthetically imitate a *direct access* to the past, which means that in this type of memory a past situation is remembered as if the speaker were able to travel back in time to (re)experience the moment itself. In that way, the speaker seemingly circumvents and 'strips off' the manipulative layers of interpretation added later in the memory process. Authentic memory poems, therefore, depict a past moment 'live' in its making, as if it happened as the speaker speaks. The speaker's connection to the past is rather a matter of *re-enactment* than of reconstruction, since this type is characterised by a speaker's sensory and emotional immersion into the past to "mak[e] visible" the 'thing itself' and not merely its retrospective recollection. Hence, in contrast to the first two types of memory, which are more or less strongly mediated accesses to the past – i.e. mediated through public representations in indirect memory and a family member's stories in family memory – the type of authentic memory depicts an unmediated and 'unadulterated' access that directly captures a past moment.

As pointed out before, in the poems discussed below, this direct and immersive access to the past is more concretely realised in the poems' connection to photography/videography. What does this mean? In its early stages, photography (as well as videography) was regarded as the 'authentic medium' par excellence that is capable of initiating a direct gaze at an entity. Unlike paintings or literary works, where the 'thing' to be examined needs to pass through the painter's/writer's imagination, photographs and videos, produced by the technical device of the camera, can fully dispense with the mediating instance of a subjective creator and can therefore directly

56 For further details on the relationship between marketing/consumerism and authenticity see *Authenticity in Culture, Self, and Society* (2009), edited by Phillip Vannini and J. Patrick Williams, or James H. Gilmore's and B. Joseph Pine's *Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want* (2007).

capture what is in front of the lens, without any subjective filter. Thus, as one of the 'fathers' of photography, Henry Fox Talbot, famously claims, "it is not the artist who makes the picture, but the picture makes itself" (quoted in Knaller, *Ein Wort* 77). Similarly, Thomas Susanka points out that in photography

> the subject of an image would depict itself and hence guarantee its own truthfulness. The influence of the image's creator […] would cease to be decisive of whether a depiction is faithful to the original or not. (95)

In contrast to the painter's/writer's hand, which represents the subjective 'touch' involved in these presentations of an entity, the camera lens becomes the neutral and objective purveyor of the 'thing itself' that is accurately recorded in the moment, rather than composed retrospectively. In this context, Susanne Knaller states that

> the photographic image reformulates the idea of the imitation of nature and gives romantic fantasies of immediacy a positivistic turn. It thereby confirms a reality beyond representation and reception. ("Ambiguousness" 55)

Photographs (and videos), in other words, offer the impression of a direct, unfiltered engagement with a moment 'authentically' captured in time. More concretely, this "impression of authenticity", Susanka continues, is constituted by creating both a sense of "spatial proximity" (as the camera is close to the events) and "temporal immediacy" (as the camera can capture an event while it happens) that draws the spectator into the scene (96).

The three kinds of poems to be discussed in this chapter, in one form or another, make use of this 'authentic potential' of photography/videography to directly capture "things […] that are not, or no longer present" (Dörfler 17; trans. D.B.).[57] These three kinds can be described as follows: in the 'simplest' form, in some poems, the notion of a 'direct access' is negotiated via a speaker who encounters a concrete photograph in the present, which brings him/her to reflect upon the past. In contrast, in other poems, the speaker does not look at a concrete photographic depiction, but rather imitates a photographic gaze on the past. Subsequently, these poetic memories shall be labelled 'snapshot memories', since they, like a snapshot taken with a photo-camera, capture single visual impressions in a specific moment in time. As will be shown, in precisely capturing a certain moment, these poems reveal similarities to the Imagist tradition in modernist poetry. Similar to the second kind, several poems of the authentic memory type additionally apply a video-graphic perspective on the past. These memories shall be labelled 'clip memories', since they resemble a short video clip, in which the speaker 'records' a spatially and temporally limited sequence of actions happening in front of him/her. All three kinds, as pointed out above, heavily rely on the album in their access to the past, yet they differ in their 'philosophy' of an 'authentic' gaze at the past: while poems focusing on individual photographs address the traditional question in memory studies how accessible the 'actual' past is from the present in the form of pictorial representations, snapshot and clip memories trans-

57 German original: "Dinge […], die sich nicht, oder nicht mehr in unserer Gegenwart befinden".

cend (or simply ignore) this fundamental discussion and follow a more 'post-modern' conviction that if there is nothing beyond representation, and if authenticity is nothing more than a constructed phenomenon actively ascribed to something/someone, one can at least create the *impression* of an authentic gaze at the past through literary means. In other words, these latter poems, one might claim, show a 'neo-realistic' perspective on the past, in which the aspect of representability no longer plays a role; this also affects the way liminal remembrance is created in each form of authentic memory poem, as will be shown next.

Poems on Concrete Photographs

Before discussing poems that remember the past in the form of a poetic 'snapshot' or a 'clip', the analysis shall start with some poems in contemporary Irish poetry that connect memory and photography in a simpler manner, as they deal with concrete photographs as repositories of the past. These poems all follow a similar scheme: a speaker (most commonly a lyrical I) encounters an individual photograph in the present, which subsequently enables him/her to (more or less) personally connect with the past moment depicted in the picture. Hence, in contrast to snapshot and clip memories, which exclusively focus on a past moment, while leaving the 'manipulative' impact of the present behind, poems that deal with concrete photographs rely on an interaction between present and past. In this context, the speaker's album plays a most important role, as it becomes the 'connective force' between the two temporal dimensions: by personally perceiving the photo as a physical entity in the present, the speaker attempts to directly access a moment of personal experience in the past, with the photograph becoming a sort of 'gateway'. This can, for instance, be seen in Sinéad Morrissey's poem "The Doctors" from her collection *Parallax* (2013), in which the speaker negotiates the past through a photograph of old soviet doctors performing their medical practice. As shall be shown, it is in this co-existence of present and past, as connected by a speaker's experience (while mostly excluding the lexicon) that the liminal depiction of history occurs. The exact connection between the present and the past, established via a concrete photograph, takes on different shapes in individual poems, ranging from speakers succeeding in 'traveling back' to a past moment to speakers becoming aware that the present inevitably shapes their understanding of the past, rendering the notion of an 'authentic' access invalid.

"Red" (Tom French)

Tom French's sonnet "Red" (2001), for example, represents a poem in which a direct access is possible. In the poem, "a print/ of thirteen troopers lighting up and resting" during the First World War becomes the platform for the present-day speaker to negotiate the discrepancies between the 'actual' experience of the 'Great War' in the past and its historiographic reconstruction in the present (ll. 3-4). The poem does so by juxtaposing two perspectives on the past – one based on the public lexicon, the other on the private album. Formally speaking, the two perspectives are presented in the frame and centre of the sonnet: faced with the picture of the troopers in a histo-

riographical monograph, in the framing lines 1-3 and 12-14 the speaker directly quotes from a historian's annotation to the photograph (i.e. the lexicon), while at the centre, he shifts into the first-hand perspective of one of the soldiers depicted (i.e. the album). Both perspectives shall be briefly discussed below.

At the centre of the sonnet, the photograph allows a direct access to the past, as if the spectator could 'relive' the moment itself by looking at the picture. More specifically, the speaker gains an immediate connection to the past by noticing a strong physical likeness between himself and one of the soldiers: "[t]he man at the very back is the spit of me" (l. 5). This likeness provides the basis on which the speaker is able to transgress temporal boundaries: the soldier's *Doppelgänger*-appearance enables the speaker to switch from his present position as a spectator of a photograph to the role of the similarly looking soldier. The speaker becomes one of them, as can be seen in the fact that now, the initial first-person perspective, as shown in line 5 ("spit of *me*"; emphasis added), is replaced by the perspective of the collective 'we' of the soldier's regiment, starting in line 6:

> We have stopped in our tracks to be snapped
> because our first sight of the birdie may be
> our last, and are giving prosperity our finest shot. (ll. 6-8)

Like in many 'snapshot' poems to be examined below, the moment that is "snapped" here in the brevity of three lines is presented in a manner that elicits an impression of immediacy: the adoption of the soldier's perspective, the sustained rhythmical flow created through the run-on-lines that connect each line of the tercet, as well as, for instance, the use of the present gerund (i.e. "are giving") evoke a 'here-and-now-effect', as if the moment is witnessed 'live' as it happens, and not in retrospection.

Sharing the soldier's personal album, the speaker remembers the regiment's situation in the First World War as an existence in which danger is constantly imminent. As such, even the rather 'harmless' activity of taking a group photo to keep memory alive is overshadowed by impending death: the soldiers permanently sway between life and death, since this first-time photograph might also be their very last. This in-betweenness can best be seen in the ambivalent lexis of the three lines. The notion of "to be snapped", for example, can both refer to the act of capturing/ keeping a moment alive for generations to come in the form of a snapshot photograph, as well as to the act of taking something away rapidly, in the sense of life being 'snapped up'. Similarly, the final word of the tercet ("shot") implies another note of violence: as they stop in their "tracks" in order to be photographed, they are not just a motif for the photographer to give him "our finest shot" but also a target for the enemy and his deadly shot.

This version of the past, which represents the soldier's personal experience, is contrasted with the historiographical annotation to the photograph that the speaker reads in the present. The annotation tells a different story, or rather, it does not tell the soldier's story at all. In the "caption" to the photograph (l. 3), the personal experiences of

the soldiers and, even more importantly, the soldiers themselves are excluded entirely. Instead, the focus is on the object of the "*Hapsburg uniforms of 1914*":

> 'The *Hapsburg uniforms of 1914*
> were meticulously differentiated between
> ten shades of red'. (ll. 1-3; emphasis in original)

In this context, a different connection to the past is evoked: from this perspective, the picture provides surfaces, not depths; it is about the uniforms and their colour spectrum, not the soldiers 'within'. The historian's gaze is not concerned with the idiosyncrasies of the individual soldier but rather with "tell[ing] one dug-up shred of tunic from another" (l. 11). In this annotation, the individual soldiers depicted in the photograph remain unmentioned and are not remembered for their own sake but become mere representatives for exemplifying the history of military fashion during the First World War. As such, a sanitised version of the past is presented in the lexicon. The poem suggests that the red colour of the soldiers' blood is replaced by the visual spectacle of the uniforms' rich spectrum of red fabric, for present spectators to admire. In that regard, the historian distinguishes

> 'Cherry' from 'Rose', 'Burgundy' from 'Lobster',
> 'Amaranth' from 'Crimson', 'Scarlet' from 'Wine',
> 'Carmine' from its sister colour 'Madder'. (ll. 12-14; emphasis in original)

The historiographical perspective refuses to take into consideration the fears and hopes of those who actually experienced this past moment, but rather objectifies and abstracts. The historian, one might argue, resembles the one soldier in the picture who uses his "binoculars" and "focuses on the sky" (l. 9), while all the other soldiers are looking straight at the camera. In other words, he is the one averting the gaze from the actual soldiers right in front of him.

In the end, the photograph enables both perspectives on the past: historiographical reflections on the one hand, and the recuperation of first-hand personal experiences on the other. However, the poem suggests that it is only the speaker's personal experience of the picture, and the individual soldiers depicted, that can access the 'core' of the 'actual' experience (as it is positioned at the 'core' of the sonnet), while the historiographic perspective remains ultimately distant from this experience. As such, by combining the present-day perspective of the historian with the re-enactment of the past experience of the soldier, French's sonnet displays a clear preference for the album-related access to the past. The official perspective of the lexicon is criticised for its utter failure to capture what happened back then. The present corrupts the actual moment and it is the speaker's task to uncover the 'authentic' experience that is hidden underneath the official interpretation. The speaker, therefore, remembers what the public has forgotten.

"Manulla Junction" (Paula Meehan)

In contrast to French's poem, which conceives of photographs as 'gateways' to directly access the past, Paula Meehan's poem "Manulla Junction" (2000) establishes a meta-perspective on the correlation between memory and photography. As such, it

questions this very notion of a direct access and the idea of an 'authentic' connection to the past via a photograph. Yet, at the beginning, the poem starts out exactly like "Red": a first-person speaker engages with a photograph in the present, which portrays a particular moment of the past, "halted forever" in the form of the picture at hand (l. 2). Through this picture, which is "*a photograph by Father Browne*" (paratext; emphasis in original),[58] it first appears the speaker seemingly also gains a direct access to the past. The photograph shows a young Irish girl waiting with a suitcase at a train station:

> She stands in the station the first day of spring,
> halted forever in that precise gesture. Something
> fey to this girl, with her father's old suitcase,
> tied up with twine […]. (ll. 1-4)

While looking at the picture, the speaker, like in French's poem, is immediately caught by what is portrayed in the photograph: "what drew Father Browne to her radiant face/ […] draws me too" (ll. 15-16). It is the "energy radiating outward from her now bleached face" that (seemingly) allows a direct access to this past figure and the situation she is in (l. 18). As the speaker notices that there is "[s]omething fey" emanating from this girl, she starts right away to reconstruct the past scenario with the girl at the centre:

> The wind in her golden hair, all of Irish history at her back,
> no notion of what might lie further on down the track.
> The taste of the unknown city on her tongue,
> or a song she has never heard sung. (ll. 5-8)

In the speaker's version, the girl appears in a liminal position. The train station, as a transitional space, signifies the girl's own uncertain position of being stuck between a heavily laden past and an unknown future, or between the burden of "Irish history" and, faced with "a song she has never heard sung", her inability to project a future self. This condition, the speaker continues, "torments her and turns her narrow bed/ into a grave" (ll. 9-10).

By depicting the girl as a tormented figure that is badgered by the full weight of "all of Irish history", the speaker refers to a well-established tradition in Irish culture: the girl stands in the long line of other female figures, such as Dark Rosaleen or Cathleen Ni Houlihan, who, in their tales of suffering and their defiance of their masters, represent the Irish nation itself (cf. Schrage-Früh, *Emerging Identities*). Here, in the form of the symbol of a female Irish nation, the speaker projects an element from the public (nationalist) lexicon onto the photograph, as the girl's personal inability to get rid of the past becomes an allegory of the Irish nation being stuck in the same tale of suffering time and again. The girl's own "fey" appearance in this situation signals Ireland's deplorable state of being haunted and consumed by an ever-present past. Formally

58 Although not directly indicated, 'Father Browne' might refer to the famous Irish photographer Francis Browne, who is most well-known for his pictures of the Titanic. Next to being a renowned photographer, he was a Jesuit priest, which may explain the notion of 'Father' in the paratext.

speaking, this endless presence, for example, is shown in the speaker's reference to the future in line 6: this line, which addresses what lies "further on down the track", is connected via end-rhyme with the stanza's previous line and its mentioning of "all of Irish history at her back". In other words, the line referencing the future is formally drawing back on the past (as part of a rhyming couplet). If the nightmarish past "vexed by a rocking cradle" brings forth a terrifying beast in William Butler Yeats' poem "The Second Coming" (1919; l. 20), the haunting past in "Manulla Junction" brings forth a threatening, unknown future that ultimately ends in the image of the "grave".

With this notion of the "grave" the speaker suddenly ends her 'immersion' into the past and takes a step back in order to reflect upon the process of her encounter with the photograph. Faced with the tragic finality of the girl's fate, the speaker wonders if her reconstruction shows the girl's 'actual' past at all, or if it merely expresses her culturally conditioned *interpretation* of the girl's past: "[o]r is this what I choose to read and have read?" (l. 10). With the Irish tale of suffering in mind, the speaker more specifically asks if she has unwillingly constructed the girl as a tragic character in a "lonely narrative" (l. 11); a narrative fostered in the public lexicon, which, like in French's poem, might not represent the girl's individual experiences. Thus, she wonders: "why assign her victim? Why deduce grief/ from her shiny shoes, from the fresh budded leaf?" (ll. 13-14). In particular, the speaker questions the reliability of her negative access to the past, because, as the "shiny shoes" and "fresh budded leaf" already indicate, the photograph might also suggest an opposite reading that is no less plausible: instead of a tale of suffering and grief, the speaker thinks to herself, "[w]hy not/ a joyous journey ahead of her to a glorious spot?" (ll. 11-12). Confronted with these opposing narratives, at this point in the poem the speaker's initial direct connection to the past via the photograph is now replaced by a reflective distance toward the past. The photograph does not offer a direct access to the girl's young existence, but rather obscures the 'actual' past through potentially triggering multiple readings at once, of which, from the speaker's perspective, neither can be verified and each is equally constructed. As such, the girl remains in a liminal position, as each version that is remembered is already latently forgotten in favour of the next one. In the end, the photograph is not a 'gateway' to link past and present but, quite on the contrary, a reminder for the speaker that the past must indeed remain a 'foreign country'. The past is irretrievably lost and the only thing left is a photographic representation that serves as the stage on which the girl is "recruit[ed]" for the speaker's "opera" of imaginatively envisioning her past in the present (l. 20).

In "Manulla Junction", therefore, the speaker is not only a passive observer who is 'drawn' into the photograph to witness the 'actual' past, but an active creator of meaning. With the past over and gone, and no 'pure inside' left to uncover, the speaker notices her power to create "a path" for the girl on her own volition (l. 22). In this newfound role, the speaker envisions herself as a form of savior who, reminiscent of speakers in Eavan Boland's or Medbh McGuckian's poetry, needs to release the girl from the 'same old' role of the tragic Irish female in a tale of suffering. Thus, she pro-

claims: “I want to give her a happy ending” (l. 21), followed by the notion that the girl is supposed to gain “at least like me a path she can endure” (ll. 21-22). Hence, in the remainder of the poem, the speaker revises the “already written fate[ ]” (l. 23) by depicting her as a girl who, when “she woke to and rose to and went from out her father’s house” in the Irish countryside (l. 27), has “those angers spent” that tie her to the past (l. 28). Without any burden left, the girl can now turn toward an open future and a “joyous journey”.

“The Photograph of My Aunts” (Joan McBreen)

Last but not least, Joan McBreen’s “The Photograph of My Aunts”, taken from *Winter in the Eye: New & Selected Poems* (2003), also combines a direct access to the past via a photograph with a more reflective distance. In this poem, the photograph’s sheer material presence in the speaker’s present-day home establishes a ghost-like aura that uncannily envelops the speaker in between a sense of familiarity and unfamiliarity with the past depicted. The poem begins with the speaker’s rediscovery of a forgotten photograph showing her aunts “in late summertime” (l. 4), sometime in the past:

> The photograph I found beneath the purple box
> must have been lost and left behind. (ll. 1-2)

In the act of retrieving the photograph as a physical object from “beneath the purple box”, the speaker is immediately confronted with the past moment the picture portrays, as the detailed description of the photographic motif shows in the next stanza:

> Goats graze under lilac trees. Two older women
> wearing straw hats, stitch in pink and blue,
> tiny knitted garments: their dresses blow in a breeze
> that lifts the edges, revealing black button boots. (ll. 5-8)

Next to being captured in the simple present, the inclusion of minor details in the description, such as the “pink and blue” stitch pattern of the “tiny knitted garments”, has an immersive effect: although the speaker did not take part in this past moment, her own experience of carefully observing the picture in the present appears to enable her to get close to the ‘original’ experience of the past moment as such. By closely perceiving the photo in the present, the speaker, much like the “breeze” that “reveal[s]” what is covered underneath “their dresses”, is able to uncover the ‘authentic’ moment itself from underneath its photographic representation. In that vein, she is ‘getting closer’ to the photograph through a description of not only the visual details, but also of other sense perceptions. Thus, to name one example, the speaker appears to transform from a distant spectator to a direct participant in the past moment who can feel the “*warm* wall of the house” that “[t]hey [i.e. the aunts] lean against” in the picture (l. 17; emphasis added), while the aforementioned breeze has their “hair blown in a hazy lane” (l. 10).

In other parts of the poem, the very gap between past and present is re-opened. Thus, for example, in the second half of the poem, the speaker’s immersion into the past is suddenly countered by the epiphanic realisation that “[t]he sisters are dead” (l.

15). At this point, the regular rhythm of the first half is broken and successively replaced by a more staccato-like, single-line syntax towards the end, which underlines the increasingly failing connection to the past on a formal level. In the realisation that the aunts are dead, the speaker is taken back to the present immediately: the past moment, as much as the aunts' lives, is irretrievably lost (or, in the truest sense of the word, 'past') and can therefore not be fully revived. The only fragment still paying tribute to the aunts' former existence is the photograph itself. With this awareness of the photograph as a physical presence in her present home, the close connection to the past is now converted into a distance towards the past moment depicted. In particular, this distance is shown in the speaker's sudden awareness that the photograph, in contrast to the first half of the poem, shows a mere *representation* of the past, not the past itself. In that sense, emblematically, the photograph now "hangs over the piano/ near the painting of an apple orchard" (ll. 13-14). The spatial juxtaposition of the photograph next to the landscape painting underlines its representational character. What is left of the past moment in the present is not the natural setting of goats grazing "under lilac trees" as such, but, as in the painting, a representation of nature. The speaker is ultimately left in a liminal position: the past depicted in the photograph can neither be fully remembered, since there is always the distance of the photographic representation involved, nor simply forgotten, since the situation and persons portrayed are too familiar. In the centre of the poem, therefore, right between the immersion in the first and the return to the present in the second half, the speaker comes to the realisation that the past obtains a lingering ghost-like existence, carrying traces of familiarity, in the form of the 'haunting' presence of the photograph: "[t]his portrait stares from my wall,/ the faces haunt me with other likenesses" (ll. 11-12).

National History in 'Snapshot Memories'

As pointed out above, the poems to be discussed next rely on a different relationship between memory and photography, as they imitate a photographic gaze at the past. In these snapshot poems, the speaker is not so much a human agent per se, as he/she resembles the device of a camera itself. Like a camera as a "disembodied witness", neutrally observing a scene (Knaller, *Ein Wort* 79), the speaker presents the past as an impersonal instance that neutrally 'zooms in' on and 'snaps' visual impressions of a past moment. Accordingly, he/she presents the past from a heterodiegetic and covert position, where, in contrast to speakers in the poems discussed so far, he/she lacks any identifiable personal traits or visible biographical or familial ties to the events depicted; instead, the speaker's gaze is directed at events in which other people are involved (i.e. he/she relates other people's personal experiences). As such, in the words of Trevor Joyce's poem "Sursum Corda" (2007), the speaker becomes a "lens [that] collects and concentrates" (l. 3) but does not interfere in the actions. From this neutral, camera-like perspective, the speaker creates an impression of authenticity by relying on aspects of the album, which are realised in the notions of "temporal immediacy" and "spatial proximity".

This specific relationship between memory and photography influences the way of how the poems below create a liminal representation of national history. Whereas in poems dealing with concrete photographs liminality is the result of an interaction between the present and the past, in snapshot memories liminal remembrance is generated in an interaction between what is put into sharp focus in a concrete poetic memory, and what merely appears on the blurry fringes of the speaker's memory lens. In terms of seeing the past through a camera lens 'zooming in', the poems focus on individual momentary sensory perceptions (i.e. album) to such a strong extent, that a description of the larger, national contexts in which these personal experiences are set (i.e. lexicon), merely appear as indistinct references on the threshold of the speaker's attention. Consequently, as will be shown, these poems apply a *hyperfocus* on moments of personal perception that only allows vague hints at national events/contexts: on the one hand, contexts are still vaguely 'caught' in memory as a part of a remembered experience, and yet, on the other hand, they are so minimally implied and distanced that they are likewise on the verge of being forgotten.

"Moss" (Tom French)

A good example to start analysing this way of creating a liminal representation of history in snapshot poems can be found in Tom French's short poem "Moss" (2009). Within the limited space of only four lines (and a single sentence), the poem, like a snapshot-photograph capturing a single image, is a literary representation of a single visual impression, centred around the image of "the limbs of the injured" (l.1):

> The limbs of the injured might have passed,
> after the night sisters have returned from the woods
> with baskets of moss to dress their wounds,
> for the limbs of beech and sycamore and ash. (ll. 1-4)

With its highly restricted form and its focus on an individual image, "Moss" is strongly associated with an Imagist idea of poetry, an early twentieth-century movement that was itself fascinated by a photographic gaze in poetic texts. As pointed out in Amy Lowell's famous principles prefacing the seminal anthology *Some Imagist Poets* (1916), imagist poetry is first and foremost a form of poetry that "present[s] an image (hence the name 'Imagist')" (vii). As such, imagist poetry consciously turns away from the Romantic and Victorian perception of poetry as a means of exploring internal states and emotional conflicts of the subject. Rather, Imagism, in the wake of photography and a 'new objectivity' in art, is oriented towards the visual and the external. Influenced by the immediacy of photography, Lowell claims, the image in front of the writer's 'lens' is to be textually depicted as precisely and directly as possible: "we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities" (vii). This exact depiction of the image is achieved by mapping the visual image at hand with "always the exact word, not the nearly-exact, nor the merely decorative word" (vi). Imagist poetry is thus concerned with minimal sets of words to describe an entity, while any means of poetic diction, which merely serve as playful linguistic decoration (tropes, metaphors etc.), are deemed superfluous. Hence, Lowell points

out, in imagist poetry the focus on the relevant image is "hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite" (vii), as it 'frees' the image from any manipulative layers of formal or stylistic decorum (including an overt, subjective speaker 'blocking' the view on the visual entity) to concentrate on the image's essence instead, because "concentration is of the very essence of poetry" (vii).

"Moss" shares many of these imagist aspects. The poem, in its minimalist formal arrangement of four lines, also tackles the limbs in a direct and precise manner, without a layer of poetic diction obstructing the 'clear view' on the matter at hand. The speaker remains an impersonal, camera-like instance in a covert position, while the image is depicted in free verse (i.e. without any 'artificial' poetic decorum), in a "hard and clear" declarative statement in the poem's main clause: "[t]he limbs of the injured might have passed/ […] for the limbs of beech and sycamore and ash" (ll. 1, 4). In this context, in an imagist sense of the word, each of the four lines is 'necessary', considering that each line fulfills a certain function in successively advancing an exact and adequate description of the visual impression. While the first line introduces the image, lines 2 and 3 prepare the indirect comparison of the limbs with "beech and sycamore and ash" in line 4. More specifically, in contrast to the mere mentioning of the limbs in the first line, the short analepsis in the second and third lines provides more details of the exact physical appearance of the limbs: the injured limbs feature "wounds" that have already been treated by "the night sisters", who "dress[ed]" the limbs in "moss" that they collected "from the woods". Against this background of a specified image of injured limbs treated with moss then, developed in the first three lines, the final line completes the exact description of the limbs by introducing another image (from the everyday realm) as a point of comparison and a visual aid to precisely capture the limbs: with all the moss covering the limbs, they "might have passed" for the limbs of trees.[59] Additionally, the image of the "night sisters" collecting moss, provides a clear reference to the many female volunteers who supported the troops during World War I by collecting moss from the Irish bogs.

59 In addition, the very notion of an indirect comparison as a way of approaching an image is itself another feature which "Moss" adopts from imagist poetry. In a particular branch of Imagism, the credo of finding the "exact word" often translates as the search for the 'exact' comparable image with which the central image of a poem can be captured most accurately. In Ezra Pound's two-liner "In a Station of the Metro" (1913), for example, the ghostly faces of commuters suddenly surfacing in a crowded metro station in line 1 ("the apparition of these faces in the crowd") are juxtaposed with the image of "petals on a wet black bough" in line 2 (Pound 35). Similarly, in William Carlos Williams' poem "Lines" (1921), the green colour of "broken glass" (l. 2) is juxtaposed with the "graygreen" colour of "leaves" (l. 1) (Williams 159). As these examples show, the comparison follows a specific structure: influenced by the Japanese haiku tradition, many imagist poems usually combine the semantic field of man-made culture (crowd in metro station; glass bottles) with an element from the natural realm (petals; leaves), in order to get to the 'natural' essence of the image. French's "Moss" can be seen in the same vein: here as well, the image of man-made injuries inflicted upon soldiers' limbs is juxtaposed to the natural image of moss growing on trees.

This precise and photographic gaze to be found in French's poem strongly influences the liminal remembrance of national history. In a nutshell, "Moss" displays a complex form of liminal remembrance consisting of two components: first, the status of national history between being remembered and being forgotten is linked to the poem's generally narrow, photographic 'zoom' on details, resulting in the fact that the larger national context becomes blurred and hardly recognisable. This aspect is most apparent in the way the speaker presents the soldier figure. Second, the poem's liminal remembrance is linked to the imagist juxtaposition of the two sorts of "limbs" and, with it, the juxtaposition of man-made violence and nature in memory. In the following paragraphs, both components shall be discussed individually.

The poem's 'blurring' of the national context already becomes visible in the paratextual reference "*1917*" (emphasis in original), preceding the four-line memory text. Like the caption to a photograph, the date provides a rough temporal contextualisation of the following image, yet it remains vague nonetheless: while 1917, especially in combination with the notion of the injured in the main text, can be regarded as a marker for the First World War, neither the paratext nor the main text allow any further specification of where (and even when) exactly this image can be found. This is a perfect example for the dominance of the album over the lexicon in the authentic memory type: whereas the speaker closely captures the visual experiences of the limbs at this very moment (i.e. album), he only remembers a minimal amount of knowledge on the more general war context in which this image is set (i.e. lexicon).

This asymmetry between what is put in focus and what remains rather blurred is furthermore shown in the depiction of the soldier figure, where the poem's photographic 'close-up zoom' results in a liminal positioning of the World War context: while the speaker closely captures the detail of singular body parts (i.e. the limbs) at the centre of this memory, the bodies of the soldiers' *as a whole* remain utterly out of the memory picture. Thus, with this close zoom on the limbs, as a means of creating a sense of "spatial proximity" to the image depicted, the speaker simultaneously introduces a moment of distance and forgetting. According to Elisabeth Weber and Georg Christoph Tholen, minimal textual implications (such as the minimal focus on the limbs in contrast to the entire body) function as textual signposts which make gaps ("'Leerstellen'") visible of what has been left out of memory (Weber/Tholen 8). The direct presence of the limbs in the memory focus makes visible the utter absence of the rest of the soldiers' bodies. As such, this minimal implication can be regarded as a strategy to remember and forget the context of the war at the same time: while this micro-focus on the *wounded* limbs indirectly implies the existence of violence and combatants, in its narrowed focus, this poetic memory simultaneously also leaves the soldiers, to whom these limbs belong, faceless and unidentified. This specific depiction of the bodies, therefore, indirectly brings a general semiotics of violence of the larger context into memory, in the form of wounds, yet denies providing names or faces and thus keeps the violence at bay at the same time. Rather, within this close focus, the limbs appear as independent entities. The hyper-zoom, in other words, enables a poetic dissection of the soldiers' bodies into their individual parts that are

no longer recognisable as political actors and only faintly echo the atrocities of a World War into their individual parts.

Next to this interaction between focused and out-of-focus elements in the poem, a liminal recollection of national history is furthermore fostered through the juxtaposition of the limbs to the image of "beech and sycamore and ash". While, as pointed out above, the injured limbs implicitly refer to the violence of war, in the manner the limbs are juxtaposed with nature, this violence, and with it the larger political context, seem to be excluded from memory as well. The sudden eruption of violence 'imprinted' on the wounds is countered by the peaceful, almost fairy-tale-like scenario of sisters, equipped with baskets, walking through the woods at night and by the stability and continuity of nature in the form of tall-grown trees that have collected moss on their trunks and branches. The harsh reality of the injured limbs is embedded in a more 'enchanted' environment, where, in the way the speaker remembers the limbs, some form of metamorphosis takes place: dressed in moss, the "limbs of the injured" become part of the natural environment, while the man-made injuries fade out of focus. This, in the imagist tradition, becomes most apparent in the exact choice of words the speaker uses to initiate the juxtaposition. Like in other imagist poems, the juxtaposition in "Moss" implies more than a simple comparison between two similar concepts. In contrast to a conventional simile (e.g. 'the limbs of the injured are *like* the limbs'), in which one concept is used to explain the other, the formulation "might have passed" in line 1 warrants the limbs a twofold ontological status: as additionally indicated in the double meaning of the word "limbs" (both signifying body members as well as branches of trees) the limbs do not merely look like limbs of trees, but, covered in actual moss, the possibility is insinuated that they could have been taken *to be* the limbs of trees. In this metamorphosis, therefore, the context of a violent eruption is 'neutralised' by the limbs becoming part of the peaceful sphere of nature, in which wounds can heal, and, given time, moss can grow over everything.

"Shelter (May 1976)" (Lorna Shaughnessy)

With her short poem "Shelter (May 1976)", from her second collection *Anchored* (2015), Lorna Shaughnessy offers another example of a snapshot memory. Like "Moss", Shaughnessy's poem features an impersonal, camera-like speaker who imitates a direct, 'authentic' access to a past moment, by closely zooming in on visual details of a scene. From this perspective, the speaker also achieves a liminal representation of national history (here: the context of the Troubles) that relies on an interaction between focused and out-of-focus elements and an asymmetry between album and lexicon. In the following paragraphs, first some features of the photographic gaze in "Shelter (May 1976)" shall be discussed, then the effect of this photographic perspective on the liminal remembrance of the Troubles will be analysed.

The central motif captured in "Shelter (May 1976)" is a secret arms depot hidden at a farm during the Troubles:

> The gun sleeps, snug
> in the wall of a milking shed.
> Somewhere else on the farm
> a cache of explosives, more arms.
> When questioned, the farmer says
> 'A boy left that here five weeks ago'. (ll. 1-6)

The photographic style of the poem is already revealed in the first line. With the description of "[t]he gun sleeps, snug", the text points towards its own 'still life' nature, in which anything is put 'on hold'. Time and movement have stopped and the date from the title, May 1976, may as well serve as this 'picture's' caption to underline and document the momentariness of this impression.

Like in "Moss", the speaker once again is established in a covert position from which she does not seem to subjectively interfere in the depiction of the past moment. Rather, she remains a vague textual instance that retreats to an indistinct and 'invisible' position to leave the textual focus exclusively on the object, as if it represented itself. Thus, the first line significantly starts with the words "[t]he gun", through which the object of observation is textually placed in a prominent position from the very beginning of the poem. The speaker's own subjectivity appears absent from this scenario, as becomes furthermore visible in the indirect intertextual reference in the same line: the notion of "[t]he gun sleeps, snug" shows a similarity to the initial couplet in Seamus Heaney's famous poem "Digging", in his first collection *Death of a Naturalist* (1966):

> Between my finger and my thumb
> the squat pen rests; snug as a gun. (ll. 1-2)

While the wording at the beginning of "Shelter (May 1976)" is strikingly similar to the beginning of Heaney's poem, a comparison of both beginnings also reveals a major difference: Heaney's poem begins with the establishment of a recognisable, subjective speaker in the form of an overt poet persona ("*my* finger and *my* thumb"; emphasis added) that, in the course of the poem, uses the act of writing as a means to metaphorically 'dig' into the past from a personal perspective. In contrast, as the indirect evocation of "Digging" at the beginning makes clear, "Shelter (May 1976)" dismisses Heaney's strong positioning of the lyrical I and the notion of memory as a creative and subjective process. Instead of the poet as the agent in the memory process, in "Shelter (May 1976)" the object itself is personalised and placed in focus ("[t]he gun *sleeps*"; emphasis added). The pen used by the writer in Heaney's poem, which is only compared to a gun and symbolises the creative process of writing memories, is replaced by an *actual* gun to which the speaker has an immediate access that transcends any subjective boundaries.

Furthermore, next to the covert speaker position and focus on the object, "Shelter (May 1976)" also creates an illusion of spatial proximity and temporal immediacy. In other words, as if this moment was captured through a camera lens, the poem suggests a direct temporal and spatial engagement with the weapons stored at a farm in May 1976. In terms of temporal immediacy, for example, the use of the present tense

and the inclusion of direct speech evoke the impression of a 'here and now' immersion into this past moment, in which the temporal distance between actual experience and retrospective reconstruction of the experience is levelled. Thus, right from the beginning, without the 'filter' of a recognisable speaker persona, the reader is directly confronted with the moment as "[t]he gun sleeps" in the wall (l. 1) and becomes an immediate 'bystander' and witness to the farmer's exact utterance "[w]hen questioned" (l. 5). This temporal immediacy is supported on the poem's formal level, too: with only six lines in total and a ratio of merely two to three stressed feet per line, the poem's brevity and compactness furthermore underline the momentariness of the retrospective gaze in "Shelter (May 1976)". With its division into three bi- to trimetrical couplets, the poem does not provide larger temporal coherencies, but rather elicits textually limited, momentary fragments of past experience. Guided by this structure of fragmentary glimpses, the act of reading itself mirrors a series of momentary discoveries: given the full stops after each couplet, the reading process is divided into decoding three short sentences, which, considering the shortness of each couplet, might temporally resemble the momentariness of a snapshot being taken. The reader's reception of three minimal units, in other words, becomes an equivalent to a rapid succession of three individual pictures taken with the (mental) camera that, like a photograph, are limited to a single impression each.

In terms of spatial proximity, the first two lines already showcase how physical closeness is poetically appropriated in "Shelter (May 1976)". With its focus on "[t]he gun", the initial couplet zooms in on the space of the farm to such an extent that the enclosed space "in the wall of the milking shed" (l. 2), usually hidden from plain sight, becomes visible. The camera's gaze is able to transgress spatial boundaries and in the act of making visible what so far has remained hidden a sense of intimacy is created: the first couplet invites the reader to gain insight into even the smallest and most secret space of the farm. In addition, this intimacy and closeness is fostered through the specific choice of words in this couplet: the speaker refers to the word "snug" – which according to the *OED*, can refer to someone's state of being "comfortable and protected" (1450) – and to "milking shed", which introduces the notion of a maternal relationship between the gun and the wall. Like in some of Seamus Heaney's poems, in which a milking shed (as part of a more traditional Irish landscape) signals the nurturing bond between Irish peasants and (mother) nature,[60] the milking shed in "Shelter (May 1976)" also implies an element of nurture and familial care when a personified gun sleeps comfortably ("snug") in an enclosed, safe space; a space, one might argue, almost like a womb. In this space, a reversal takes place: the gun appears to be 'reset' into a state of innocence in which it is transformed from a symbol of violence to a passive entity that needs to be protected from being discovered and used in the outside world of political conflict.

As pointed out above, these photographic elements of proximity and immediacy contribute to the poem's liminal remembrance of the national context, as they initiate an

60 See for example "Churning Day" (1966) or "The Barn" (1966).

interaction between sharply focused and blurred elements. In Shaughnessy's poem, this interaction more specifically reflects a constant negotiation between uncovering and hiding secrets, which can be read as a comment on the secretive atmosphere in 1970s Northern Ireland: after the events of 'Bloody Sunday' in 1972 at the latest, this phase was characterised by a significant increase in para-military warfare and the conduct of planned assassinations on both sides of the political and ideological spectrum. Furthermore, both mass internments of 'suspects', who were subsequently tortured for information, and the increased use of undercover informants mixing in with the general population made knowledge a dangerous commodity and created an atmosphere of suspicion, mistrust, and personal insecurity. In this setting, the camera-speaker needs to (quite literally) show the violence of the Troubles, yet is also caught in the repressive conventions of the time that discourage 'laying bare' too many discoveries. Thus, the 'camera' zooming in on the past, on the one hand, is able to make visible hidden elements (e.g. the gun covered in between walls) while other pieces of information (e.g. who left the guns there, or where the farm is located) remain hidden or vague, as they are not to be talked about. This insecurity is furthermore reflected in the interaction between album and lexicon: in a time of mistrust, the speaker only relies on what she visually experiences, while knowledge circulated in the broader public sphere might be compromising. In the following paragraphs, three examples for simultaneously remembering *and* forgetting the Troubles contexts will be discussed: liminal remembrance becomes visible in the composition and connection of the three couplets in the poem, the depiction of the outside interrogator, and the choice of the 'motif' of the arms depot itself.

Like "Moss", Shaughnessy's poem focuses on small details of sense perception, while the larger context surrounding these experiences is blurred. These dynamics between focus and blurriness, and uncovering and hiding, becomes most apparent in the composition of the three couplets, and the depiction of space in particular. With each couplet, the spatial radius of what is remembered is expanded. Interestingly, this expansion of space correlates with an increase in vagueness regarding how specific (or unspecific) each couplet recalls the past. As such, like a picture that becomes blurrier around the edges, the speaker's perspective appears to become blurrier the further she moves her gaze to what is taking place *outside* the farm. This increasing vagueness can also be seen in the fact that the couplets move from the intimate singular to the vague plural: the first couplet, with the 'sharpest' zoom in the poem, focuses on a concrete, individual "gun" in the tiny space "in the wall of the milking shed". In the second couplet, this "snug" space is left towards a broader area of the farm, which is accompanied by a decrease in the specificity of reference. Hence, in line 3 and 4, the concrete location of the "milking shed" is replaced by a vague reference to a place "[s]omewhere else on the farm", without any further information on the exact locale. In the same vein, the individual gun is now replaced by a vaguer reference to "a cache of explosives" and "more arms" (l. 4). With the final reference to "more arms", the development towards an indistinct plural is completed. Here, "more arms" appears as a vague addition to the cache of explosives (as also

indicated in the enumerative syntax in line 4) that neither allows a more specific statement concerning the quantity (one gun and one cache vs. an indefinite multitude of weapons) nor the quality (i.e. what kind of weapons) of the "arms".

In the third and final couplet another spatial expansion is achieved that, once again, correlates with an increasingly blurred form of reference: the last two lines introduce an element from the outside, in the form of an interrogator enquiring about the weapons, who is depicted in such blurred a manner that he is positioned in between being remembered and being forgotten. First and foremost, this in-betweenness of the outside figure is expressed in his/her physical appearance. The wording in the last two lines is highly ambivalent and, as a result, the final couplet can equally refer to an actual interrogator who is actually present at the farm in this moment or to a merely hypothetical interrogator, who might potentially appear sometime:

> When questioned, the farmer says
> 'A boy left that here five weeks ago'. (ll. 5-6)

As such, the beginning of line 5, "[w]hen questioned", allows two readings of the subsequent couplet. First, it can refer to an actual, individual incident in the past, when the farmer was questioned and actually uttered the words "'A boy left that here five weeks ago'". Secondly, "[w]hen questioned" also allows a reading on a purely hypothetical plane, in the following sense: in case of being questioned (or: every time he is questioned), the farmer is instructed to reply with a ready-made answer. In this reading, the singular, historical event is replaced by the hypothetical possibility of multiple incidents at various points in the past. Here, the present tense ("the farmer *says*"; emphasis added) fulfills its conventional function to signal a regular and habitual action, since the farmer, in case of being questioned, is supposed to always answer with the exact same utterance (as a form of linguistic shelter, so to speak). By suggesting the possibility of both readings, the last couplet complicates any attempt at clearly identifying the outside person. In this memory, the interrogator figure is partly a concrete physical presence at the farm, yet always partly also exists as a hypothetical instance. Ultimately, the interrogator remains anonymous and, with this anonymity, gains a threatening aura: the speaker's vague remembrance of the interrogator between remembering and forgetting might be interpreted as her attempt to keep the secret safe. Yet, the interrogator cannot simply be ignored, since there is the possibility that he is already at the farm to disrupt the peacefulness of the 'still life'. In the end, he never becomes a full part of this remembered moment as it is entirely unclear whether he is there or not.

Connected to these two interpretations of the last couplet, it is not only the interrogator's depiction that exists in a liminal state, but also the farmer's utterance in the last line itself. The farmer's direct phrase "[a] boy left that here five weeks ago" establishes a memory within a memory: embedded in the covert speaker's camera-like gaze at a specific moment in March 1976, the farmer's utterance introduces another temporal layer by hinting at an even more distanced past when the guns had been

brought to the farm in the first place.[61] Most significantly in this context, depending on how the last couplet is read, the farmer's memory serves either to remember or to forget the exact moment when the guns arrived. This is particularly shown in the changing connotation of "five weeks ago" in each reading. As a deictic expression, "five weeks ago" makes sense only in relation to the specific point in time when this expression is uttered. In case of reading the final couplet as an actual, one-time interrogation in March 1976 (as the title suggests), the notion of "five weeks ago" remembers a concrete point in the past: the weapons had been brought to the farm in approximately late January 1976, five weeks before the specific questioning took place in March. Yet, in the second, hypothetical reading, the singular reference point in time, that allows "five weeks ago" to signify a concrete temporal frame in the past, is missing. Rather, as pointed out above, here the idea of a singular interrogation is replaced by the hypothetical possibility of multiple interrogations at various points in time. As a ready-made reply, the farmer states "five weeks ago" regardless of when exactly he might be questioned. As such, in the second reading the utterance becomes a tool to obscure and forget the past. This ready-made phrase rejects any clear identification of the moment when the guns arrived, since "five weeks ago" can potentially refer to any (and therefore also to no concrete) moment in time. The phrase, one might conclude, plays with both notions of hiding and revealing information at the same time, as it both remembers and forgets a moment in the past.

Last but not least, the liminal interaction between remembering and forgetting becomes visible in the choice of the photographic 'motif' itself. On the one hand, like the "limbs of the injured" in French's "Moss", the weapons presented in "Shelter (May 1976)" serve as emblematic, physical reminders of the Troubles' atrocities in general. In this context, the mere presence and central position of the weapons in this memory alone echo the violence of the Troubles that, at the moment of observation, takes place elsewhere outside of the farm. Furthermore, these guns on the farm, as a prototypical Irish setting, become an allegory for remembering the deep-seated omnipresence of violence that is inscribed and 'sheltered' in the very fibre of Ireland. Violence then, in the words of Heaney's "Punishment", is a "tribal" and "intimate" part of Ireland (l. 44) and the shift from the individual gun in the first to explosives and a mass of "more arms" in the second couplet serves to remember the increase and intensity of violence which afflicted Northern Ireland in the mid-1970s.

Yet, on the other hand, this focus on the farm, and the way the weapons are presented, simultaneously entail a moment of forgetting and distance. This can best be seen when comparing "Shelter (May 1976)" to some other poems in Shaughnessy's

61 This memory within the memory furthermore underlines an aspect mentioned before: as pointed out above, the peaceful setting of the farm establishes a spatial distance from the violence 'outside', since the weapons remain in an inactive state here. Through the farmer's utterance this distance is supported on a temporal level as well. For five weeks (at least), these weapons have not been used in any assault. This memory focuses on a moment in the past that is both spatially and temporally separated from any concrete act of violence.

Anchored, which are similar to the present poem in tone and structure. In these poems, guns often become 'characters' in their own right as they actively 'speak' a language of violence. Thus, for instance, in "No-one saw it coming (July 1975)", the speaker observes:

> The only voices to come from the burning bushes
> are angels of death: the 9mm Luger pistol, a .38 Enfield,
> a .45 Colt revolver and the 9mm Sterling SMG. (ll. 19-21)

In this poem, the very moment when violence erupts (also presented in the present tense) is recuperated by enumerating the exact types of weapons that contribute to the 'angelic' choir of gun-shot sounds, bursting out onto the scene with a quasi-divine power (see "burning bushes"). Similarly, in "The Chosen (January 1976)", the intensity of a concrete act of violence is likewise portrayed in the form of remembering the disruptive sound of gun shots being fired. In this poem, the past is remembered from the perspective of an unnamed character that had escaped a mass execution, only to feel "as though his bones shattered/ when they opened fire on the ten left behind" (l. 10). Last but not least, in the first half of "Keeping Time (April 1975)", the gun in question is also depicted as a 'speaking' entity, as the poem focuses on the 'mouth' of the gun, "the perforated muzzle of a Sterling SMG" (l. 3), which spatters its message (i.e. "thirty-three bullet-holes penetrate the walls", l. 4) and thus disrupts the peace of a "Sunday night in a quiet, [sic] country club" (l. 1).

In all these examples, violence occurs as a sudden disruption of a formerly peaceful scene, as the guns begin to 'speak'. In "Shelter (May 1976)", however, the guns remain silent and do *not* 'speak'. Instead, quite on the contrary, the speaking guns are replaced by the 'sleeping' and hidden guns that linger in an inactive and muted state. Like in "Moss", the scenario in "Shelter (May 1976)" presents a form of peaceful 'still life', in which violence, 'inscribed' in the guns, is kept at a distance by the sheer silence of the captured moment. In conclusion, the motif of the arms depot combines elements of remembering and forgetting, as the political violence taking place around the farm is both a part of the speaker's picture and left out as the guns do not speak. The speaker's choice to focus on the experience of these muted guns (as part of her album) might be interpreted as a move away from the official lexicon perspective on the Troubles, in which the violence is always a dominant theme of memory. Instead, she confronts the reader with a strangely peaceful alternative version that is best kept secret and must be protected from the outside interrogators. The frame the speaker chooses for this picture, in other words, like the milking shed for the sleeping gun, provides a safe 'wall' that offers shelter from what happens outside of the farm, to keep this individual moment alive in a 'snapshot', before it is gone.

National History in 'Clip Memories'

In contrast to the focus on single visual impressions described in 'snapshot memories', 'clip memories' deal with closely capturing a short *sequence* of causally linked events in the past. Thus, whereas poems with a photographic gaze are more con-

cerned with eliciting the exact visual properties of an object in poetic 'still lives', in this form of authentic memory, the speaker meticulously follows the movements and multi-sensory impressions of individuals and/or groups in a temporally and spatially limited setting. 'Clip memories', one might argue, take the notion seriously that episodic memories are, first and foremost, *action* memories (cf. Zimmer/Cohen) – meaning that memories are encoded in the (physical) activities of individuals at a certain time in the past. By retracing body movements performed in the past, the speaker restages the exact experiences of characters he/she momentarily observes and thus evokes the illusion of authentically witnessing these actions right now. As such, in their creation of an authentic access to the past, poems using a video-graphic gaze also strongly rely on sensory experiences from the album, while the more general knowledge from the lexicon is neglected. Thus, for example, in Ciaran Berry's "April 1941" (2008) the speaker, like a camera, follows his grandfather's every move back home from work and, from this perspective, describes the physical impact of bombs exploding during the Belfast Blitz, as they destroy one part of the city after another. With this changed focus on a sequence of events in mind, it is not surprising that poems with a video-graphic perspective also differ from 'snapshot memories' in their choice of formal arrangements: as will be shown, 'clip memories' replace the short, minimalist and fragmentary forms of the photographic perspective with longer and more coherent *narrative* compositions, that allow the speaker to document the individual steps and experiences in more detail. Yet, in these narrative forms, like in 'snapshot memories', national history is also placed in a liminal position, which, once again, is based on an interaction between the camera's focus and blur.

"Safe House" (Leanne O'Sullivan)

The sequence of events that is 'authentically' captured in Leanne O'Sullivan's narrative poem "Safe House" (2013) surrounds the personal tragedy of a family that takes place one evening during the Irish War of Independence. A group of Irish revolutionaries – only vaguely referred to as "the men" (l. 2) – enter a family's home to use the house as a hide-out for the night. Curious about the newcomers, the family's child, also only vaguely described as "the boy" (l. 7), "during that night" enters "the room/ where their bags and belongings were hidden" (ll. 7-8). In rummaging through the bags, the boy discovers a revolver and, accidentally, shoots himself (cf. ll. 12-14). Fearing the severe consequences that the discovery of a dead child might have in store for both the family and the revolutionaries in the contemporary political climate, they decide to instantly bury the child at "a corner of the farm" (l. 20) and, with the local doctor's and parish priest's consent, are advised to negate the incident and the child's very existence:

> And afterwards, in the freezing dark, the father
> went out to find the doctor and the parish priest
> to tell them what had happened and what they
> should say if anyone ever asked.
> Tell them there was never a child.
> Say they were never there. (ll. 25-30)

In the way this short sequence is represented, the poem reveals similarities to a video clip. Like a camera, the speaker 'neutrally' presents the tragic evening from a heterodiegetic perspective. She is not a part of the set of characters acting in the poem's events, but, quite on the contrary, repeatedly signals her outside position by referring to the characters in the form of "they" (e.g. l. 12, 17, 21, 27) and "them" (e.g. l. 27, 29), while not revealing any personal characteristics or her exact position. Like in 'snapshot memories' discussed above, the speaker is an impersonal mediating instance that sketches the incident objectively, without any personal involvement. Furthermore, the poem achieves a camera-like effect by almost exclusively using external focalisation on events that evening. From this perspective, she meticulously follows the arrival of the revolutionaries (cf. ll. 3-6), the death of the child (cf. ll. 9-13) and the family's actions after the incident (cf. l. 17-32) and thus provides the impression of immediately witnessing the events as they happen.

Related to this camera-like perspective on the past, the poem furthermore initiates a 'direct access' to the past by carefully describing individual sensory perceptions of characters. As such, the video-graphic gaze, much like the photographic gaze, is a perspective that stresses aspects of the album to create an illusion of authenticity. On a textual level, this effect of a camera's zoom is achieved by including characters' direct utterances and by focusing on physical details of the setting. Thus, for instance, the speaker witnesses what the revolutionaries say to the family upon arrival (cf. l. 6), and depicts the boy's search through the revolutionaries' bags in all of its tactile and haptic details:

> He felt along the canvases, the mouldy wet
> and sag of the straps. His fingers touched on
> papers and coins, and lifted out the revolver,
> its coolness and the weight of it in his hands. (ll. 9-12)

Through the speaker's meticulous tracing of the boy's individual sensory perceptions, the poem, like the snapshot memories described above, suggests a sense of spatial proximity (the speaker appears to be standing right next to the boy) and temporal immediacy (the speaker depicts the sensations, line by line, as the boy feels them). Starting out with the "mouldy wet/ and sag of the straps", the speaker zooms in even more closely on "[h]is fingers" as the symbolic embodiment of the tactile sense, before this description culminates in the moment when the boy feels the "coolness and the weight" of the revolver. Finally, this close-capturing of an individual experience becomes even more apparent after the shot has been fired: like a camera-shot capturing and lingering on a particular moment in extreme slow motion for dramatic effect, the revolver's disruptive force also suspends time for an instant:

> and the room shook, and stood still,
> and seemed to hang for a moment in that night. (ll. 15-16)

Following this close description of the boy's encounter with the gun, the family's subsequent reaction is depicted in an equally immersive manner. In the next stanza, the speaker also captures a moment of experience by zooming in on the family's interac-

tion with the physical remainders of the boy, starting with the act of cleaning "his face":

> When they found him they cleaned him,
> his face, gently and quickly, and his mother
> wrapped him in a blanket […]. (ll. 17-19)

The speaker's 'zooming in', in this segment, is also shown on a rhythmical level. The syntactical parenthesis in line 18 ("gently and quickly") slows down the fast, rhythmical flow of line 17 and, within the atmosphere of panic (and its fast rhythm), compels the reader to dwell with the mother for a moment over the dead boy's face. It is as if all movement stopped once again, before the regular rhythm is resumed in the next line, and the action continues. Finally, after this last intimate interaction between mother and son, the speaker focuses on the family as it "built up a fire again in the kitchen" (l. 22). Here as well, an impression of witnessing the moment is suggested by individually enumerating "his clothes, his shoes, all the signs/ and small, clumsy turnings of a child" that are to be destroyed in the kitchen fire (ll. 23-24). In this scene, the speaker paints a vivid 'word picture' by embellishing the past scene with a plethora of details. Her successive naming of the individual items resembles the family's activity of throwing these elements into the fire, one after another, which suggests a close zoom on the events while they are happening.

This video-graphic 'zooming in' on sensory details of a scene is directly connected to a liminal representation of national history in "Safe House". As in the examples discussed in the previous section, the direct access to the past goes hand in hand with an interaction between sharply focused and out-of-focus/blurred elements; which, in turn, correlates with an interaction between processes of remembering and forgetting. To begin with, in "Safe House" this interaction between personal experiences, which are in focus, and aspects of the national context, which are out-of-focus, can already be seen in the poem's formal arrangement. Out of the nine stanzas in total, stanzas 3-6 (i.e. the textual 'centre') closely remember the micro-level of personal experiences, while only the first and the last stanza (i.e. literally the 'frame' of this memory text) minimally imply the macro-level of the national context in which this family tragedy is set. The stanzas in between centre and frame (i.e. stanzas 2 and 7-8 respectively) serve as transitional stanzas where the poem's focus moves from the blurry macro-level of national history to the detailed micro-level of personal experiences, and vice versa. More concretely, this move from macro to micro-level (and back again) is expressed in these transitional passages through characters physically crossing the border between the outside/public and the inside/private space. Stanza 2 describes the revolutionaries, as political personae, entering the family's private home, while in stanzas 7-8, the father, as indicated above, moves towards the outside and into the public sphere to meet the doctor and the priest. Given this dynamic shift from macro- to micro-level (and, with it, from vague to specific remembrance), the formal arrangement of this poem's memory resembles the image of a camera lens that is sharply focused in the 'private' centre, yet becomes blurrier the more one moves away from this centre towards the larger national context.

It is in this blurry, out-of-focus position that national history appears as a liminal entity. This can already be seen in the poem's first two lines, where the depiction of the national context is situated on the nexus between a process of remembering *and* a process of forgetting:

> When they were beginning to build a country
> Some of the men came to hide in a house […]. (ll. 1-2)

In the first line, the speaker schematically sketches the national context (i.e. Ireland's endeavor to proclaim and establish an independent Irish Republic), rather than explicitly naming it, like a camera lens that merely depicts the hazy contours of a specific object in its outer field of view. Although, with the notion of "beginning to build a country", the speaker minimally remembers the publicly shared narrative of the Irish War of Independence and thus references the public lexicon, the indefinite markers "they", "a country", "a house" and "some of the men" simultaneously also advocate a moment of distance. Thus, without the paratextual information that "Safe House" is a poem by an *Irish* author, the first line might refer to a multitude of different national contexts in which some form of 'nation-building' was at stake. In its vague form of remembrance, in other words, the reference lacks any concrete Irish national dimension. Instead it bears an aspect of arbitrariness and thus can be interpreted as establishing a textual process of forgetting, as the speaker leaves the Irish context in a haze.

Regarding this vague sketching of the national context in the first line, the depiction of the revolutionaries, as representative agents within this national context, throughout the rest of stanzas 1 and 2 furthermore supports national history's liminal positioning within the poem. Thus, the strategy of a vague and distanced textual implication is continued here – the soldiers are merely remembered as "some of the men" (see above), while any further details of identification are missing – and their first utterance upon entering the family's house insinuates an interaction between remembering and forgetting:

> […] there was a family, and a child upstairs,
> listening. They told him what to say if anyone
> ever asked. Say they were never there.
> Say there was only a family in that house. (ll. 3-6)

If at any moment after that night, the family is required to reconstruct the evening, they are supposed to leave out the revolutionaries' presence. Thus, although the revolutionaries appear at the family's home, their imperative "[s]ay they were never there" demands the family to instantly forget and to 'delete' them from the family's memory, since, officially, "there was only a family in that house". In a *mise en abyme* correlation, it can be argued, this request to not be remembered on the level of the characters can also be transferred unto the level of the speaker's memory perspective in general. In fact, the speaker fulfills their demand: by placing this specific utterance of the revolutionaries at the very beginning of the poem, the speaker already installs an element of forgetting in her memory. She, one might argue, engages in a dialogue with the characters, during which the conflictual nature of the speaker's

memory is revealed: the speaker's attempt to authentically represent the Irish revolutionaries in her memory is countered by the revolutionaries' self-presentation as instances that cannot (and must not) be recalled in memory. Consequently, as much as the revolutionaries lead a 'shadowy' existence in the family's house, meandering between their actual physical presence and their 'official absence', they also appear in a liminal position in between being remembered and being forgotten in the speaker's version of the past. Whereas, on the one hand, the speaker attests their presence in the house by including them in her narrative, she, on the other hand, partly also complies to their explicit request for amnesia: like the family, the speaker does not identify them in any more details in memory but keeps her distance; in this safe house, they remain anonymous.

Next to this liminal memory practice in the first two stanzas, the last stanza of "Safe house" once more addresses the issue of what cannot be assimilated in memory on a more general level:

> There was never a map that could lead back to
> Or out of that place, foreknown or imagined,
> Where the furze, the dark-rooted vetch, turned
> Over and over with the old ground and disappeared. (ll. 33-36)

After the boy has been buried somewhere at the periphery of the family's farm (where "the old ground" has been dug-up), "that place" where his corpse came to rest, remains unmarked on any map, be it physical or "imagined". In this context, the notion of an "imagined" map evokes an association with memory. The non-existing "map" is not merely the physical map leading to the boy's grave but also a metaphor for the boy not being remembered, since the terrible incident must not be talked about. In this context, therefore, the spatial concept of a map is transformed to express a temporal dimension. In that manner, the map-image in "Safe House" complies with Aleida Assmann's observation in *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (first published 1999) that numerous recurring metaphors, used to describe memory, borrow from a spatial source domain to talk about a temporal element, such as the notion of a 'trace' ("Spur") still left of a past situation (209). Yet, in "Safe House" no trace is left, neither spatial nor temporal. Instead, as the speaker in Paula Meehan's poem "Death of a Field" states "the memory of the field disappeared with its flora" (l. 9). In "Safe House" the memory of the boy and the family's loss, likewise "disappeared" from the surface of the earth with the "furze" and "the dark-rooted vetch", with only the dug-up ground carrying the faintest reminiscence of what happened. Besides the speaker's own reconstruction, there is no memory that remembers "that place" in the past where a family lost its boy in the turmoil of an emerging Irish nation. The memory of these events, in other words, "disappeared" into oblivion.

With this reading in mind, one can argue that the last stanza implicitly refers back to the first stanza and becomes a comment on how the family's private tragedy is treated within the broader public context of remembrance. Although the public national context is not explicitly mentioned in this stanza, it is nevertheless implied in the moment of a non-existing 'memory map' which charts the family's misfortune. In

other words, it is implicitly remembered through what is *not* remembered. As pointed out above, in the first line of the poem, the speaker recurs to the public lexicon by implying the widely shared narrative of Ireland's struggle for independence as the "beginning" of the modern Irish nation. More specifically, the speaker's initial implication refers to a nationalist reading of this era in Irish history in which the political events surrounding the years 1916-1921/22 form a historical caesura: the era is interpreted as the genesis or 'birth' of the Irish nation, when Ireland transitioned from the shackles of British oppression to autonomous self-government and socio-cultural liberation.

How is this implication of a nationalist reading of early twentieth-century Irish national history in the first stanza related to the lack of memory about a family's private tragedy at the time in the last stanza? According to Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall (cf. Section 2.3), the album and the lexicon interact in memory in a process of mutual justification. Yet, at times, they can contradict each other, which, in the worst case, can lead to one version being denied in favour of the other. The same can be said for memory in "Safe House": in a national context in which para-military upheaval is interpreted as a way of leading Ireland towards being a free nation, the death and suffering of innocent individuals, resulting from the political violence of the time, must be rejected as irrelevant. In the narrative of Ireland's glorious genesis, the cruel casualties and collateral damage, as part of the family's album, that accompany Ireland's 'destiny' do not fit the 'official' reading of the lexicon and therefore must be forgotten. The first and the last stanza correlate as cause and effect. In the political propaganda of a new beginning (first stanza), the boy and his family suffer from a *damnatio memoriae* (last stanza): with the focus on Ireland's progress, the individual's voice cannot be heard. Like the boy's grave, in other words, the family's 'fate' remains unmarked. As such, the family's private misfortune must remain under a cloak of silence, as the *public* figures of the doctor and the parish priest make abundantly clear to the father: in the public version, "[t]here was never a home/ or the found, easy measures of a family" (ll. 31-32).

In the end, the national context of the Irish Revolution does not merely linger in between remembrance and oblivion but is also presented as a repressive context that establishes a clear hierarchy between a public and private realm, as exemplified in the public figures in the poem. Hence, for example, the revolutionaries' utterance "[s]ay they were never there", as an imperative to forget, is repeated verbatim by the doctor and the parish priest, towards the end of the poem (cf. l. 30). In their otherwise vague depiction, what all public figures nevertheless have in common, therefore, is their direct association with a demand to forget. In the same vein, from a compositional point of view, this repressive atmosphere is shown in a textual 'bracket' that encapsulates the detailed remembrance of the family's private incident at the centre of the poem (i.e. stanzas 3-6). This textual frame is established by positioning the aforementioned utterance "[s]ay they were never there" in the transitional stanzas directly before (stanza 2) *and* directly after (stanza 7-8) the speaker's close videographic gaze at the family's home. As such, on a textual level, the memory of what

happened in the family's private space is literally contained in a public frame of forgetting (in between the negating impact of the repeated word "never" in line 5, 29, 30, and 31), created by political (revolutionaries), academic ("doctor") and religious ("parish priest") instances in Irish society alike. In this public frame, everything fades into either a faint reminiscence or utter oblivion. The family, in contrast to the public figures, is depicted as utterly voiceless throughout the poem. Imprisoned in the hegemonic frame of the public sphere, they are required to listen to the authoritative voices outside that "[t]ell them" what to remember and what to forget.

In this context, the speaker's 'authentic' reconstruction of the family's suffering at the centre of the poem obtains an ethical dimension: the speaker's detailed, camera-like retrospection of what happened in the family's home that evening is an attempt to recover the family's experiences from the throngs of the collectively forgotten. The speaker, through this particular, 'authentic' access to the past, becomes the advocate of what 'actually' happened; the one who tells the story of what, so far, has not been told. As pointed out above, the 'authentic' refers to an imagined 'inside' that needs to be uncovered (cf. Guignon 6). The speaker in "Safe House" similarly breaks with a layer of silence in order to uncover the essence of the family's actual physical and emotional experience in that past sequence. The speaker will not find an answer to the family's fate in the public lexicon. Instead, she turns away from it by, literally, putting the private experience of the past at the centre of attention. The liminal presentation of the national context, therefore, becomes the foundation of a re-interpretation of this particular era in Irish history: the poem's first line indicates the 'lexicon-version' only to counter and dismember this reading of a "beginning" with a detailed remembrance of the end of the boy's life. The dominant national narrative then is minimally remembered in its public form, in order to be replaced by an alternative version based on a detailed recuperation of personal experiences.

"Mallow Burns, 28th September 1920" (Martina Evans)

Another example of a clip memory can be found in Martina Evans' narrative poem "Mallow Burns, 28th September 1920" (2009).[62] Like in "Safe House", in "Mallow Burns" a series of connected events are remembered in a manner as if these events were happening right now in front of an impersonal observer. As such, the speaker is also a heterodiegetic and covert instance that, from an outside position, is able to closely witness various incidents in Mallow, as they occur on a day in September in 1920. However, in contrast to O'Sullivan's poem, in which the speaker presents only *one* sequence of events, "Mallow Burns" encompasses two short sequences: the first part of the poem is concerned with the morning of September 28, while the second part deals with events in the evening, when buildings in Mallow are set on fire and the town is 'dragged' into the Irish War of Independence. In the following paragraphs, first the poem's realisation of a camera-like perspective on the past shall be examined, then the effect of this perspective on a liminal remembrance shall be analysed.

62 In the following analysis the title will be abbreviated to "Mallow Burns".

In “Mallow Burns”, the camera-like perspective becomes apparent on the poem’s formal level. In contrast to the individual stanzas in “Safe House”, Evans’ poem dismisses any poetic line arrangement. Instead, typographically speaking, the poem appears in the form of one coherent text block, consisting of a single paragraph that extends over one and a half pages. Additionally, and most importantly in the present context, this very long paragraph itself consists of a single sentence that, besides the occasional comma and the final full stop, is devoid of any form of punctuation. Instead, the numerous main-clauses and sub-clauses of the sentence are predominantly connected through a plethora of ‘and’-conjunctions (24 in total).

Due to the lack of punctuation and the consistent repetition of conjunctions, the text appears to be as a single ‘stream’, in which one observation made by the speaker follows another. It is this stream-like quality of the text that evokes a sense of momentariness and immediacy: much like a stream of consciousness, in which a speaker’s thoughts are related as they appear in the moment, the speaker here reports the observations as they come to her attention. The temporal discrepancy between the event itself and the speaker’s reconstruction of the event is minimalised. The constant, and at times chaotic, flow of the sentence suggests the overwhelming density of events immediately confronting the speaker in this particular situation in the past. Hence, the ‘stream’ alludes to the speaker’s position as a live witness who, much like a camera being moved around the scene, dynamically shifts the focus from one experience to another to capture the local upheaval in Mallow first hand in all of its chaotic intensity. The events taking place in Mallow do not allow order and structure to be maintained, as the lack of punctuation insinuates, but need to be recorded in a ‘one-shot take’, in which no cuts or editing exist.

Against the backdrop of this formal arrangement, the video-graphic aesthetics of the poem can furthermore be detected in the way the speaker dynamically uses a (textual) ‘zoom’ to portray both the macro- and the micro-levels of events in Mallow. More specifically, her presentation of Mallow in September 1920 is characterised by a dynamic and alternating shift between ‘establishing shots’ of the town itself and close-ups on individuals and their actions within the town. Through this seamless alteration between the panoramic and the detailed, the impression of gaining a holistic picture of what happened in Mallow is evoked, since neither the grander scale nor the minor details are neglected in memory. The poem begins, for example, with a short scenic description of the town in the morning:

> 9.30 am and the sun passes over the steeple of St. Mary’s
> Church, swans on the Blackwater, smoking men leaning
> against the Clock House, women in brown hats buying
> milk in the creamery […]. (ll. 1-4)

The speaker is the unseen observer who, first and foremost, witnesses the atmosphere in Mallow and who initially sets the scene for the close observations that follow on the individual level. By referring to the “swans on the Blackwater” and the men being able to leisurely smoke while the sun shines, the speaker paints a most idyllic picture of the small town. This picture is presented in a typically ‘objective’ fashion, as

the speaker does not disturb or take part in the everyday routine that is in progress. She, in other words, can authentically represent the 'actual' events, without manipulating or corrupting this sequence in the past. Furthermore, in contrast to the still images in 'snapshot memories', this initial 'shot' already suggests movement on different levels, which underlines the momentariness of the speaker's glimpse. Hence, the notion of the "sun" that "passes over the steeple" becomes an analogy for the speaker's own gaze 'passing' over the town of Mallow at "9.30 am". Likewise, in the speaker's roving gaze around town, the people of Mallow are captured in the middle of their everyday activities, as, for instance, the use of the gerund in "leaning" or "buying" shows.

Yet, the everyday idyll of small-town Mallow is immediately broken, once the speaker pans her gaze further down the road. Next to the women "buying/ milk in the creamery", the speaker suddenly spots the "skull and crossbones badges flashing/ on the uniforms of the Lancers" (ll. 4-5). As the focus on the badges sown to soldiers' uniforms indicates, the speaker's panoramic gaze is now swiftly replaced by a closer zoom on details. In this vein, as the speaker's gaze follows these Lancers "exercising their horses/ along the Navigation Road" (ll. 5-6), she turns away from the motif of the town in general towards the visual micro-experience of "a solid gold bar of dust" (l. 6) that "breaks over Sargent Gibbs's khaki back" (l. 7). For the remainder of the first part of the poem, the camera is left on the figure of Sargent Gibbs (the only persona in the poem to be named explicitly), who becomes a victim of para-military violence. As he and his troop of "Lancers" ride their horses through the street, Gibbs suddenly perceives "the rapid/ fire of footsteps on the stone corridors" (ll. 9-10): para-militaries appear in front of him (cf. l. 12), demand him to "*Halt*" and, as he does not comply, they shoot him (l. 13; emphasis in original).

Regarding the way the assault is described, "Mallow Burns" is similar to the description of the boy's encounter with the revolver in "Safe House": the focus of this passage is on meticulously 'zooming in' on and describing a variety of momentary sensory perceptions. As in O'Sullivan's text, in Evans' poem this focus on individual sense perceptions creates the illusion of an authentic access that enables the reader to re-experience the scene first-hand. Thus, for example, the speaker seems to be so close to the assault, that she is able to document the exact numbers and kinds of weapons the attackers use to kill the Sargent (none of these separated by a comma):

> they have two Hotchkiss
> light machine guns 27 rifles 1 revolver very light pistols
> 4,000 rounds of ammunition a quantity of bayonets and
> lances […]. (ll. 20-23)

The speaker is able to witness every single detail, down to the point of becoming an omniscient observer that can even name the precise number of "rounds" in the soldiers' possession. In that position, she almost resembles an archivist, who keeps an exact record of all the details that are relevant to remember this scene 'correctly'.

These first-hand impressions furthermore result from the speaker's choice to focalise larger parts of the assault through the internal perspective of Sargent Gibbs and his album. As one example of this sensory immersion, a passage can be quoted that is characterised by addressing most of the different channels of sensory perception (i.e. sound, touch, smell and sight). First, like in dramatic slow-motion action scene, Sargent Gibbs can see as "the/ first bullet goes through the sunbeams" (ll. 13-14), then

> they shout *Halt* again and he shouts *No* elon-
> gated and deep from his belly which becomes wet and
> sticky as his head thuds against the jamb of the door and
> he smells something more than horse sweat and someone
> tries to bandage him and then their voices are getting faint
> like horseflies buzzing away […]. (ll. 15-20; emphasis in original)

By reconstructing various experiences involving different senses in only a few lines, the speaker describes the Sargent as an almost 'touchable' physical presence in the text and makes his body a memory medium that allows a direct connection to the past.

Immediately following the first part, the second part of the poem repeats the interaction between dynamically zooming in and out of Mallow from the speaker's camera-like perspective. Thus, at the beginning of the new sequence, the speaker shifts back to a macro-perspective to overlook more general developments in town towards the evening. By now, the atmosphere in Mallow has changed drastically, as the speaker observes how people prepare for an upcoming battle:

> People are nailing galvanized zinc in
> front of their plate glass windows and soldiers are driving
> in from Fermoy and Buttevant […]. (ll. 35-37)

The speaker then returns her gaze to the swans on the Blackwater only to find the town on the verge of destruction:

> The white swans on the black water
> against the red sky, screams of the women, the creamery
> on fire, three hundred jobs gone, Town Hall flaming,
> houses alight, holy pictures bayoneted, the screams of the
> women […]. (ll. 39-43)

Faced with this horrible scenario, the speaker, again in the middle of the line, suddenly once more zooms back in on the level of the individual and, more specifically, on one of the women who are screaming: "one pregnant lying down beside the grey stones/ in the graveyard" (ll. 43-44). As the speaker is thus immediately confronted with the dying woman, she ends her memory observation by proposing a short, negative prediction of the individual's future. In fact, the speaker cannot image any future for her at all: "she'll be too cold the next time the/ sun rises to ever get up again" (ll. 44-45).

After this general discussion of the poem as a clip memory that closely captures a sequence of events in the past, the question remains of how this camera-like style of looking back at the past represents national history in a liminal manner. In how far, in

other words, does the poem's camera-like perspective initiate an interaction between processes of textual remembering and forgetting in regard to recalling the national context of Ireland's struggle for independence? In the following paragraphs, two aspects of the poem's liminal remembrance will be exemplarily discussed.

To begin with, the poem's liminal remembrance can be connected to the speaker's dynamic 'zoom' on individual details. The choice to internally focalise the event through Gibbs's perspective reveals both a process of remembering as well as forgetting. Whereas, as pointed out above, this perspective creates the impression of 'reliving' the moment in detail, the internal focalisation simultaneously, as paradoxically as it sounds, establishes a distance to this remembered moment. This in-between state particularly results from the desolate state the Sargent is in. More specifically, the speaker focalises through a *dying* character, whose senses are rapidly failing as he transitions from life to death. In this context, Gibbs's personal transition towards death, in which his senses "like horseflies [are] buzzing away" resembles the speaker's transition from an exact remembrance towards oblivion (l. 20). Thus, for example, as the Sargent is slowly dying, the description of his surroundings becomes increasingly blurred. As "their voices are getting faint" on the verge of the Sargent's death (l. 19), and the attackers "pass out of town into the safe/ countryside" (ll. 25-26), they also "pass out" of the speaker's memory gaze. In that sense, as much as the speaker remembers this past scene in all of its experiential nuances, she, from this perspective, also refrains from remembering and identifying the combatants in her memory in too many details.

Secondly, regarding the poem's memory practice between remembering and forgetting, the syntactical 'stream', which belongs to the video-graphic style of remembrance, also implies a particular distance from the events depicted. As described above, this 'stream' can be seen as a textual equivalent to a 'one-shot-take': like a camera that films everything that appears in front of the lens without stopping, the speaker in "Mallow Burns" describes moment after moment, as they come to her attention in two temporally limited sequences, one in the morning and one in the evening. Consequently, like the technique of one-shot-takes in film, the on-going 'stream' in Evans' poem conveys the idea that not a single observations or experiences is 'cut' out of her memory account; the textual stream, in other words, creates the impression that the two sequences of events are shown in their entirety. Yet, at a closer look, this impression of a full account is misleading: the uninterrupted stream of momentary experiences actually contains significant gaps, consisting of aspects of that day that are not meant to be remembered. Thus, one of the most important gaps is the fighting and killing of the battle itself: only the *before* (people preparing their houses with "galvanized zinc"; soldiers coming to town) and *after* ("Town Hall flaming,/ houses alight") of the battle taking place in Mallow are remembered.

In that regard, "Mallow Burns" is similar to Dennis O'Driscoll's "Crowd Scene" from his 2007 collection *Reality Check*. Here as well, the speaker, a terrorist planning an attack on an unnamed Irish "pedestrianised street" (l. 7), talks about his plans before

the attack by observing the masses of shoppers "calmly streaming in and out of shops" (l. 4) and then reports on the consequences of his deed, when "screens will flash with breaking news,/ shreds of ashen evidence be sifted" (ll. 18-19). The attack itself, or even what the attack consists of exactly, is not mentioned. Nonetheless, it is still indirectly present in the text, since both the first half, referring to the initial planning phase, and the second half, pointing out the immediate aftermath, place the attack into a central position in the poem and thus make its complete absence from the speaker's account all the more visible. The same can be said for the absent memory of the battle in "Mallow Burns": as in O'Driscoll's poem, in Evans' text, the speaker's portrayal of the before and after puts the battle into a central position. The close gaze at what happened before and after points towards the gap in the speaker's memory and contours what remains forgotten. The poem suggests that these events are part of the speaker's memory, yet leaves their exact nature in the dark. The fact that the speaker, in order to observe the sun above, suddenly adverts her gaze from the town of Mallow when the soldiers arrive and the battle is about to start can be regarded as a clear sign of forgetting on the speaker's part: after "the sun is sinking/ into the Blackwater" (ll. 32-33), the battle is merely indicated in the speaker's short reference that "the sun goes finally/ down" (ll. 37-38). In contrast to the close observations of events in town on both the macro- and micro-level throughout the rest of the poem (see above), one might argue, the speaker's sudden turning away from events in town indicates her refusal to witness and remember the battle itself.

Instead, in this passage of the poem, the speaker retreats from her own experiences as a live witness who relies upon her album. Instead, for the first and only time in the poem, she takes a more meta-reflective and lexicon-based stance towards the events, which allows a clearer perspective on the national context in which these events are set: Mallow is freed from "two hundred years of loyalty to the Crown" (l. 38). In connection to the notion that the "sun goes finally/ down" on long history of loyal Mallow, the speaker, like the speaker at the beginning in "Safe House", refers to the widely-shared narrative about Ireland's revolutionary era as a clear caesura in the country's national development, as it "finally" breaks loose from the shackles of "the Crown". In other words, Ireland is in a transitional phase, as seen in the image of the setting sun between daylight and the "night under the moon" (l. 39). Towards the end of the poem, the speaker reinterprets this narrative by twisting it towards a negative outcome: all this fighting is not seen as a historical transition towards a brighter future, but as the very end of all development. It becomes the beast that kills its own children: the pregnant woman lying beside the "grey stones/ in the graveyard" gains a metaphorical value and, as in Meehan's "Manulla Junction" (2000), becomes the female figure representing Ireland in the form of the miserable woman. The baby, much like the 'new-born' nation that is supposed to rise from this transition, is not born, but dies in the cold that night. The poem thus destabilises the official narrative of Ireland's development toward an independent future. As the 'stream'-like arrangement of the poem shows, this transitional phase in Irish history is a matter of chaos and by depicting this era in between proximity and distance, remembering and forgetting, the

poem, like “Safe House”, unfolds a revisionist tendency. In “Mallow Burns” as well, the optimistic public narrative is countered by the speaker’s detailed perception of atrocities and destruction during that night in Mallow. The lexicon version of Ireland’s struggle for independence is once more redefined in light of the speaker’s album.

3.5 Type IV: Memory and the Metaphor of the Past as Waste

The fourth and last type of poetic memory significantly differs from the three discussed so far: whereas the first three types display concrete situations from the past, remembered by a speaker who draws on his/her (direct or indirect) personal experiences and observations, the last type deals with national history via a metaphorical perspective. Thus, as the poems below will show, history is not directly addressed and reconstructed but negotiated through the use of another concept that, as a ‘source domain’, becomes a vehicle for discussing the past. This altered perspective affects the way a liminal depiction of the past is achieved: It is no longer the result of a speaker simultaneously including and excluding certain aspects from personal memory but a consequence of the source domain’s own liminal status. In other words, the liminal representation of history is expressed by indirectly comparing history to a concept that is itself depicted as liminal in some form.

In this chapter, one of the most dominant metaphors of history in recent Irish poetry will be discussed: the metaphor of *the past as waste*. This metaphor was especially (but not exclusively) prevalent during the Celtic Tiger years, when many poems used the concept of waste to reflect on the utter devaluation of the national past in an optimistic Celtic Tiger society (cf. Section 4.1). More to the point, these poems present the Celtic Tiger abandonment of the past in the form of a speaker (or other persona) discarding concrete entities that are no longer useful in his/her prototypical Celtic Tiger setting.[63] The use of waste in this scenario is particularly interesting for the present study, since waste is a highly liminal entity. Thus, at a closer look, the concrete waste entities depicted in the individual poems do not merely signify the past as inferior or useless, as the official Celtic Tiger lexicon would propagate, but rather present it in between devaluation and revaluation; the wasted entity becomes an element that is both familiar and unfamiliar and that ultimately cannot simply be discarded and forgotten. In this context, as will be shown, the album plays an important role: against the abandonment of the past in the lexicon, the poems below often show a character and/or speaker, most often in the form of a ragpicker, who finds a more experiential access to the discarded things. In sensually experiencing these discarded entities, the ragpicker finds new value in them. As in authentic memory poems, album and lexicon are mostly opposed to each other in waste poems.

63 The poems are set in what Eóin Flannery labels “clichéd set pieces” of Celtic Tiger Ireland (206), such as suburbs or shopping malls that serve as a microscopic depiction of the Celtic Tiger society more generally.

To properly understand the different facets of how the waste metaphor is used to express the liminal position of the past in a Celtic Tiger environment, both the target and the source domain of this metaphor need to be briefly discussed. Regarding the target domain (history), it is important to note that the poems below do not deal with concrete national events. Rather, what is negotiated through the concept of waste is the past in general. Thus, these poems do not show how individual aspects of Irish history are remembered but become poetic commentaries on the deplorable status of the past as such in a Celtic Tiger environment. More specifically, as a 'wasted entity' in a Celtic Tiger surrounding the past can appear in three forms: in the form of an individual's personal past that is discarded (e.g. Kevin Higgins' "Clear Out"), in the form of a group's collectively shared past which is left behind (e.g. David Wheatley's "Misery Hill") or in the form of a mixture of both individual and collective aspects (e.g. Iggy McGovern's "The Skip").

Regarding the source domain, the concept of waste requires specific attention, especially since in the poems to be discussed waste is much more than the umbrella term for any discarded entity. Although the poems display a wide range of car wrecks, indefinable rubble, or even social outcasts that obtain a waste quality, these devalued 'things' merely constitute one part of a larger waste picture: from a broader perspective, waste must be regarded as a *cultural practice*. Martin O'Brien, for example, generally understands waste "not just [as] the end of a useful life" but also as the socially constructed "transition to *negative* value" (1; emphasis in original). Two important observations can be deduced from O'Brien's short description: first, that the concept of waste moves beyond the level of concrete entities to incorporate the social process ("transition") in which an entity is classified as 'waste' and, second, that this process is inseparably linked to the concept of value.

The idea that the concept of waste must be understood as an active process is formulated in Susan Strasser's seminal study *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash* (1999). In her opinion, "[n]othing is inherently trash" (3). Waste is not a natural feature deeply encoded in the properties of an entity but needs to be permanently created in a dynamic social process of categorisation: "[t]he categories of objects we use and throw out are fluid and socially defined, and objects move in and out of the classifications" (5). Like O'Brien, Strasser's take on waste stresses the fact that a focus on the material level is not enough to grasp the concept adequately. Rather, waste is a dynamic concept that necessarily harbours a procedural component in the form of a permanent process of actively categorising elements as 'waste'. Similarly, Gay Hawkins underlines the process-nature of waste by including the active "conversion of objects into waste" (75) in his definition of the concept. Material entities, he points out, are not inherently waste but they "translate human interests" in becoming waste (79). Hawkins particularly foregrounds the notion of an active subject that initiates the "conversion" by consciously choosing to distance itself from an entity: "[w]hen people classify something as waste they are deciding that they no longer want to be connected to it" (75). Consequently, the process of categorising waste is the result of a subjective and affective response to the (material) environment.

As pointed out above, this process of dynamically signifying entities as waste cannot be separated from the concept of value. In recent waste studies, wasting is understood as one side of a complex cultural practice of establishing a meaningful relationship with the world, by ordering the material and social environment into valuable and non-valuable components. Commenting on this cultural function of waste, Gay Hawkins and Stephen Muecke point out that

> [e]xpelling and discarding is more than a biological necessity – it is fundamental to the ordering of the self. Waste management […] is deeply implicated in the practice of subjectivity. It is bound with a whole host of habits and practices through which we cultivate particular sensibilities and sensual relations with the world. (xiii-xiv)

For Michael Thompson, "the social control of values attributed to objects functions via the waste category" (10). Waste, as such, is the dynamic catalyst that makes a flexible distribution of value possible in the first place. In a society's circulation of economic and symbolic values, waste is the regulatory 'valve' that allows entities to temporarily leave the system to be re-integrated in a new position later. Waste, as Miles Orvell classically states, is by no means just "a symptom of disorder, of things gone wrong". Rather, waste is the "raw material" out of which entities can be "rescued, reclaimed, reworked, reintegrated" (287). In the end, the fact that entities can dynamically shift between waste and value is not only a possibility but a cultural necessity, in order to flexibly position oneself in an ever-changing environment.

This wider understanding of waste as cultural practice also applies to the 'waste poems' discussed below. In these poems, waste can be understood as a triadic constellation: it is a constant interaction between an individual/a group that defines what waste is (*waster*), the (social) process of devaluation (*wasting*), and the concrete entity that has been devalued in this process (*wasted*). These three components (*waster*, *wasting*, *wasted*) occur in every poem presented in this chapter. Yet, the poems differ in the specific focus they apply on this constellation. Thus, there are poems that focus on the figure of the waster, poems that focus on a process of devaluation and subsequent revaluation and poems that predominantly focus on the devalued entity itself. In the following pages, examples for each of these foci shall be analysed, especially regarding how they present waste (and thus the past as waste) in a liminal position.

Focus on Waster

"The Skip" (Iggy McGovern)

Concerning poems that focus on the figure of the waster and his/her categorisation of what counts as waste, Iggy McGovern's "The Skip" (2005) is a good example to examine. The sonnet starts with a lyrical I who is in the process of discarding "bits and bobs" into a skip in a suburban neighbourhood:

> Spring-feverish, I cheerfully dispatch
> my clutter, bits and bobs into the skip
> and, from the bedroom window, keep a watch
> on neighbours filing past the funeral ship. (ll. 1-4)

In the poem, the suburban environment functions as a microcosm of Celtic Tiger society which appears to be utterly disconnected from the past. As such, the figure of the waster finding himself in a "spring-feverish" mood, ready to "cheerfully" get rid of last year's burden. This joy of discarding any burden becomes palpable on a phonological level, especially in the alliteration "*b*its and *b*obs" (emphasis added). Here, the combination of two voiced bilabial plosives with a following high and a low vowel respectively ("b*i*" and "b*o*"), as well as the faster rhythm in this mostly monosyllabic passage ("bits and bobs into the skip"), introduces a certain musicality to the second line that resembles the speaker's joy at 'cleansing' his house in spring. The image of a new cycle of seasons, starting with a hopeful spring, hints at the concept of a 'new' Ireland where, in a Yeatsian spirit of a cyclical history, the "clutter" of the 'old' Ireland is consumed in the fire of a now completed cycle. As implied in the metaphor of the "funeral ship", anything related to last year is in the process of leaving suburbia, as the ship is about to enter a finite journey, never to return to the Celtic Tiger 'haven'.

Soon, the speaker's individual discarding transforms into a more collective practice of 'cleansing' the suburban environment, as other waster-figures appear. Thus, after watching the "neighbours filing past the funeral ship", the speaker describes how these neighbours participate in the process of wasting as well:

> and later in the evening they will bring
> additional detritus of their own
> in royal cheek or gentle reasoning:
> tomorrow's trip should not be made alone. (ll. 5-8)

Like at a "funeral", in this collective discarding of the "detritus" each waster must follow strict rules of conduct. Seeing that the speaker has disposed what is deemed useless, the other neighbours are obliged to keep up with suburban conformity, as wasting becomes a necessity for social acceptance: hanging on to the old is deemed taboo, much like lingering on the past in the Celtic Tiger is considered as a form of 'treason' against the 'new' Ireland. By adding devalued items of their own, they show a sense of loyalty to the speaker's disconnection from the old and useless. Since "[t]omorrow's trip should not be made alone", they too, as part of a suburban neighbourhood, get rid of the past and send it on its final journey. Yet, in this process of collective discarding, the neighbours are also faced with a dilemma: while they are obliged to participate in getting rid of the old, they are not meant to get too close to what is wasted. They are only "filing past" the skip, but never stop in front of it. They can bring their own detritus only "later in the evening", presumably under the cover of darkness and under less surveillance by the neighbours. This precaution is necessary as any contact with waste needs to be justified under the speaker's watch: they discard it "in royal cheek or gentle reasoning". As such, one might argue, for the neighbours, waste obtains an uncanny aspect. In the skip, it exists in a liminal position: it has already been discarded from the houses, yet on this evening it is still part of the suburb that confronts the neighbourhood with its physical presence, as something that was once familiar.

This liminal aspect of waste in the skip is underlined when the process of wasting described in the octave is countered in the sestet with the arrival of a ragpicker figure:

> The suburb waits for one last visitor
> to creep around the corner of the past.
> what buried chalice is he looking for,
> grave robber turning archaeologist? (ll. 9-12)

Walter Benjamin famously describes the ragpicker as a modern revolutionary who, existing on the thresholds of society, is constantly "shaking the foundations of this society" (54). As such, he/she becomes a social "*provocateur*" who can move freely ("[f]or him alone, all is open", 86; emphasis in original) and who can change established social structures from the outside (cf. 48). The ragpicker in "The Skip" displays this revolutionary mentality too: he is an outside figure, a mere "visitor" that enters the speaker's suburban realm. In this position, he is freed from answering to the conventions of the suburban neighbourhood and, as such, he is at liberty to not comply with the collective disposal of the past. Rather, he does the impossible and counteracts the process of wasting by looking "around the corner of the past". The ragpicker becomes a counter-figure against the waster, who dares to experience wasted entities in more detail and thus finds an experiential access to the past (as an equivalent to the use of the album in the other types). As such, like many speakers in Seamus Heaney's 'bog poems', the ragpicker in "The Skip" takes up the role of an "archaeologist" who recovers elements from the past, as he is climbing into the skip under the observing gaze of the speaker. In the ragpicker's presence, the "clutter, bits and bobs" that were "cheerfully" disposed at the beginning now transform into the "buried chalice" (an indirect reference to the more traditional Catholic past) to "brag about" (l. 13). At this point, the past is both discarded and revalued, as becomes most apparent in the central image of the skip itself. Here, waste and value coexist, as the skip is both the funeral ship meant to be sent out for good, and the ancient grave that the "grave robber" discovers. In this place, what has been devalued already entails a potential new value, as the ragpicker shows: the 'corpse' that needs to be buried and sent away in the ship, is now the ancient corpse that is of immeasurable value to the "archaeologist" who retrieves his finding from the skip and thus makes visible again to the speaker what has already been disposed of. The skip thus signifies that the past (in the form of waste) is both gone and recovered at the same time.

In this context, like the ragpicker "creeping around", waste becomes an uncanny existence between the familiar and the unfamiliar. As John Scanlan points out, it turns into "the unwelcome shadow that trails the present" as the "eerily familiar object […] that continuously resists any of our attempts to disconnect from it" (36). This can best be seen in the sonnet's closing couplet. What started out as a "spring-feverish" discarding of last year's burden ends with the speaker's realisation that the past cannot be completely ignored:

> now climbing up to brag about his find
> his shadow ribbing my venetian blind. (ll. 13-14)

In the form of the ragpicker, the speaker is directly confronted with the on-going presence of the past that still casts a "shadow" on the speaker's home. This already becomes apparent in the end-rhyme of the closing couplet: the words "find" and "blind" can each be read as signifiers for both the presence and absence of waste. While the ragpicker is able to find value in the skip by getting into contact with it, the suburban speaker, in his distanced and isolated position behind the "venetian blind" is unable to see this potential value; he, in other words, remains blind. In the same vein, the uncanny presence of waste is also reflected in the double-meaning of the word "ribbing". On the one hand, it can be interpreted as a synonym for 'teasing': the ragpicker's "brag" about his "find" makes the speaker painfully aware that the disposed of is all but valueless. In the form of his shadow, the ragpicker's successful revaluation of items from the skip, teases the speaker's suburban façade (his "venetian blind") with his failure to disconnect from the discarded. On the other hand, "ribbing", as a noun, can also refer to the human skeleton (as in a 'structure of ribs'), through which a more physical component is added to the presence of the past. Understood in this sense, "ribbing" semantically draws back on the image of the past as a corpse in the "funeral ship". This corpse, which has been prepared to be sent on its final journey, has risen from the grave, uncovered by the ragpicker-archaeologist. The supposedly forgotten, therefore, are back with the living and are ready to haunt the speaker.

To conclude, in "The Skip" waste is depicted as a liminal entity that is far from being insignificant and inferior. In the guise of discarded entities, the past exists in an in-between state between being distanced on the one hand and being revived on the other. Thus, it is not simply forgotten, but also, at the same time, remains anchored in the present as a potential value to be rediscovered. What has been thrown away in the octave by the speaker is revalued in the sestet. Thus, the waster's complete disconnection from the past fails, since it still seems to "creep around" the suburban neighbourhood, defying any attempt to get rid of it.

"Clear Out" (Kevin Higgins)

Another example of a poem that focuses on the figure of the waster can be found in Kevin Higgins' "Clear Out" (2009). Right from the beginning of the poem, the reader encounters a speaker who enthusiastically declares that "[t]oday it all goes to the dumpster" (l.1). In the spirit of this statement, in what follows, the speaker, like the one in "The Skip", is keen on clearing his house from anything that is no longer useful to him; including "old political furniture" (l. 2) and, with it, his old personal ideologies and political concerns:

> the broken bookcase called
> nationalisation of the banks;
>
> the three legged dining chair called
> critical support for the P.L.O.,
>
> the fringed, pink lampshade called
> theory of a permanent revolution;

> the collapsed sofa-bed called
> excuses we made for Robert Mugabe;
>
> the retired toilet seat called
> the trade union movement. (ll. 3-12)

Keeping the fact in mind that the housing market boomed during the Celtic Tiger years, the poem's setting of a house in the process of being cleared and renovated can be read as another microcosmic depiction of Celtic Tiger Ireland. In this setting too, the past has become a valueless entity. Like the speaker in Higgins' poem "The FÁS Man Cometh" (2005), where he declares that "old mind-sets must be set aside/ *Labour in Irish History*? I've left it behind" (ll. 19-20; emphasis in original) – the speaker in "Clear Out" has freed himself from the heavy burden of the past. All that counts now is the "new furniture" delivered by the end of the poem (l. 21). The "permanent revolution" of Irish history has come to an end and thus resembles the outmoded, old-fashioned lampshade that will end in the dumpster.

With all his old convictions being thrown out with the furniture, the speaker intends to re-invent himself in the present-day moment, which can be interpreted as another allegory of the Celtic Tiger's celebratory break from the past. Thus, like the 'new' Ireland at the turn of the century, the speaker witnesses a form of 'rebirth', in which all cords to the old self are cut:

> And the man who spent
> twenty five years sitting on it?
>
> At three thirty six pm
> in the stripped living room
>
> I forgot him. As of now
> he never existed. (ll. 13-18)

As indicated in the precise time of day given in line 15 ("three thirty six pm"), from now on, the speaker exclusively focuses on the present moment. More specifically, in an era where there is "only one time – the present; everything else is, literally, anachronistic" (S. Deane 239), the speaker is so caught up in this very moment that he simply does not find the time to look back at the past: "I'm way too busy watching/ the delivery man unload/ frightening, new furniture/ from that van pulled up outside" (ll. 19-22). The poem ultimately displays the speaker in the role of a waster who decides to start anew by throwing away "the man" he used to be and any object and political struggle associated with this old self, to exist in a depoliticised space of the present.

The only problem is that the process of getting rid of the old and useless is not so simple after all, since what the speaker declares as waste obstinately maintains an uncanny presence in his home. Although it is cleared out of the house, the old furniture is still a ghost that hovers in the speaker's "stripped living room" and that "resists any attempt at unambiguous classification" (Giesen 63). The furniture is both unfamiliar, since it no longer matches with the speaker's self in the present, and familiar, since it still carries the "memory of its previous form" that the speaker has known for

twenty-five years (Giesen 64). Traces of this lingering existence can be found on various levels of the poem. To begin with, most fundamentally, on the poem's formal level, for example, the old and broken furniture literally still gains a rather significant presence. In contrast to the "new furniture" which only occupies one line in the entire poem (l. 21) and does not seem to have any substance other than being "new", the old furniture occupies five couplets (ll. 3-12). Looking at the poem's textual space in total, the old furniture's presence becomes even more apparent: "Clear Out" consists of eleven couplets in total. While the first couplet introduces the speaker's intention of throwing everything in the dumpster (see above), the next five deal with the old furniture (and, as such, the past), and the last five are set in the speaker's "stripped living room" to deal with the present without the wasted entities. Waste then, in terms of textual quantity, is as much present as it is absent, or, referring to the past, as much remembered as it is forgotten in the poem. The speaker's sweeping declaration that "at three thirty six pm/ in the stripped living room", the old furniture (and all of its associations with the past) is no longer part of his home, is thus utterly refuted by the wasted entities persistently lingering on in the textual space. Despite the speaker's argument to the contrary, stanzas 2-6 beg to differ and show that the past is still present, refusing to be ignored.

Furthermore, the uncanny presence of the old furniture becomes visible in other aspects of the poem. Thus, for example, the way the old pieces of furniture are described is most relevant. Before the five pieces are named (i.e. "bookcase", "dining chair", "lampshade", "sofa-bed", "toilet seat"), the speaker frames their description with a clear categorisation of the following items as waste. By declaring that "[t]oday it all goes to the dumpster", the subsequent naming of the individual pieces resembles a process of 'adding' them to the container outside. The naming, in other words, becomes the linguistic equivalent of throwing these items away. Yet, while naming each piece individually, the speaker encounters a paradox: the naming is a means to declare them as waste, but it also grants them (textual) presence. More specifically, the speaker's situation is comparable to Immanuel Kant's conundrum with his long-term servant Martin Lampe: after roughly forty years of service, Kant is forced to fire his servant, since Lampe, allegedly, was drawn to alcoholism. Enraged by this immense personal loss, Kant decides to forget him forever. In order to do so, Kant writes a brief note to himself, indicating that the name 'Lampe' must be completely forgotten (cf. Weinrich 94). The paradoxical nature of his strategy is apparent: Kant reminds himself to forget Lampe or, put differently, he remembers Lampe in order to forget him. The same goes for the speaker: as he names the pieces of furniture in order to 'add' them to the dumpster, the speaker remembers the past in order to forget it. In this very process then, the past is in a position that contains aspects of both remembering and forgetting: it is neither remembered (as in the act of naming it is already distanced) nor forgotten (as the speaker nevertheless mentions it).Thus, while the first line of each couplet in stanza 2-6 names the piece of furniture as a thing to be discarded, the second line, in turn, echoes the "memory of its previous form" (i.e. the speaker's associations with a past self), which confronts the speaker

with the furniture's value and familiarity. The couplet structure therefore shows that the past and the present co-exist.

Even in the second half of the poem, where the wasted entities are no longer present, this uncanny familiarity can still be detected. Although the speaker decides to deny the existence of his former self, the feeling of the uncanny remains and materializes in form of the "*frightening*, new furniture" (emphasis added) that is unloaded "from that van pulled up *outside*" (emphasis added). Whereas, in the first part of the poem, the speaker moved the old furniture to the outside in order to "avoid contamination" with the uncanny (Giesen 63), the uncanny now comes back inside with the new furniture brought by the "delivery man". With the dumpster (containing the old furniture) and the delivery van bringing the "frightening" new pieces, the outside space becomes the space of the unknown that is always latently around (as it also literally frames the poem in the first and last line). By noticing that he lacks any connection to the new pieces of furniture outside, the speaker, in the words of Bernhard Giesen, is faced with the new furniture's "pure and absurd materiality" (63). These new pieces are only things that lack any personal connotation and that will likewise appear as 'uncanny' in the speaker's home: as these new and unfamiliar things will take the place of the old furniture in the living room, they become the reminder of how absent the old familiar is. As such, the last couplet's composition is rather telling: while the first line materialises the "frightening, new furniture", the second line does not contain any familiar associations but only the notion of an unknown "outside".

In the end, like in "The Skip", the waster's intention to get rid of the 'old' past fails. Although he might have the power to declare things as waste, this does not give him the power to keep the wasted entities from returning. Waste, and the past as waste, is once again a liminal entity that, on multiple levels of the poem, is present and absent at the same time. The speaker's past is far from simply being irrelevant and forgotten, as it finds its way back into the speaker's present, where, as the analysis of stanzas 2-6 above has shown, it is here to stay and haunt the speaker with its textual presence.

Focus on Wasting

"A Pyramid Scheme" (John McAuliffe)

John McAuliffe's "A Pyramid Scheme", from his second collection *Next Door* (2007), can be analysed as an example of a poem that focuses on the processes of devaluation and revaluation. "A Pyramid Scheme" casts a more detailed glance at a singular wasted item in a suburban neighbourhood and describes its transition from non-value to (re-)value. In doing so, the poem stresses both the liminal nature of the transformation process and the liminal potential of waste in between the loss and gain of value.

More specifically, the poem is centred around an "old Cortina[]" (l. 1), that has "come to rest/ at the end of the road" (ll. 1-2), and describes the car's transformation over time: while at the beginning of this six-stanza-poem, the old car appears as a non-value item that materially decays ("the weeks pelt/ its glass and steel", ll. 2-3), at the end of the poem, the car wreck has gained new value, as the speaker's market rhetoric

suggests: “its fag-end”, the speaker summarises, is “still paying a dividend” (ll. 23-24). Within this frame, the stanzas in between the first and the last focus on the car’s phase of transition between the two states of non-value and (renewed) value. Formally speaking, this focus on the Cortina’s transition becomes visible in the textual arrangement of the poem. As pointed out in Section 2.1, a liminal phase of transition between two states is generally defined by a softening of rules and structures. In the poem, the car’s transitional situation, in which fixed boundaries become fuzzy, finds a formal equivalent in the several run-on-lines (both within and in between stanzas, e.g. between stanza 3-4, 4-5 and 5-6) that likewise blur the boundaries between the poem’s individual formal units. Furthermore, and in connection with the first aspect, the same can be said for the poem’s syntactical structure: starting in the third stanza (i.e. in between the two states), the poem consists of a single sentence that runs throughout stanzas 4-6 and only stops with the full stop after the poem’s final word “dividend”. This arrangement leads to the impression that on the syntactical level as well, clear boundaries are no longer maintained. Rather, everything blends into one syntactical ‘stream’ which can be read as a structural imitation of a state of fluidity. In this regard, the final full stop can be interpreted in a similar manner. In the form of the full stop, the poem allows a clear (syntactical) boundary to appear only *after* the speaker has confirmed the car’s new value.

Next to these structural implications, the revaluation process also becomes apparent on the poem’s content level. The Cortina’s transformation can be more specifically defined as an interaction between a form of material and symbolic revaluation. Thus, first, after the car has been decaying for “weeks”, a ragpicker rediscovers it and “strips” the car of any material that can still be used otherwise:

> Emptying it and making free
>
> with some random person
> who strips the interior and then,
> accompanied, helps himself
> to tyres, battery, driveshaft, exhaust. (ll. 4-8)

What is important here is the description of the ragpicker’s activity as “emptying” and “making free”. In *Rubbish Theory*, already mentioned above, Michael Thompson argues that most material objects move from a ‘transient’ phase (i.e. everyday objects that lose value over time) to a ‘zero-value’ phase (i.e. objects being classified as waste; cf. 322). The transition from one phase into the other, Thompson states, contains an emancipatory moment, since in gaining a zero-value status, the object is ‘taken out’ of the regular value circulation to exist in a “timeless and valueless limbo where at some later date [the object] has the chance to be rediscovered” (322). The wasted entity, therefore, is inherently liminal as in its devaluation it already signals the potential to be revaluated. The same counts for the car in “A Pyramid Scheme”: with the last remaining material value removed (i.e. “tyres, battery, driveshaft, exhaust”), the car, or what physically remains of it, now is ‘freed’ from any attachment to its former position in a material value cycle. Now, the Cortina is in a “limbo” situation, where it shows a liminal potentiality to be flexibly revalued in various ways. The rag-

picker's material recycling then frees the car from any attachment to a fixed, overt value cycle and simultaneously paves the way for its future revaluation: the car has now become a 'tabula rasa' – the speaker suitably describes the remainder of the car as "looking naked" (l. 10) – that can attain new value.

In the end, in the further course of the poem, the Cortina shifts from its former material value into a new symbolic value system. Thus, starting from this "naked" limbo state, the Cortina transforms from being a car to becoming a "guarded hiding place" (l. 23) for the "elders" of the local community (l. 22); and, as such, it soon gains its own "notorious" reputation (l. 18). This transformative process is mirrored in the physical change of the car's appearance in stanzas 3 and 4:

> Mirrorless and windowless,
> it gathers accessories
>
> like one of those disused roadside crannies:
> plastic bags, a seatful of empties
> and, adjacent, a holed mattress, a pallet,
> a small fridge – […]. (ll. 11-16)

No longer maintaining its use value as a car, the Cortina subsequently no longer appears in the form of a car. Rather, like waste in McGovern's "The Skip", it goes through a process of (physical) metamorphosis that reflects the item's liminal status. In stanzas 3 and 4, it is no longer the car from the beginning, yet also still not the hiding place it becomes in stanzas 5 and 6. Instead, as it "gathers accessories", the Cortina is in what Nordin and Holmsten describe as a "transitional place of becoming" (7). In this sense, the speaker's description of the individual items that are added to the car wreck ("plastic bags, a seatful of empties") depicts the future hiding place in the process of being build. The addition of other waste items underlines the car's own waste status: dumped at the beginning of the poem, the Cortina is now used as a dumping site of its own, where other people also dispose of whatever has no material value left. Yet, typically for items in the waste category, this waste collection already entails the potential for new value: while the single items appear without any value individually (e.g. "empties", "holed mattress"), in their accumulation and combination over time they obtain a new function. Thus, the dumping site in total faintly mimics a rudimentary house, including a place to sleep ("mattress") and a place to eat ("small fridge"), which already foreshadows the hiding place it becomes at the end of the poem.

The final transition from waste to a renewed symbolic reference fittingly takes place in the run-on-line between stanza 4 and 5:

> the whole lot useless, inside out,
>
> *till* the rusting shell starts half-stories,
> the kind that makes it first notorious,
> for the children who will have to learn
> what goes on at night, or could go on,
>
> then a shelter for their elders,
> a try-out zone, its vacant doorless
> frame a guarded hiding place […]. (ll. 16-23; emphasis added)

Now, the "whole lot" is no longer "useless" but has turned into a memory medium for the "half-stories" collectively shared by the local community. The car wreck has shifted from its abandoned and forgotten waste position at the end of the road into an overt position again in the community's communicative practice. As such, it becomes a haunting presence that challenges suburban norms. Fed by the community's speculations about how the dumping site might be used "at night", the Cortina-wreck has turned into a "notorious" myth, positioned somewhere between fact ("what goes on at night") and fiction ("or could go on"). The speaker's 'refusal' to directly mention "what goes on at night" implies that the activities happening in the "rusting shell" are of a socially stigmatised or even taboo nature. Hence, the waste pile, loaded with "half-stories", ultimately returns from the realm of the useless as a threatening harbinger of the socially 'unwanted'.

Set in another suburban community, the transformation of the Cortina in "A Pyramid Scheme" can again be read as a comment on the position of the past in Celtic Tiger Ireland. Although the car has been abandoned as an entity no longer useful for a present collective (as an allegory for Ireland abandoning the past as the major discourse of the lexicon), the past cannot simply be forgotten, but reappears in an altered form. Once again, the dead do not remain dead: although it has "come to rest" (another allusion to death, like the "funeral ship" in McGovern's sonnet) the past returns into the communal realm, where it fulfils a productive and essential function. Without the past and a foundation to build upon, Celtic Tiger society is bound to stagnate in its narrow view of the present. It needs the experience (album) of the past, shown here in the "elders" making their experiences in the car wreck. Thus, like Thompson's "zero-value category", the past is needed as a catalyst to maintain Ireland's adaptability to change. The past becomes a "try-out zone", or a projection screen on which present structures can be renegotiated (as much as the "elders" use the car to negotiate behaviour that is not accepted in the suburban context). In the end, by depicting the past as waste, the poem displays the inherent potential in a devalued history to 'strike back' with new value and meaning. In the context of the Celtic Tiger's 'trashing' of the past, in which only the 'broken' pieces remain visible in the present, the past can still be re-assembled, rendering false the 'once-and-for-all' break advocated in Celtic Tiger public discourse. By gathering and reconnecting the pieces, the past can be 'put back together' in a new form, in which it can create new 'stories' that are still meaningful for the present.

"Misery Hill" (David Wheatley)

Another example of a poem focussing on the process-nature of waste can be found in David Wheatley's "Misery Hill", the title poem from his debut collection (2000). In this poem, the speaker, in the role of a Benjaminian poet-ragpicker, visits an abandoned street, which has become some sort of landfill for any discarded entity that the affluent Celtic Tiger Dublin no longer needs. In this setting, like the ragpicker in "The Skip", the speaker is once again a counter-figure against the Dublin wasters: as will be shown below, he challenges the grand scheme of devaluation by interacting with

and experiencing the discarded entities, through which they gain new value and meaning.[64] To that end, the poem once more shows a lexicon that is directly opposed to the album: where the one denies the importance of the past, the other shows the value that can still be found in it. Like the poems discussed before, "Misery Hill" displays waste in a genuinely liminal position, since the things the speaker encounters have been devalued and left behind by the urban collective, yet are still somehow present and feature traces of their former value.

Right from the beginning, the street itself, for example, filled with all sorts of discarded objects (the speaker speaks of "impassable rubble victorious", l. 3), is depicted as existing on the fringe between absence and presence:

> Streetsign gone and most of the street,
> high walls asterisked with wire,
> impassable rubble victorious:
> only the allure of a name
> still on the map but nowhere else. (ll. 1-5)

With "only the allure of a name" left, the 'discarded' street becomes a fading, ghost-like appearance that is neither fully here nor fully gone. As a mere 'asterisk' it does not belong to the city's 'main-text' yet is not fully excluded from it either. Rather, the speaker perceives this street similarly to "so many other ghosts" (yet, it is "more solid" than the others, l. 7) that he has encountered on his tour around Dublin: "Blind Alley/ Smock Alley, Hangman's Lane" (ll. 9-10); all aptly named according to their fading, indeterminate status of decay or even near-death. "Smock", for example, indicates that the street is in an ambivalent condition where any clear shapes are blurred, so that no definite distinctions are visible anymore, while the "Hangman" evokes the notion of a transition between life and death. Misery Hill, like the other ghosts of Celtic Tiger Dublin, is also kept in an indistinct realm: the "streetsign [is] gone", but the "name/ [is] still on the map" and the overwhelming material presence of the "rubble" still lingers on as a witness of this place's past.

As the speaker continues to walk through this abandoned area, the street's liminality is furthermore mirrored in the indistinct weather that day:

> Grey of a low sky that is not
> debauched white or compromised black,
> but as if in essence one
> with the rubble and the circling gulls,
> an ideal colourlessness called grey. (ll. 16-20)

The sky is neither white nor black, but rather an indeterminate grey in between. More to the point, the grey of the sky has obtained an "ideal colourlessness" that withdraws it from any proper classification within the regular colour spectrum (in contrast to the "debauched white or compromised black"). The sky has no determinable form or feature but permeates everything, as formally shown in the word "grey" being both the

64 In the same vein, in some of Vona Groarke's 'house poems' the speaker serves as a ragpicker who steps into an abandoned house to retrieve forgotten memories from objects left behind (e.g. "House Contents" or "Around the Houses" [2004]).

first and the last word of the stanza. As such, it contributes to the undefinable atmosphere of this place ("in essence one/ with the rubble and the circling gulls"), where things blend into one another and fixed boundaries are missing. In the same vein, for example, the "wrecker's yard" (l. 22) and "the warehouse roofs, funnels and steeples" (l. 23) all become part of "the low banked clouds in which they dissolve" into one entity (l. 25). Furthermore, the area's acoustic scenery consists of multiple components all blending together:

> The gull's cry mixed with a churchbell,
> the horn from a freighter moored on the quay,
> fade; traffic fades […]. (ll. 26-28)

The sounds in this street mix with each other, as they all slowly fade (the word 'fade' is repeated twice to syntactically connect all sounds mentioned before). In the process of fading, they resemble the streets' own liminal state, as they are neither fully gone yet nor recognisable as clear individual sounds anymore.

In this desolate setting, the speaker's role in the poem must be analysed in more detail. As pointed out above, like the "grave robber" in McGovern's "The Skip", the speaker in "Misery Hill" is the only character to directly get into contact with the abandoned and discarded. Thus, whereas "cars/ drift down the quay past Misery Hill" (ll. 14-15) and the "post-office van/ passes silently by with letters/ for anywhere but this grim street" (ll. 36-38), the speaker takes up the role of the ragpicker to initiate a process of revaluation. He is the last one able to recognise the street's lingering existence that others, who merely 'pass by', do not (want to) see anymore. Like Benjamin's ragpicker, the speaker appears on the fringe of society. While, on the one hand, he still perceives himself as part of the urban collective (he describes Dublin as "*our* snap-together capital/ of forgetfulness", ll.8-9; emphasis added), on the other hand, the speaker remains distanced from both its 'nine to five' work ethic and, as will be shown below, its "forgetfulness": thus, when "[t]he wind/ rises, [and] five o'clock comes" (ll. 13-14), and the "cars" mentioned above are on their way home, the speaker observes them from his distanced and isolated position within the "wire-topped walls" of Misery Hill (l. 39).[65] The speaker, then, does not take part in the city's production and consumption cycle but focuses on the urban decay instead, which is continuously generated as a result of the city's modern and forgetful lifestyle.

In his outsider-position, the speaker is able to personally experience the various facets of the abandoned Misery Hill street. In this context, each of the eight stanzas of the poem, one might argue, represents moments of personal perception or, put differently, of personal engagement with different visual and/or acoustic elements of waste in the street. Thus, next to the general references to "rubble" throughout the

65 Together with the reference to the "high walls asterisked with wire" in the first stanza, the mentioning of the "wire-topped walls" in the eighth and final stanza becomes a formal equivalent to the actual walls in Misery Hill: they frame the speaker's position in the street and most of the observations in the poem refer to elements within the walls, while the 'outside world' is barely addressed.

poem, like the ragpicker in “The Skip”, the speaker also ‘digs’ into this “impassable” collection of wasted entities by pointing out some of its individual components: first, he “pick[s] through the débris:/ a pram, a tyre, a handbag” (ll. 12-13), then, in the seventh stanza, he focuses on an abandoned shoe and an old concert poster:

> Here’s a single high-heeled shoe
> posed upright, still wearable,
> and a poster for a concert last year. (ll. 31-33)

By individually naming the pram, tyre and handbag, and by, moreover, physically engaging with them (i.e. he “pick[s] through” them), the speaker gives a new (textual) presence to these items. Out of the entirety of the rubble in the street, these items have been singled out to be seen and remembered. The same can be said for the shoe and the poster: the seventh stanza’s initial “[h]ere’s” offers an instantaneous spatial presence to the following two items. As if (physically) pointing these objects out to the reader, the speaker brings these discarded items back into the focus of attention, as he is experiencing them in this very moment, here and now. Furthermore, in this moment of experience, the speaker does not only hint at the remaining ‘use value’ of the shoe (it is “still wearable”) but also engages with the two items more thoroughly in the form of questions:

> Might its owner come back for the shoe?
> Is there still time to buy tickets? (ll. 34-35)

After establishing their physical presence, the speaker investigates the traces of their past value (i.e. the poster was there to sell tickets, the shoe to be in the possession of its owner) by interrogating and imagining their ‘story’, so to speak.[66] The shoe’s and the poster’s presence, established before, is now enhanced with a temporal dimension. Furthermore, the two questions might be interpreted as the speaker’s direct address to the reader. In this case, they ask the reader to reflect upon the seemingly forgotten and rediscover (and revalue) the discarded from a changed perspective: these items have their history (and value) too, and the ‘ghosts’ of the past are still to be traced in the present. As such, by naming, interrogating and giving a textual structure to these wasted entities (formally he embeds them in a regular five-line-stanza), the speaker embarks on a journey of poetic revaluation: he wanders around the street, where he “pick[s] through” and presents the collectively devalued. With the speaker following along the “long forsaken site[s] of the city’s past” (Johnston 504), the formerly devalued transitions into the valuable again. In a street that is still latently present (see above), the ragpicker is the figure to bring this presence (and value) to the surface again and, moreover, create new value by experiencing what others no longer perceive.

After analysing the speaker’s personal engagement with waste, what does the notion of revaluating discarded entities mean for the presentation of the past in the poem? To cut a long story short, if one interprets the Misery Hill ‘landfill’, ignored by most of

66 The question about the shoe hence also includes another one: what might have become of the owner and why she left it “[p]osted upright” in the middle of the street.

Dublin's citizens, as a metaphor for what happened to the national past in Celtic Tiger Ireland, "Misery Hill" must be understood as a reaction against the "forgetfulness" of a modern Irish society. The past might have been utterly devalued but, as the ragpicker shows, it is far from forgotten. Quite on the contrary, it still 'litters' entire streets. In this context, the interaction between the individual and the collective, as well as between the album and the lexicon, is most important. Where the past has already been collectively dismissed, as represented in "our […] capital/ of forgetfulness", personal experience of the pieces and "rubble" that is left is the only way to still connect to it. In this regard, the past must be accessed from a personal perspective in which experience prevails over knowledge. In fact, in "Misery Hill" collectively shared knowledge is no longer available. In a society that has cut any ties to the past, cultural memory loses its value and becomes "rubble" instead. Nonetheless, the collective discrediting of any former knowledge about the past already entails the potential to be individually revalued by experience: the rubble left by the collective becomes the ground from which the speaker picks up the pieces to engage with and remember them. The ragpicker then is the only character that keeps memory alive in an oblivious society by both criticising the collective forgetting itself and by documenting what has been forgotten. Through the concept of waste, therefore, "Misery Hill" presents the past in between processes of collective forgetting and individual remembering.

Focus on Wasted

"Politics" (Paul Durcan)

Besides poems that focus on the waster or the process of wasting, other poems mainly concentrate on the wasted entity itself. More specifically, in several 'waste poems' this wasted entity representing the past appears in form of a *living being* that is no longer valuable for the present society and thus obtains a waste quality. Next to, for example, the figure of the crooner in Kevin Higgins' "The Shop Street Crooner" (2005), or the Irish 'emigrant' who lives among "rows of empty beer cans" in Patrick Moran's "Interiors, with Emigrant Irish" (2015; l. 30), in Paul Durcan's narrative poem "Politics" (1999) the figure of "the Associate Professor of Modern Irish History" can be found as a person that has been 'discarded' in the Celtic Tiger environment (l. 10).

Significantly, in the prototypical setting of a shopping mall – a recurring scenario in Durcan's Celtic Tiger poetry – the history professor is unemployed and, seemingly, homeless. Hence, in the first part of the poem, the speaker, in the role of an everyday persona going shopping, describes the professor as a downtrodden person who, "at 11.30 a.m. in the morning" dwells in a car park (l. 40) and who, stereotypically, succumbed to alcoholism to bear his new social insignificance:

> He had a white enamel toothmug in his hand
> into which he was emptying a litre can of Guinness.
> There was froth on his lips and he had not shaved
> for a week or two, sporting a fine, white stubble. (ll. 13-16)

In his deplorable physical and social state, the professor obtains the quality of a discarded item, as becomes abundantly clear at the very beginning of the poem: in the first line, the professor is introduced as a figure that is symbolically seated right next to a "bottle bank in the shopping centre car park" (l.1), as if someone had discarded and left him there. In this position, "upright on the ground/ between the tank and the hedge" (ll. 11-12), the speaker discovers him by chance while "slotting wine bottles into the green tank" (l. 2). The professor appears to have lost his status as a subject since, in the process of disposing the bottles, the speaker is unable to clearly identify him as a human being at first:

> When I saw what I *thought* was a human leg
> clad in trouser and boot, protruding
> from under the far end of the tank. (ll. 3-5; emphasis added)

The leg, on first sight, almost appears as dismembered and cast off as a disposed entity. In the speaker's initial half-recognition, it is caught in an abject state, as neither the ordinary waste object, nor identifiable as a subject. Only a moment later, the speaker, upon peeking at the other side of the tank, can confirm his recognition of a human being positioned next to the dumpster:

> I peered around the tank and saw
> that the leg belonged to a face I recognised
> although I had not set eyes on him
> for at least seventeen years. (ll. 6-9)

From line to line, the piecemeal presentation of the individual parts (first the leg, then the face, without mentioning the body as a whole) evokes the impression of the speaker (textually) 're-assembling' the body to recognise the familiar human subject. Like other waste entities, therefore, the body in the first stanza appears as an item 'broken' into pieces.

Given this description of the history professor as a 'wasted' social outcast, like in other poems using the waste metaphor, the Celtic Tiger present in "Politics" has completely dispelled any connection to the past. Thus, for example, to the speaker, who, in his "Nike white trainers/ and […] Nike white baseball cap" (ll. 64-65) can be identified as a "commonplace" Celtic Tiger consumer (l. 37, 66), the professor's repeated claim that "we should never have left the Commonwealth" remains meaningless (l. 59). In the same vein, since the speaker lacks any awareness (or even interest) in the past, he is unable to process the professor's warning that Dublin is "Down and Out" (l. 17). Thus, when the historian claims that "The boot now is definitely on the other foot" (l. 42), the speaker fails to catch the idiomatic implication (i.e. things have turned around) and, instead, understands the professor's utterance literally: he "stared at his [professor's] grand pair of laced black boots" (l. 43). As shown on a linguistic level, the speaker is unable to see anything underneath the surface level directly presented to him, including the temporal depth of the past. Instead, he exists in a depoliticised space where only present consumer choices matter – later, the poem is set in the shopping mall's own supermarket – while he remains numb towards any broader historical contexts. Symbolically then, the speaker carries "white, pocket car-

rier bags/ of sleeping pills and anti-depressants/ My Tranxene 7.5 and my Seroxat 20" (ll. 68-70); an example of Durcan's recurring satirical motif of a medicated consumer who is kept calm and disinterested in anything outside of his everyday consumer routine. "Politics", therefore, portrays a shallow, one-dimensional Celtic Tiger society in which only superficial and unimaginative characters live; these characters have severed any ties to the past and, as a result, "could think of nothing else to say" (l. 46).

Still, as in the other poems discussed above, in its use of waste as a source domain, "Politics" undermines the dominant discourse of 'throwing away' the past. Although the history professor is introduced as a wasted entity, and the past is seemingly irrelevant, he (and the past represented by him) is not simply forgotten. Rather, once again, the past appears in a liminal position between being forgotten and still being a component present consumers have to deal with. More concretely, the past's liminality is expressed through the professor becoming a liminal character in his own right. As the poem progresses, the initial depiction of him as a homeless man, at a second glance, turns out to be ill-fitting. The professor challenges the semiotic frame of a typical homeless beggar, as the speaker painfully realises by examining more closely the professor's attire and outward appearance:

> Compassionately he stared up at me
> out of black horn-rimmed spectacles
> brushing back a forelock of his mane of grey hair.
> In my jerkin and jeans I felt so commonplace
> while he looked so distinguished sitting down there
> at 11.30 a.m. in the morning in between showers.
> […]
> His crumpled pinstripe suit, his polka-dot bow tie. (ll. 36-40; 44)

The professor, from the speaker's perspective, appears in between social categories and in between two distinct stereotypes. Whereas his sitting next to a dumpster with a drink in hand (from a misused "toothmug") suggests a low social status, his "horn-rimmed spectacles", "his mane of grey hair", or "his polka-dot bow tie" counter this negative social categorisation, as these aspects signify the stereotype of an intellectual. As the speaker notices, the man sitting next to the bottle bank is neither the one nor the other. Rather, he is an in-between figure – a hybrid between two unlikely social categories – that cannot be clearly classified.

The speaker's failure to pigeonhole the liminal professor in his otherwise well-structured consumerist routine becomes a source of unease and he starts "foostering/ shifting from one foot to the other" (ll. 23-24). As both part (in the form of the beggar) and not part of society (in the form of the intellectual in an anti-intellectual, materialist climate), the professor is in a more comfortable position than the speaker. Like the beggar in Durcan's more recent poem "How I Envy the Homeless Man" (2012), the social outcast suddenly turns into an empowered figure, as he is no longer subjugated under the strict social conventionalism of Celtic Tiger Ireland. Thus, in contrast to the speaker who can only endure the present with "anti-depres-

sants", the professor appears as a social dropout who has found his 'natural' evocation:

> He adjusted to a more
> comfortable sitting position,
> crossing his legs,
> a Lord of the Animals position, (ll. 25-28)

In this position, he radiates comfortability:

> I saw satisfaction steaming out of him.
> But not only satisfaction – something else also,
> something you might call tranquility.
> or rectitude. (ll. 54-57)

As pointed out in Section 2.1, liminality describes a state in which hierarchies can be reversed and re-arranged. The same can be said for "Politics": faced with the professor's "tranquility" and "rectitude", the hierarchy between the speaker and his former teacher is reversed and the speaker is forced into an inferior position. As "satisfaction" is "steaming out of him", the professor dominates the scene and, despite his 'disposed' status, he maintains a dominant presence. While, at the beginning of the poem, it was the speaker who perceived the professor as a thing rather than a human being, the objectifying gaze turns around now. Although it is the professor who is caught in an unfortunate condition in the car park, the speaker now becomes the 'odd one out' to be looked at and 'examined':

> It was embarrassingly obvious that I puzzled him
> as if somehow I seemed out of place.
> […]
> He sat up straight, looked me in the eye more steadily
> with that medley of deference and defiance
> that an elder in the palaeolithic would deploy
> looking down the lens of a TV camera. (ll. 33-34; 60-63)

Without going into further details, what does the professor's liminality mean for the representation of history? In "Politics", one might claim, the past cannot simply be seen as a discarded entity. Rather, like waste objects in other poems, it unfolds a liminal presence that cannot be properly classified. Through the figure of the professor, the past is represented as a lingering and even dominating phenomenon. Although neither the speaker in the car park, nor the "teenage checkout girl" (l. 77), or the "tight, small queue" in the supermarket show any understanding of the professor's historical references (l. 78), the past nevertheless 'forces' itself into the text: no matter how much the speaker, for example, internally rages against the professor's obstruction of the regular consumerist routine by inappropriately flirting with the check-out girl (e.g. "Jail would not be good enough for him!", l. 80 / "Sodden sodden sodden sodden sodden!", l. 82), the last eight lines of the poem are dedicated to the professor's direct allusions to the past, including the reference to the "1916 crucifixion" (l.89) and the final repetition of "we should never have left the Commonwealth" (l. 92). The poem therefore ends on a historical note that moves the focus away from

the present and establishes the past more dominantly in this 'forgetful' setting instead.

"Dogged" (Lorna Shaughnessy)

In Lorna Shaughnessy's "Dogged" (2015), the living being at the centre of the poem is a "mangy dog" that "comes back" to the speaker's home at the beginning of the poem (l. 1). Right from the start, the speaker semantically locates the dog in the realm of the unwanted, as her vocabulary of disease, infection and disgust shows in the first stanza:

> The *injured* past comes back like a *mangy* dog.
> It hangs around, *infecting* my doorstep with its *sores*
> and the *smell* of neglect […]. (ll. 1-3; emphasis added)

Disease and disgust are associations that often accompany the process of classifying entities as waste, especially in the category of organic waste (cf. O'Brien 26). With this association in mind, even bodily excretions (excrement, blood, mucus etc.) or partially the body itself (e.g. in the form of festering wounds) can be included in the waste category (cf. Brewster). The same is true for the dog's body (and, as such, the past): keeping in mind that the speaker focuses on its "sores" and "smell", its "scabby skin" (l. 7) its "limp" (l. 10), as well as its sickly behavior, (i.e. it "crouch[es]", l. 8, and "cower[s]", l. 9), the dog has been clearly transferred into the realm of waste.

As a wasted entity, the dog no longer serves a useful purpose in the speaker's home. Quite on the contrary, after it has been sent off, it now returns and becomes a (literal) obstacle in the speaker's household:

> […] trips me up when I venture out,
> circling my legs, ready for the next casual kick. (ll. 3-4)

As such, the dog, associated with infectious diseases, does not only become a component with "zero-value" but rather obtains the negative value of a disturbing nuisance that, in its sheer materiality, has manifested itself in the speaker's home. Hence, the speaker realises:

> If I feed it, it'll never go away.
> If I ignore it, it'll never leave (ll. 5-6)

Both if-conditions have the same result. As indicated in the repetition of the definite "never" and in the parallelism of the two lines, there is indeed no alternative. The dog is here to stay, as is again pointed out in another reference to its physical presence in the following line: it "press[es] its scabby skin against the door-pane" (l. 7). In the first half of this line, the accumulation of short plosives ('t'), bilabials ('p') and fricatives (in the alliteration "*s*cabby *s*kin") evokes a sense of harshness that reflects the dog's unwanted, intrusive presence in the speaker's home. In the end, the dog (and the past in the form of the dog) becomes a liminal entity. It is no longer useful, yet it still remains, "loyal and unwelcome as disease" (l. 11).

More to the point, for the speaker the dog becomes a concrete experience, as something that can be seen (it is constantly "in the corner of my eye", l. 8), touched (e.g.

"the next casual kick") and even smelled ("the smell of neglect"). The past, as in the other types of memory discussed above, exists as a part of the speaker's personal realm, where it occupies a 'neither/nor' position. Thus, right at the beginning the dog is found in a spatially liminal location: it "hangs around" on the "doorstep" of the speaker's house. As such, it is perceived on the threshold between the inside and outside and between belonging and not belonging to the speaker's home. This spatial liminality at the beginning of the poem is continued throughout the rest of the text. In relation to the speaker, the dog's spatial position is constantly shifting and, therefore, cannot be fixed to a single location. More specifically, the dog meanders between foreground and background positions: thus, it shifts from immediate physical contact with the speaker (e.g. "circling my legs") to a passive observational pose in the speaker's peripheral vision ("in the corner of my eye") and vice versa. In lines 9 and 10, for instance, these dynamics between foreground and background become most apparent, since here the two positions are directly juxtaposed to each other:

> Or cower in the wing-mirror as I drive away
> and limp out to meet me when I come back, (ll. 9-10)

The dog's passive cowering in the first line, is met by its active "limp[ing] out to meet" the speaker in the second line. The dog remains in the background as a mere reflection in the "wing-mirror", before it actively protrudes into the foreground as it "limp[s] out" of the house. Whether the speaker distances herself or comes back to the house, she constantly encounters the dog, either directly (in the foreground) or indirectly (in the background). Consequently, the dog gains a spatial omnipresence in the poem that defies any clear localisation.

In the end, in the form of the dog that can neither be sent away nor kept, the past sustains a rather negative connotation. In poems like "A Pyramid Scheme" or "Misery Hill", as described above, the liminality of waste appears as a source of innovation and creation of new value. Yet, in "Dogged", the effect of liminality's "openness" is reversed: here it is no longer a source of innovation, but a source of instability and inaction. In her monograph *Post-Agreement Northern Irish Literature: Lost in a Liminal Space?* (2016), Birte Heidemann labels this form of liminality "'negative liminality'" (10). In her opinion, the 'softening' of fixed structures in a liminal space does not necessarily result in new productive possibilities. Rather, liminality can also transform into a "*disabling* condition" in which subjective agency is rendered invalid (10; emphasis in original). Thus, instead of nourishing a creative potential, the lack of clear boundaries and forms in the liminal state might also achieve the opposite: without any discernible classifications and reliable coordinates to build upon, the indeterminacy of the liminal condition forges a sense of insecurity and loss of control that correlate with an inability to act decisively.

In "Dogged" too, while being confronted with the "injured past", the speaker is unable to act. The past, like a dog, has been neglected, 'kicked' and, more generally, misrep-

resented[67] and now, in its "injured" form, comes back to confront the speaker in the present. It does so in a most subtle manner: by just being there it makes the speaker painfully aware that she is caught in between the will to forget (i.e. to get rid of the "unwelcome" dog) and the obligation to remember (i.e. the dog constantly comes into the foreground to remind the speaker of its existence). Yet, ultimately the speaker can perform neither of these two tasks: the past cannot be forgotten (as the dog is constantly there) and also not remembered (since the dog's immediate presence is repulsive to the speaker). Thus, the situation in "Dogged" can be described as an instance of "liminal permanence" (Heidemann 8): a constant state of in-betweenness in which one is neither able to move forward nor backwards. No matter what the speaker decides to do (e.g. feed it/ ignore it; drive away/ come back), all actions are of little avail. The past is here to stay, "infecting" the speaker's everyday realm with its indeterminate omnipresence.

67 See also Shaughnessy's poem "Uncovered", where the speaker pleas to "[l]et the facts speak for themselves, perhaps?" (l. 13), instead of continuing to remove parts of the past as "dust and detritus" that "we didn't want to know" (l. 3).

4. The Bigger Picture: Liminal Remembrance in Irish Culture

Poetry, like any other form of literature, does not exist in a cultural vacuum. Rather, poems often (whether directly or indirectly) become artistic reflections of specific cultural, social or political discourses of their time. In the case of liminal remembrance poetry, occurring prominently in an early twenty-first century Irish society, this is no different. Thus, after extrapolating strategies and procedures of liminal remembrance on a *textual* level in the previous chapter, this study will end with a glimpse at the bigger cultural picture on a *contextual* level. More to the point, it will be argued that the dominant poetic mode of liminal remembrance can be read as a response to some major changes in Ireland's cultural memory practices over the past few decades: as Ireland radically transformed from one of the poorest and most isolated countries in the "European backwater" (O'Donovan 139) to being "a poster-girl for twenty-first century capitalist success" (Murphy 174) – and then back again to austerity – it not only exchanged its traditional Catholic cultural habitus for a more cosmopolitan way of life,[68] but also, more importantly, repeatedly changed its collective outlook on the national past. Over the past few decades, one can detect three major ruptures in how Ireland remembers its history: first, there were the heated debates around Irish historical revisionism. Second, one needs to consider the dominant impact of a neoliberalist philosophy during the Celtic Tiger era. Finally, commemoration changed again due to the return to a more traditional nationalist remembrance culture after the collapse of the Celtic Tiger.

As each rupture introduced a new way of remembering the national past 'correctly', by radically debunking the ones that came before, the very process of publicly remembering the past became a matter of insecurity and crisis over the years: the constant shift of memory perspectives fuelled questions about which version of history was 'right' and left people wondering if anything definite could be said about the past at all anymore. The poetry of liminal remembrance, which has become so dominant in this exact context, might be very well interpreted as an *expression of* and a *reaction against*[69] this recent 'memory crisis' in Irish cultural memory: by keeping history in a constantly shifting position between being remembered and being forgotten,

68 For an overview over the social transformation of Ireland during the Celtic Tiger see Fahey/Russell/Whelan (eds., 2007); Keohane/Kuhling (2005); Inglis (2005, 2008); Nolan/Maitre (2007); D. O'Sullivan (2009).

69 It goes without saying that any attempt to define a correlation between literary form and cultural function must remain somewhat speculative and that the very idea, possibilities and limits of a 'form-function-mapping' of literature might be worth a dissertation of its own. Thus, it cannot be the point of this conclusion to argue for a *direct*, singular interrelation between liminal remembrance in contemporary Irish poetry and contexts of Irish commemoration practices – if such a thing even exists. Rather, this last part of the study shall merely suggest two possible readings of how the liminal poems analysed in this study can be situated in their cultural context.

liminal poems by writers such as Iggy McGovern or Martina Evans become an indirect comment on the inability to fix the past in any singular position.

With this argument in mind, first the three ruptures will be briefly described individually. Then, the discussion will turn towards locating the poetry of liminal remembrance in this very context of a memory crisis.

4.1 Remembrance in Contemporary Ireland: Three Ruptures

Disrupting the Myth – The Revisionist Debates

The first rupture in Ireland's recent historical consciousness appeared in the 1970s and 1980s with the revisionist debates, "a vigorous, and at times, vicious, historiographical debate [that] has proceeded alongside the Northern Troubles" (Whelan 179). Before revisionism made an impact on Irish cultural memory, the way Ireland's history was to be officially remembered was widely controlled and shaped by a prominently nationalist tradition of remembrance. Consequently, and depending on the political camp,[70] historical 'truth' for many Irish people in the pre-revisionist era was embodied in one of two conflicting grand narratives:

> The two basic plot lines are first, the story of English oppression and Irish suffering put forward in, for instance, A.M. Sullivan's *The Story of Ireland* (1867) and second, the tale of benevolent English intervention and general Irish ineptitude presented in Standish O'Grady's much less appreciated *The Story of Ireland* (1893). (Hansson 52)

Despite their obvious ideological and narrative differences on the surface, the underlying plot structure of these two narratives is strikingly similar: as T.W. Moody explains, in both instances the past is "the story of a people coming out of captivity, out of underground, finding every artery of national life occupied by her enemy, recovering them one by one and coming out at last in the full blaze of the sun" ("Irish History" 84). Given their simple story lines and emotional power, these narratives witnessed a long-lasting and successful memory career, as they became the firm foundation and 'obsession' upon which the concept of 'Irish identity' was founded throughout the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century.

However, these grand narratives came under heavy attack with the outburst of terror in the North in the second half of the twentieth century. More specifically, as the Troubles intensified, these romanticised visions of the past, and their inherent call-to-arms credo, were criticised for helping to fuel the atrocities in the present moment by 'infesting' impressionable young minds with the notion of regaining a glorious past

70 Moody calls the narrative of Irish liberation from English oppression the "Catholic-Separatist myth" and indicates that this narrative was the dominant narrative for a majority of people in the Republic of Ireland ("Irish History" 72). On the other hand, a majority of people in the North followed the narrative of "English intervention" (see Hansson above).

through force.[71] At this critical juncture, revisionism quickly gained wide-spread public attention as a powerful counter-narrative against the dangers of these nationalist memory practices (cf. Fanning 147). Since too many people had died already, revisionists aimed at "emancipat[ing] the country from nationalist tyranny" by replacing the demagogical 'myths' of nationalism with the objective 'truth' about Ireland's past (Whelan 180; cf. Nutt 161). It is with the rise of this more 'objective' perspective on history that "the nature of history writing in Ireland has changed dramatically" (M. McCarthy 5) and "a new interpretation of Irish history" (Foster, "History" 140) would shock the very image of the past so many people had taken for granted up until this time.

The revisionist debunking of the nationalist memory tradition specifically focused on two aspects: first, the traditional version of the past was criticised for being "one-sided" (Freiburg 70): it exclusively displayed a "political allegiance to nationalism" (Edwards 56), and relied on romantic "notions of insularity and cultural purity" (M. McCarthy 5), while ignoring more problematic aspects of what 'really' happened in the past; more specifically, it ignored all elements that did not fit the nationalist agenda. Second, revisionists found fault with the traditionalists' presumed lack and sheer disinterest in empirical accuracy and challenged their "inadequate foundations" of writing history (Moody, "New History" 38): nationalists, as revisionists claimed, relied on Gaelic storytelling traditions rather than historical facts, so that their take on history was 'making up' the past as a fictional story (cf. Foster, *Irish Story*). According to this argument, nationalists would shape history into a coherent plot by dismissing the inconsistencies, sudden turns and outright dangers Ireland's past might offer in reality. In response, revisionists offered a (what they called) "value free" perspective on the past that, unbiased by any guiding ideology, neutrally aims at the objective core of truth and does not 'shy away' from showing where Irish history might have gone wrong after being blinded by nationalism (Brady 10).

This fundamental revisionist critique did not go unnoticed by nationalist historians and a heavily publicised discussion on the 'right' version of history ensued soon after. More to the point, nationalist historians replied to their historiographic opponents with the argument that there is no such thing as a "value free" perspective on the past.[72] In their opinion, the only difference between revisionism and nationalism lies in the fact that revisionists hide their ideological agenda under the guise of objectivity (cf. Bradshaw 200). Desmond Fennell described this underlying revisionist ideology as follows:

71 In this context, Brian Walker jokingly argues that, like on a pack of cigarettes, the traditional narratives of Irish history should have a health warning attached to them: history can lead to madness and death (cf. 58).

72 Following Walter Benjamin's argument against German historicism, Anthony Coughlan, for instance, mocked the revisionist claim for a value-free judgement with the utterance that "the good historian knows that he is a moral and political being involved in an enterprise that is also moral and political" (289).

> What is the image of historical revisionism in Ireland today? A retelling of Irish history which seeks to show that British rule of Ireland was not, as we have believed, a *bad* thing [...] and that the Irish resistance to it was not, as we have believed, a *good* thing, but a mixture of wrong-headed idealism and unnecessary, often cruel, violence. (184; emphasis in original)

Far from being "value free", anti-revisionists claimed, revisionism advertises a pro-British sentiment that undermines the nationalist struggle for independence as an utterly negative endeavour and a failure.[73] In that regard, nationalists argued, revisionists cater to a pessimistic and highly sceptical version of the past. This version simply disregards the emotional currents that make Irish history *Irish*, since its distant and 'objective' perspective cannot adequately express the meaning of suffering for the Irish national character (cf. Bradshaw 203-204).

In the end, however, despite these nationalist counter-arguments, revisionism managed to rapidly revise the dominant way of remembering Ireland's history and the well-rounded story of coming out of captivity was replaced by a more fragmented and bleak view on the past. One can even argue that revisionism was so successful in spreading its more 'disillusioning' version of Irish history in public, that the public commemoration of one of the key events in the nationalist narrative, the Easter Rising of 1916, was cancelled for the first time in 1991. The reason for this decision, Seamus Deane comments, was that "the Easter Rising of 1916 has been so effectively revised that its seventy-fifth anniversary is a matter of official embarrassment" (234). As this example shows, the revisionist approach to history had a deeply unsettling effect on how a majority of contemporary Irish people formed their identity in relation to the past:

> Revisionist historiography had the effect of successfully redefining national identity in a number of key ways. One is to break up the Irish experience, seeing it as a complex set of fragmented cultures […] [T]he result, as Bradshaw so perceptively notes, is an account of history 'from which the modern Irish community would seem as aliens in their own land'. (Kirby, "Pedigrees" 27; citing Bradshaw [1989: 349])

The new way of remembering Ireland's national history was no longer a relatively simple and coherent narrative of a steady progression towards liberation (i.e. "the Irish experience"), but a complicated collage of fragments in which, next to the motives of failure and misjudgement, no clear-cut morality could find its place. Many people, therefore, indeed felt "as aliens in their own land" as they could no longer relate to this complex version of Ireland's past. Revisionism, as Hugh Kearney states, "touch[ed] a sensitive nerve" in Ireland (246): caught in between affective loyalties towards a familiar way of remembrance and the discursive power of the revisionist

73 An extensive and in-depth discussion of these historiographic debates between revisionists and nationalist can be found in Ciaran Brady, ed., *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism* (1994).

'truth', former followers of the nationalist interpretation of Irish history now existed in a state of the in-between, not knowing how to remember the past 'correctly'.[74]

Disconnecting the Past? – The Celtic Tiger Era

A second rupture in Ireland's historical imagination occurred during the Celtic Tiger boom, as the radically changed Irish society of the 1990s – including its sudden prosperity and its national pride in a 'new' Ireland – brought forth a new dominant perspective on Ireland's past. This perspective seriously challenged both nationalist *and* revisionist versions of Irish history by questioning the concept of history itself. Thus, it was claimed that Celtic Tiger Ireland had not only successfully overcome the nationalist 'myth' with the help of revisionism but that it had also finally overcome revisionism and the past altogether:

> Other critics […] claim that Ireland's current economic prosperity, powered as it is by multinational corporate investments and high-tech manufacturing industries, makes both a revisionist and a traditionalist view of cultural memory irrelevant, as Ireland has finally gained independence from its own past. Such independence suggests that Ireland's contemporary autonomy is synonymous with a disconnection and dislocation from the cultural prerequisites of national memory. (Gray 72)

During the Celtic Tiger heyday, in other words, Irish culture orchestrated an utter degradation of the past by celebrating and stressing the liberation of the present-day society from the 'dark ages' Ireland witnessed before.

This radical collective break with the past found its utmost expression in a public 'end-of-history' discourse.[75] According to this discourse, the neo-liberal Celtic Tiger society of the late 1990s to early 2000s was seen as the long-awaited final step in Ireland's historical development. As such, with prosperity becoming a major marker of national identity during the Celtic Tiger years, the Irish public sphere catered to the idea that neo-liberalism was "the *natural* guarantor of individual freedom" (Phelan 75; emphasis in original), bringing Ireland to a 'golden age' in which all conflicts of an inferior past found their ultimate conclusion. In public discussions of the time, "a belief [was propagated] that the free market is the wisest, most efficient method of

74 Kearney retells an anecdote of a few revisionist historians lecturing on 'The Flight of the Earls' in the 1980s. He talks about how "[a]t one sessions [sic] […] a member of the audience is said to have protested against the revisionist tone of the lecture by calling out 'For God's sake leave us our heroes'" (246).

75 The term 'end of history' was most famously coined by Francis Fukuyama as a comment on the falling Soviet Union in 1989. Yet, the concept's philosophical roots can be traced back to nineteenth-century German idealism. It was especially Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (1837) that spawned the idea of history being a temporal means to a pre-determined end. Simply put, in Hegel's notion, the end of history is achieved as soon as the idea of a *Weltgeist* has been materialised in its completed form through a series of dialectic processes. History, therefore, is a finite set of conflicts that, with each 'clash' of ideas solved, finds itself in closer proximity to the ultimate end. The concrete 'end' here is a perfectly stable form of human society where the need for politics regulating the present stability replaces the need for history in guiding towards this stability (cf. Demandt 323).

human organization ever developed" (Kerrigan 15), with neo-liberalism being "some disinterested and benign force" that awaits Ireland at the end of its historical ladder (Kirby, "Policies" 190).

This 'end of history' belief became so powerful that it was increasingly "taboo to criticize the Celtic Tiger" (Keohane/Kuhling, *Collision Culture* 143) and to voice any alternative perspective on Ireland's present and past (cf. Cronin). Instead, with this discourse achieving "hegemonic status within the twenty-six counties" (Coulter 12), it quickly became 'trendy' to remember the past in the darkest colours possible, in order to make the prosperous present shine even brighter in comparison. Hence, during the Celtic Tiger years, "the nauseating norm of 'othering' Ireland's past" (O'Donovan 139) was developed: history was displayed as a 'dumping site' and "bogeyman" for anything unwanted in present-day Ireland (Kirby/Gibbons/Cronin 7). The relationship between present and past became a strict dichotomy that warned Irish citizens to stay away from history, as no one in their right mind would voluntarily leave the safe harbour of the Celtic Tiger to wander around the dangerous terrain of the past (cf. Kirby/Gibbons/Cronin 7).

Overall then, Irish cultural memory during the Celtic Tiger era was dominated by a narrative of rupture:

> And it goes like this: Once upon a time, the Irish threw off the shackles of the past that held us back. We began to work hard, to innovate, to find within us the talents we always had but which had been suppressed or neglected for too long. In the bad old days, you see, the Brits held us back, or perhaps the Catholic church stifled our innate talents. Whatever it was, once we threw off the yoke of oppression, we became 'a nation of entrepreneurs'. We began 'punching above the weight'. (Kerrigan 3)

Irish history was seen as a rite of passage that had finally been fulfilled by "thr[owing] off the shackles of the past". In this regard, public and academic discussions were often dominated by the metaphor of Ireland as a living organism 'growing up' and the comparison of Irish history to a fairy-tale romance. According to former president Mary McAleese, for instance, Irish history equals the development of Ireland's "own distinct national character" through an organic process of "maturing as a nation" in order to finally settle down through a deep "understanding of our place in the world" in the realms of prosperity (quoted in Titley 157). Ultimately, "Ireland had come of age" (Donovan/Murphy 22-23), as it "organically harnessed the possibilities of global capitalism" (Titley 157-158), while leaving all of its protectionist teenage angst behind. In the same vein, other commentators regarded the Celtic Tiger as the cathartic denouement to a dramatic story and the Irish past became a "moral tale with a happy ending" (O'Toole 11). Irish history followed "a Hollywood-style narrative arc. It was a tale of misery, struggle, transformation and triumph" (O'Toole 11); or as Paul Sweeney puts it: Irish history is a "sad tale" that fortunately "has a happy ending" (17), so that history no longer needs to be remembered.[76]

76 The optimism of these years in neo-liberalism becomes most apparent in O'Donnell, ed. (2000).

Re-Connecting the Past? – Post-Celtic Tiger Ireland

In 2011, the then newly-elected *Taoiseach* Enda Kenny publicly declared that, after the sudden and unexpected demise of the Celtic Tiger, Ireland finds itself in a state of transition and renegotiation: "We stand on the brink of fundamental change in how we regard ourselves, in how we regard our economy and in how we regard our society" (quoted in Cooper 389). In *Transforming Ireland: Challenges, Critiques, Resources* (2009), Debbie Ging, Michael Cronin and Peadar Kirby voice a similar opinion on Ireland's Post-Celtic Tiger situation. They describe the phase immediately following Ireland's economic crash as a stage of cultural and economic instability in which only the need for change itself "may well be a certainty" ("Resources" 212).[77]

Within this general climate of transition, another radical renegotiation of Ireland's cultural memory can be observed. In the spirit of Richard Terdiman's remark that "any rapid alteration of the givens of the present places a society's connection with its history under pressure" (3), the sudden event of Ireland's economic collapse strongly discredited the formerly dominant belief that the Celtic Tiger society was the historical end of Ireland's national development. In the face of a sudden increase in unemployment, ghost estates and rising debt per head, remembering Irish history as a "success story" (Allen 24) became utterly unfit to explain how the present national crisis came into existence.[78] As a result, in the academic and popular literature of the Post-Celtic Tiger years, the neo-liberal interpretation of Ireland's historical development (cf. Mac Sharry/White) was quickly replaced by a new and more critical version of the past.

This new version, however, was not so new after all: Ireland's remembrance policy in the Post-Celtic Tiger era can be described as a renaissance of nationalist interpretative schemes, including traditional memory motives like suffering and endurance.[79] In

77 A more detailed account of the Post-Celtic Tiger insecurity can be found in Ross (2009) or Keohane/Kuhling (2014).

78 Or, as Kerrigan puts it, after the crash "the official cover story is in shreds" (xi).

79 By embedding Ireland's Post-Celtic Tiger situation in a historical narrative of oppression and colonialisation, Post-Celtic Tiger Ireland shows clear parallels to Ireland in the early twentieth century and its struggle against the English 'masters'. Thus, it is not surprising to see that in the Post-Celtic Tiger phase, several representatives of Ireland's political and cultural elite repeatedly referred (and still refer) to Ireland's earlier struggle for independence as a platform for their present-day political agenda. Next to a series of other Irish politicians, Enda Kenny, for instance, compares himself to one of the leaders of the Easter Rising 1916, Michael Collins:

> In recent times, I have been thinking a lot about Michael Collins [...] [W]ith the destiny of a nation on his shoulders [...] again, as Collins did, [we] hav[e] to build, to rebuild, our economy and restructure our institutions [...]. In keeping with Collins's ambition, mental force and high ideals [...] the government is approaching our task of national recovery with the passion and zeal that Collins would have applied (quoted in Kerrigan 127-128).

Kenny implies that Post-Celtic Tiger Ireland faces similar problems to the Ireland of 1916: both Irelands are in a phase of transition, as they both, in their particular historical context, need to negotiate which direction to take towards the future. Given these

a time when, as Kerrigan argues, "the Great Shame [i.e. the fall of the Celtic Tiger] was followed by a perceptible rise in indignant nationalistic feeling" (126), academic and popular discussions returned to the nationalist narrative of Ireland's oppression by a foreign 'invader'. From this point of view, Ireland's globalisation over the course of the last few decades was interpreted as a renewed (and subtler) process of cultural and economic colonialisation that had successively replaced the former British colonial rule (cf. Lloyd 77). This interpretation of recent Irish history thus re-installed a pre-revisionist point of view and embedded the Celtic Tiger era into the 'master-narrative' of Irish history as a continuous series of hardships and oppression.

Examples of this Post-Celtic Tiger interpretation of history are manifold. Thus, in contrast to the earlier 'end of history' readings, the public sphere was dominated by arguments as expressed by G. Honor Fagan: in moving towards a neo-liberal Celtic Tiger society, Ireland has "exchang[ed] self-reliance for dependency in a wilful shift away from the independence movement ethos" (115). Ireland's globalisation is interpreted as a negative process of eagerly adapting to the needs dictated by the European and American markets, without noticing the oppressive forces at work. Thus, Fagan points out that "from an Irish 'grass roots' perspective, globalisation may not look as rosy as it does to the international financial sector and their political supporters in Ireland" (110). Other critics would focus more on forms of cultural oppression and claim that the loss of an Irish national culture is the result of Ireland being subtly forced to adapt to global and transcultural ideals. In Post-Celtic Tiger criticism, therefore, "[a] recurrent trope is how various aspects of Irish cultural life have been hijacked" by European and American cultural values. This trope is mainly expressed in the recurring argument "that culture is becoming increasingly commercialised" (Ging/Cronin/Kirby, "Challenges" 8). As a result, so the argument goes, Ireland has lost all unique characteristics of its national culture and "at the beginning of the twenty-first century, what is different is that Ireland in conventional economic and social terms, is no longer so different" (Ging/Cronin/Kirby, "Challenges" 3); Ireland had adapted so much to the commercial ideals of a globalised, capitalist nation, that it "was in danger of making itself look like every place else in the world" (Böss/Maher 14).

Looking at these changes through the lens of Ireland's cultural memory practices, it becomes apparent that within only a few years, the image of the national past has radically changed again. Whereas before the past was looked down upon in favour of a neo-liberal present-day Ireland, now the past was re-instated as a frame of reference in favour of looking down upon neo-liberalism; Irish cultural memory, therefore, moved from one extreme to the other and, to recontextualise Fintan O'Toole's words here, "in its rise and fall […] made Icarus look boringly stable" (10). As one version of

similarities, Kenny uses Collins' political course (or at least his version of Collins' course) as a useful matrix for his own political actions: he urges Irish people, "as Collins did", "to bring new life, new clarity, new shared purpose to Irish life, to Irish politics, and to the Irish future" (quoted in Cooper 389).

the past replaces and utterly discredits the one before, the question arises how the past can be approached amidst all these differing approaches; and although the Post-Celtic Tiger narrative might be a return to an older nationalist narrative, as a way of coping with the crisis through a familiar narrative framework (cf. Cohen vix), this return might not be able to offer the same stability that the 'original' nationalist conviction offered for a long time, since this conviction itself has already been deconstructed. As such, it is not too surprising to see that a Post-Celtic Tiger nationalist view on history is once again debunked by other ways of remembering the past, for example when in the context of the Brexit debate, the Irish Republic might rewrite some of the anti-European tendencies of the post-collapse remembrance culture.

4.2 Liminal Remembrance and the Irish 'Memory Crisis'

Although the three ruptures have been described individually above, they must not be understood as separate occurrences, but as concrete manifestations of a broader change in Irish commemorative culture at the turn of the century. More precisely, as indicated before, they can be perceived as concrete expressions of an Irish 'memory crisis'. Since many liminal poems can be read as responses to this memory crisis, it is important to examine this idea in more detail before linking it to contemporary Irish poetry.

The idea of a memory crisis refers to an innate sense of losing connection to the past, due to constant and often conflictual transformations of existing cultural memory practices. As such, a memory crisis is a genuinely liminal phenomenon, though in a negative sense of the word. As pointed out in Section 3.5, liminality is not only a state of openness, creativity and innovation, but can also be a "*disabling* condition" (Heidemann 10; emphasis in original). Existing in a state in which fixed structures and boundaries are softened might result in the overwhelming feeling that anything stable is lost, leaving no solid ground to act upon. The same counts for the Irish memory crisis: as multiple conflicting possibilities of reading Irish history co-exist, Ireland's commemorative culture has lost the solid ground upon which to remember the past. Where one rupture follows the next, and one version of the past deconstructs the other, the belief of a fixed pathway to the past no longer exists and the notion of a singular history (with a capital H) is replaced by a multitude of histories (with a lower case h) that constantly re-arrange the ways of how the national past is seen.

Ultimately, this constant re-interpretation of the past, resulting from the three ruptures described above, leads to what Richard Terdiman calls a "cultural disquiet" (viii), a feeling of disorientation and alienation triggered by the growing awareness that if the past is always a matter of interpretation, then the 'actual' past can never be retrieved and "beg[ins] to look like a foreign country" (Terdiman 5). Each interpretation of the past is only relatively meaningful in a chain of other possible interpretations, so that the past retreats behind a barrier of co-existing representations that cannot be

crossed. As such, it becomes the longed-for, yet unconquerable territory that escapes with each attempt at preserving it in recollections (cf. Lowenthal xvii).

In the end, the Irish memory crisis describes a state of uncertainty and insecurity (cf. Beck), defined by "the fear of some imminent traumatic loss" (Huyssen 5), as the question of how to relate to the past at all is continuously lingering on. As the insurmountable gap between the past and the present becomes more obvious with each rupture, Ireland is in danger of losing any fixed points of reference on how to read the past 'correctly' and, thus, loses "the clues from which to construct a present self" (Boland 16). When Keohane and Kuhling, therefore, claim that "the experience of living in contemporary Ireland is that of living in an in-between world, in between cultures and identities" (*Collision Culture* 6), one might add the experience of living in between different memory versions, which displays "a culture seeking to hold on to itself" (Terdiman 16).

It is this very insecurity and in-between status of cultural memory that is reflected in the poetry of liminal remembrance. More specifically, depending on the poem, liminal remembrance can be interpreted in two ways: in a negative way, in some poems liminal remembrance becomes the very embodiment of an insecure relationship to the past that lacks any stable foundation to build upon (i.e. liminal remembrance as an *expression of* the memory crisis). In a positive way, other poems counter the memory crisis by using liminal remembrance as an alternative form of recollecting national history that seeks to overcome the prevailing sense of commemorative insecurity in contemporary Ireland (i.e. liminal remembrance as a *reaction against* the memory crisis).

Liminal Remembrance as an Expression of the Memory Crisis

Some poems of liminal remembrance, it can be argued, can be interpreted as *concrete poetic expressions* of the Irish memory crisis, as they make the complex commemorative in-between and the negative, unsettling effect of this liminal state visible on the poetic stage. For that purpose, the poems discussed in this study adopt two strategies which, at times, overlap: some poems show Ireland's liminal state via an allegorical perspective on Irish commemorative culture, while other poems use traumatic events that cannot be incorporated in the speaker's memory as a way of depicting the uncertainty on the level of Ireland's cultural memory.

Regarding the first strategy, one might revisit Sullivan's "Townland" (cf. Section 3.2). As pointed out above, this poem undermines the *dinnshenchas* belief in the Irish landscape as a stable archive for the past. In that way, one might argue, it delivers an allegorical foundation, from which the changing paradigms in Ireland's commemorative practices are observed. Set in the urban environment of a mining town (as a perversion of and a distance from the natural idyll in traditional *dinnshenchas* poems), "Townland" shows that the Irish landscape does no longer harbour a single and stable truth but rather various ghostly sights and sounds of the past that disappear as soon as the speaker attempts to capture them. In this urban setting, references to the

past are unstable and liminality reveals its negative side: the speaker becomes the prototypical participant in the current Irish commemoration culture, who finds herself unable to relate to the past, as she can no longer 'read' the country but is caught in between multiple impressions with nothing to hold on to and no clear direction to pursue. The country has become a foreign country and its very liminality signals a sense of stagnation. As the ending of the poem and the powerful impact of the final full stop shows, in this setting, no attempt of closely listening to the past can achieve any productive outcome. Instead, the speaker is 'stranded' in this place, as she aimlessly wanders around town in chase of a faint idea of history, yet without a distinct reply or 'guiding voices' to rely upon.

Other examples of an allegorical perspective on Ireland's in-between commemorative culture can be found in poems using the *past as waste* metaphor. Thus, in Shaughnessy's "Dogged" (cf. Section 3.5), for instance, the speaker's uneasy relationship with a mangy dog becomes the very emblem of Ireland's uneasy relationship with the past in the moment of a memory crisis. In the poem, the "mangy dog" represents the past itself which, in Ireland, has been (mis)used, re-arranged or simply, like a dog, 'sent away'. It has been caught in so many different interpretative contexts that it now appears as "injured", with "sores" all over. In this deplorable state of constantly being re-interpreted, the past cannot function as a guideline for the present (and future) anymore. Quite on the contrary, it becomes an obstacle that the speaker "trips over" every time she tries to leave the house. The dog, like the past in Irish cultural memory, appears as a liminal entity that is both familiar and unfamiliar to the speaker, leaving her in a state of indecision about whether to keep it or get rid of it. As neither option is ultimately practicable, the speaker is caught in a stagnant routine of moving from and returning to the house in a repetitive cycle of pondering on how to treat the dog 'correctly'. Thus, like the two acts in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, which do not represent single days in the lives of the characters but rather a general state of being that is constantly repeated, the three stanzas in "Dogged" describe a scenario in which liminal indecision has become the default mode of being. Since the last word of the poem is "disease", there is no sign on the horizon that this 'sick' state of liminal stagnation will be overcome soon towards any post-liminal certainty. Like "Townland", "Dogged" thus represents a bleak allegorical vision of Ireland's relationship to its own past, which is depicted as cyclical and dysfunctional.

In other poems, the negative side of Ireland's liminal remembrance culture is expressed in a speaker's inability to properly incorporate traumatic national events into his/her personal memory frame. As pointed out in Section 3.2, traumatic events occupy a liminal position in memory since they are too painful to be remembered and too terrible to be forgotten. As such, traumatic events, as Mieke Bal points out, become "assailing spectres" that cannot be "integrat[ed] narratively" into already existing plots of the past (xi) and that thus defy being 'captured' in any stable frame of reference. It can be argued that this liminal position of traumatic experiences in a speaker's memory can be interpreted as a microscopic reflection of the liminal and indistinct position that national events more generally hold in Ireland's commemora-

tive culture. Here as well, the individual historical event cannot be incorporated in a single historical 'plot' but constantly meanders in between different interpretations. This specific use of trauma can, for example, be seen in Groarke's "To Smithereens", which features a speaker who cannot integrate the traumatic event of Lord Mountbatten's assassination into his personal memory frame. For this speaker, no fixed memory structures are available which might serve as a meaningful 'scaffold' for retrospectively coping with the experience. Rather, as the speaker realises right at the beginning of the poem, his memory, like Ireland's national memory, is a very fluid and dynamic construct: it resembles the sea, where things are constantly in motion and where one has to steer against different waves and currents (as another allegorical reference to the changing narratives in Irish commemoration), only to end up somewhere one was not expecting to be. In this environment, traumatic elements of the past indeed become spectres suddenly appearing from and disappearing into the depth of an ever-changing memory sea, in which no stable 'nets' to capture these monstrous things exist. Instead, the speaker, as shown above, is caught between confronting the experience to make sense of the menacing event, by describing his personal observations of the moment, and escaping from it into a different memory situation (cf. Section 3.2).

Similarly, in Perry's "Of the gas stove and the glimmerman", the speaker depicts the terrifying sounds of exploding "bombs that still wake us" in between the processes of remembering and forgetting. He, too, lacks the means to integrate these elements into memory (cf. Section 3.3). Thus, in the family memory frame, such painful memory items, including any memory related to the absent grandfather, cannot be coped with in any other way than by repressing them to a mnemonic "silence". Yet, as the speaker realises during his investigation into the familial past, repression does not grant control over the traumatic: like the sea metaphor used in "To Smithereens", the speaker in "Of the gas stove and the glimmerman" recognises the fluid nature of traumatic elements in memory that, like fish, are hard to catch. Although they are meant to remain confined, they are "escaping only occasionally/ like the startled bass from a torn fishing net". Traumatic elements, as the "torn fishing net" implies, become a disruptive force of its own that tears apart any attempt at tying it to a single place. Rather, the experience of a national trauma floats freely in memory to infiltrate even the more intimate everyday horizon and to 'explosively' appear on the surface of the speaker's memory. As pointed out in detail in the analysis above, the speaker's family memory becomes a space of conflict and friction that mirrors the national realm of conflict. Only in this state can trauma exist: regarding the idea of an 'explosion', the fragmentary nature of family memory in this poem is not merely a signifier for the complex structure of familial remembrance (see above) but becomes a sign for the general loss of coherence and stability. Within the plethora of fragments, the traumatic cannot be fixed in any way, as it turns into a disturbing force itself that counters any move towards a cohesive account of the past in which this disruptive element might make sense.

Liminal Remembrance as a Reaction Against the Memory Crisis

In her monograph *Pursue the Illusion: Problems of Public Poetry in America* (2010), Astrid Franke ascribes a particular role to poetry in public discourse: poetry offers opportunities "to think the public anew and to devise ways in which common concerns could be expressed" (5). Poetry in the public sphere, in other words, might serve as an innovative and reformative tool that provides fresh perspectives on a society and its current issues. This idea can also be applied to the poetry of liminal remembrance in Ireland's contemporary poetic landscape. Some poems dealing with national history in a liminal fashion can be regarded as tools to think Ireland's relationship to the past anew and, in this context, to challenge the public concern of a "cultural disquiet". These texts provide an alternative access to Irish history that introduces a new way of connecting to the nation's past in a time when fixed points of reference apparently no longer exist and the past has become a 'foreign country'. By doing so, the poems re-establish and renovate a more stable foundation for a relationship to the past amidst the insecurities of a memory crisis.

How do poems of liminal remembrance accomplish this task? To begin on the most general level, they establish an alternative access by radically altering the *memory angle* on Irish history: they move from a mode of memory concerned with narrative cohesion, as found in the public sphere, to a more selective approach of recollection. As the predominance of the private album over the public lexicon in liminal reconstructions already insinuates, these poems do not simply reproduce existing public narratives of Irish history, in which the meaning of an individual national event/context depends on its overall 'emplotment' in relation to other events. Quite on the contrary, poems of liminal remembrance defy the public sphere's over-saturation with memory narratives by taking individual events out of their narrative embedment, in order to look at them in isolation. Seen from the poems' new angle, the single national event is no longer merely perceived as one semantic element interpreted in a larger plot but is remembered as what it was in the first place: a concrete physical and emotional *experience*, that a (private) individual made in a particular time and space in the past.

With this shift from public narratives to personal experiences, these poems counter the commemorative insecurity persisting in contemporary Irish cultural memory: if one cannot trust the contradicting narratives of Irish national history anymore, then – in the spirit of Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* – one needs to find new reference points ("Kristallisationspunkte") from which a more stable relationship to the past can be nurtured (François 9). The poems at hand do so by 'retreating' from the public commemoration practices to the realm of the personal everyday horizon and its concrete sensory, episodic data as the last 'safe haven' to rely upon. Thus, in an otherwise unstable context of a memory crisis, the concrete experiences of Irish national history become 'memory anchors' through which a connection to the past can still be established and maintained. In the most general sense, it could be said that the memory shift taking place in liminal remembrance is a shift from the contested

field of cultural memory to communicative memory (cf. Section 2.3) as it captures the individual event at its experiential foundation, while circumventing the multiplicity of interpretations in public representations.

However, this turn towards communicative memory and selective personal experiences does not mean that a memory community and a collective commemorative practice no longer exist, since now everyone recollects the national past from his/her limited private perspective. The 'personal retreat' from narratives of the public sphere, in other words, is not to be mistaken for a simple escapist move into a pluralism of individual voices that does not allow a collective dimension of remembrance anymore. Rather, one interesting feature of the poems' alternative access to the past is that in the way the 'memory anchors' (i.e. concrete past experiences serving as new gateways for remembering Irish history) are presented, they combine an individual with a collective dimension. The 'memory anchors' occurring in poems of liminal remembrance are presented as liminal spaces themselves which encode the specific and the abstract alike: it is never exclusively a marker of a speaker's personalised access to the past (i.e. a component of a speaker's personal album) but it also constantly transcends the individual's sphere toward the realm of the symbolic that addresses a more abstract collective.

This hybridisation of the individual and the collective requires some clarifications. First of all, one needs to look at the concrete textual shape in which 'memory anchors' usually occur. In this context, the interaction between remembering and forgetting plays an important role: as shown above, in several poems liminal references to national history are often textually minimised to individual phrases or even words. More concretely, these minimal references manifest in a speaker's brief mentioning of a single auditive or visual impression/image. Thus, to merely name a few examples, the realm of the authentic memory type is filled with photographic and filmic motives: in French's "Moss", the reference to the First World War is concentrated in the image of injured limbs covered in moss. In Paul Perry's "Of the gas stove and the glimmerman" the Troubles are minimally implied in the concrete sound of exploding bombs perceived by the speaker, and in McGovern's "The Jeep" the Second World War context is implied in the image of the speaker's uncle in battle-kit.

It is in this minimal textual appearance that a 'memory anchor' combines elements of an individual and a collective connection to the national past. In its minimalism, it represents both a concrete single experience made by a concrete speaker in a concrete spatio-temporal setting *and* a representative experience that is not bound to a specific setting but serves as a collective emblem and signpost standing for a certain era of Irish history in general. This interaction, for example, can be seen in the image of the uncle in battle-kit under a William of Orange frieze in McGovern's "The Jeep": this image certainly refers to the speaker's actual uncle and his personal experience, as shared in the family. For the speaker, the uncle's concrete experience becomes his personal 'gateway' into the familial past, since, as shown in the poem's family collage overall, the speaker can closely identify with the relative's experience, to the ex-

tent of stepping into his uncle's shoes and adopting the relative's experiences in the era of the Second World War as his own. Yet, the image of the uncle attending mass in battle-kit also obtains a more general dimension. Looking at this one memory fragment in isolation, in the speaker's description, the uncle interestingly does not show any personal traits or features that clearly mark him as an individualised character. Rather, he remains a nondescript 'contour' that leaves space for interpretation. In that regard, the figure of the uncle is not just a concrete family member but also becomes a projection screen, inviting the readers, like the speaker, to fill the position and identify with the experience too. Described in this 'non-personal' manner, therefore, the poem initiates a participatory practice of sharing an experience and thus generates the sense of a memory collective based on a 'shared album'. The concrete experience of the uncle simultaneously turns into the general experience of the everyday individual that, in connection to the battle-kit and the frieze, as two components of this era's public iconography, serves as the emblem and 'blueprint' for relating to and remembering the Second World War scenario.

Another example can be found in the image of the moss-covered limbs of an injured soldier in French's "Moss". Here as well, it appears that the less an impression is contextualised by a speaker in a specific spatio-temporal setting of the past, the more a concrete experience made by a concrete individual can transform to a *hypothetical* collective experience without any clear space-time coordinates. Thus, while on the one hand, the speaker captures his personal perception of the limb in detail by comparing it to the moss-covered branches of trees, he, on the other hand, leaves the exact time and space of when and where this experience was made indistinct. Thus, he just roughly contextualises the impression sometime in "*1917*" while sketching the night sisters dressing the limb, and the spatial environment, in a most schematic, non-specific manner. In this interaction between a close capturing of the image and a vague remembrance of the context, the visual memory anchor of the limb becomes both an expression of the speaker's concrete experience in a past moment and an image operating in the realm of the symbolic. In this realm, the perception of the injured limb is taken out of its concrete setting to become a general sign that describes the experience of a lot of soldiers in many scenarios of the First World War. As such, it is a shared emblem representing a fragmentary glimpse at the World War past on an experiential foundation.

Many poems discussed in this study function in a similar manner, as they also provide memory anchors that connect the individual and the collective as well as the specific and the abstract. In that way, the contemporary Irish poetry landscape is saturated with a mosaic of versatile sights and sounds experienced in different eras of Irish history that engages the public readership in rediscovering a connection to the past on a personal and experiential level. Amidst the dilemma of public narratives, these images and impressions become the new anchors and the much needed "Kristallisationspunkte" to still hold on to the past in a moment of crisis. Where the official memorials and narratives no longer work, 'memory anchors' supply the public sphere with a series of unofficial 'memorials', located on the micro-level of everyday

life. Thus, like the ragpickers in the ‘waste poems’ above, who revalue the past by looking at the individual pieces that remain, some poems of liminal remembrance look at the fragments of individual experiences as a valuable foundation to reinvigorate a link to the past. As such, some poems of liminal remembrance generally contribute to reconceptualising the understanding of national history in the public sphere, as they turn Ireland’s past into a more personal issue, where remembrance is a matter of concrete experiences and not one of official narratives.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary

The present study was initially motivated by a simple question: how do contemporary Irish poems, written since the Celtic Tiger, represent Irish national history? This question resulted from an equally simple observation that in contemporary Irish poetry studies, the subject matter of national history has been largely neglected, especially when it comes to analysing the work of a new generation of Irish poets, who started publishing their first poetry collections in the midst of Ireland's radical cultural and social transformation at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Thus, let alone the fact that many 'new' Irish poets, such as Leanne O'Sullivan, Iggy McGovern or Paula Cunningham have hardly been analysed so far, questions of how these writers specifically negotiate Ireland's national history have yet to be answered.

The study at hand initiates a first attempt to close this research gap in contemporary Irish poetry studies and, in this context, to broaden the analytical spectrum of the existing Irish poetry canon. More specifically, by closely analysing selected poems written by a variety of 'new' and more established contemporary Irish poets since 2000, the study argued that in recent poetic works, one form of remembering Irish national history has become most prevalent: the form of 'liminal remembrance'. It was claimed that many Irish poems dealing with Ireland's past since the Celtic Tiger make use of a poetic memory practice defined by the simultaneity of and the interplay between textual processes of remembering and forgetting, which ultimately results in the impression of national history being both part and not part of a speaker's memory. As such, the form of liminal remembrance describes a specific perspective on the national past in contemporary Irish poetry that fundamentally challenges and scrutinises the boundaries between remembrance and oblivion. As equally being remembered *and* being forgotten, national history in liminal remembrance is depicted as a memory item that eludes any clear categorisation of an either/or dichotomy but, instead, is firmly harboured in an indistinct state of the 'betwixt and between': in the poems addressed in this study – which all access the past through a personal memory perspective in one form or another – speakers place national concerns of the past on the very threshold of their memories, where questions of inclusion and exclusion intersect, and national history is both partaking in memory, as a relevant and/or challenging element, and is kept at a distance as an item that is often minimised, suppressed and blurred.

To support and underline this argument of liminal remembrance, and to accurately describe the individual facets of this phenomenon, four specific types of poetic memory were introduced. These four types are *indirect memory*, in which the speaker reconstructs the past only in the form of public representations of a past national event/context, *family memory*, in which the national past appears in personal stories being shared in the familial sphere, *authentic memory*, in which the speaker estab-

lishes a camera-like, direct access to a moment in the past, as if reliving it first-hand, and a *metaphorical access* to the past that does not deal with concrete memories by individual speakers but conceptualises history through the liminal concept of waste.

Based on this distinction between four types of liminal remembrance, the study argued that each type uses different textual strategies and memory procedures, ultimately resulting in different ways of achieving a liminal state of national history. Thus, to merely summarise the most basic tendencies of each type, in *indirect memory* (cf. Section 3.2), the liminal positioning of national history is directly linked to this type's representational approach to the past. Poems of this kind use concrete public representations of Ireland's history as a foundation for negotiating processes of remembering and forgetting. They position national history in between becoming part of a speaker's private sphere and being an 'alien' element of the more distant cultural horizon of the past, which a speaker cannot (or does not want to) properly incorporate in his/her private memory. The textual analyses above have shown that the degree to which a speaker cannot relate to the national past depends on the *form of public representation* through which a national event entered a speaker's private life: while national events represented in news reports still claim a sense of immediacy in the speaker's everyday life, and therefore still 'haunt' him/her (e.g. Groarke's "To Smithereens"), national events that appear in the form of official memorials, are often forgotten simply because they no longer affect a speaker's life but become mere signs in a culture of surfaces (e.g. French's "Commute").

In *family memory* (cf. Section 3.3), liminal remembrance is the result of national history being contemplated in the complex setting of the familial sphere. This setting is defined by co-existing personal perspectives, a constant interaction between different temporal levels and an amalgamation of indirect and direct modes of accessing the past. As shown in the analyses in Section 3.3, the complexity of family memory becomes visible in two forms: first, some poems focus on the notion of memory transfers from one family member to another, and, second, other poems of this type display family memory as a fragmentary, poly-phonic and multitemporal memory collage, consisting of various personal memory episodes shared in the family. Both forms have their specific means of establishing a liminal recollection of national history. In poems depicting memory transfers, liminal remembrance results from the sheer ambivalence inherent to the transfer itself: as the analyses of Cunningham's "The Hyacinth under the Stairs" and French's "The Scar" have made clear, in the attempt to adopt another relative's past experiences, a speaker is inextricably caught between a 'fantasy of witnessing' the relative's experiences in close detail and a critical distance from this close remembrance. It is in this interplay between proximity and distance to a relative's memory that aspects of national history are liminally reconstructed: as part of a relative's experience, the speaker remembers aspects of national history in detail, as if bringing them back to life as his/her own experiences, while simultaneously, in a reflective turn, he/she distances him/herself from this memory to ponder upon the question whether the depiction of the national context should be forgotten as inaccurate or as a mere figment of imagination.

In the framework of the family collage, the liminal perspective is established by remembering national history in an *en passant* manner. Thus, as the discussions of Perry's "Of the gas stove and the glimmerman" and McGovern's "The Jeep" have demonstrated, by merely presenting aspects of national history as one fragment among other, more private fragments, references to Irish national events exist at the very fringes of the speaker's family collage: the remembrance of national aspects is strictly limited to minimal textual implications, which, as soon as they are recalled, already evade the speaker's memory focus again, as he/she constantly shifts from fragment to fragment. Yet, in this very limited existence, national references still fulfil a role in the collage (e.g. they become a template to define a family's private history in Perry's poem). In other words, in these poems, the interaction between remembering and forgetting is expressed in an interaction between an explicit textual minimalism and an implicit semantic relevance.

In the third type, *authentic memory* (cf. Section 3.4), the interaction between remembering and forgetting is connected to this type's associations with photography/videography, and the speaker's camera-like perspective on the past. Like a camera lens zooming in so closely to a particular detail of a scene that its surrounding is blurred, poems of this type focus on individual sense perceptions of a past moment to such an extent that the larger national implications of this scene become indistinct elements, situated at the very fringes of the speaker's memory picture. In this blurred position, they are still part of the speaker's memory, yet so indistinct as to be almost left forgotten. The interaction between hyper-focus and peripheral blur is realised in three ways in contemporary Irish poetry: first, some poems deal with *concrete photographs* and show how photographic representations can generate a 'direct access' to the past. As shown in the analysis of Meehan's "Manulla Junction", photographs engage the speaker in an intricate interplay between gaining a personal connection to the depicted scene/people and becoming painfully aware that photography creates distance as well, since the speaker becomes aware that the people depicted in a picture are irretrievably lost in the past (e.g. McBreen's "The Photograph of My Aunts"). Second, in *snapshot memories*, speakers imitate a photographic gaze on an individual moment of the past. Finally, *clip memories* imitate a video-graphic approach to a limited sequence of actions in the past. As shown above, both snapshot and clip memories use the strategy of a hyper-focus on details to achieve a blurry depiction of national history. In snapshot poems, history's liminal depiction is marked by the imagist credo of describing a visual entity in a most minimalistic manner (as shown in the description of the arms depot in Shaughnessy's "Shelter (May 1976)"), while in clip memories, it is the more holistic and multi-sensory focus on physical movement and actions in a particular spatio-temporal setting that limits the speaker's point of view on what can and cannot be remembered (as seen in the close description of a boy's accident with a gun in O'Sullivan's "Safe House").

In the last type, which uses a metaphorical approach to history, liminality becomes the *tertium comparationis* in the metaphor of *history as waste*. Thus, the liminal appearance of Ireland's past, as the target domain, is mirrored in the liminal properties

of waste as a source domain. In the poems discussed in Section 3.5, waste combines various forms of 'in-betweenness', depending on the focus individual poems apply to the concept of waste. More specifically, the chapter on waste poetry distinguished between poems dominantly focusing on the waster, the process of wasting or the wasted entity itself. In poems showing the speaker in the role of a waster, the past appears in the form of concrete wasted objects which occupy an 'uncanny' position in the speaker's life. It appears as both familiar and unfamiliar to him/her at the same time, and, as such, the old cannot simply be left behind but 'haunts' the speaker in the present (e.g. seen in the speaker's attempt to get rid of the old furniture in Higgins' "Clear Out"). In poems that focus on the process of wasting, waste more dominantly appears in between a process of devaluation and revaluation. Here the figure of the ragpicker plays a most important role and the past as waste appears as both discarded and renewed. This, for example, is the case in McAuliffe's "A Pyramid Scheme", where an old Cortina is debunked at the end of the road, only to transform into something new with a new purpose and value. Last but not least, in poems focusing on wasted entities, liminality gains a decidedly negative tone: waste correlates with a state of stagnation, with things neither moving forwards nor backwards. Thus, in poems with this specific focus, the past is shown as something that is here to stay, obstructing any form of constructive development in the present. This becomes apparent in Durcan's "Politics", where the unemployed, homeless history professor, as 'social trash', symbolically hinders customers in the supermarket from finishing their materialist Celtic Tiger routine. In short, in each form of waste poetry the past is not simply discarded and forgotten, but represents an in-between entity that, in the process of being 'thrown away', already contains the potential to newly return into memory.

The study furthermore showed that the interaction between remembering and forgetting in all four types is closely connected to an interaction between a speaker's personal experiences and his/her learned knowledge. Drawing on the theory and terminology by Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller and Karoline Tschuggnall, it was demonstrated that each type of poetic memory filters its liminal depictions through a personal memory perspective on the national past (cf. Section 3.1), in which components of the album (and its related concept of episodic memory) and the lexicon (and semantic memory) come together. The specific relationship between album and lexicon differs from type to type. The main result can best be summarised on a dynamic scale: on the one end of the scale, the relationship between album and lexicon is highly asymmetrical, with speakers almost exclusively focusing on experiences, while learned elements are being heavily marginalised as a result. This can, for example, be seen in authentic memory poems. On the other end of the scale, album and lexicon closely cooperate, to the point of becoming indistinguishable at times. This becomes apparent in family memory poems. In between these two poles, mixed forms of interaction can be found, as seen in indirect memory poems and poems that use a metaphorical approach. In these types, depending on the individual poem, the relationship between

album and lexicon at times tends towards separation, and at other times towards convergence.

The exact patterns of correlation between remembering/forgetting and album/lexicon are complex and depend on the individual text in which this correlation occurs. Here, only two examples of this correlation shall be revisited. First, in authentic memory poems, the notion of national history being pushed to the blurry periphery of a speaker's camera-like gaze on the past is directly related to the speaker's detailed focus on reconstructing the past via sensory perceptions, experienced in a specific moment in the past. In contrast, acquired knowledge about the past is hardly considered. In this type, the strong focus on experience thus appears to dictate the boundaries between remembering and forgetting, as hardly anything outside of the experiential realm is remembered. As such, in O'Sullivan's "Safe House", for example, only actions happening inside the house are remembered in detail. Anything that lies outside this intimate realm becomes blurred in the speaker's memory, including the national context of Ireland's struggle to become an independent nation, which is only hinted at in a vague and indistinct manner.

Second, in family memory, the close interaction between album and lexicon equally contributes to the interaction between processes of remembering and forgetting. More to the point, the speaker's negotiation of family stories in personal memory relies on his/her recognition that what he/she treated as concrete experiences turns out to be learned elements projected onto the past. Thus, in French's "The Scar", the speaker's close observation of his father on the battlefield turns out to be a projection of scenes learned from films. In this type, in other words, and in contrast to authentic memory, it is not the separation but the amalgamation of album and lexicon in the reconstruction of the past that plays into the simultaneity of both remembering and forgetting, as it combines a first-hand approach of experience with a more distant relationship to the past through a semantic access.

In total, these are the main results of the present study. Yet, a summary of the main findings would not be complete without a glimpse at the specific epochs that are liminally remembered in the individual types. In other words, next to this study's main focus on the *how* of liminal remembrance, it will conclude with some observations on *what* is liminally remembered in contemporary Irish poetry. In the analysed corpus, there does not appear to be any direct relationship between the different types of liminal remembrance and the specific epochs being remembered. Put differently, the remembrance of a specific event/context cannot be exclusively assigned to a specific type of poetic memory. Rather, leaving aside the metaphorical type that generally deals with history on a meta-level, for the remaining three types, it can be claimed that there are three epochs of Irish history that retain a predominant position in contemporary Irish poetry: first, the time of the Easter Rising, the Anglo-Irish War and Ireland's struggle for independence, then the two World Wars and, finally, the Northern Irish Conflict. As such, the poems discussed above largely limit their memory scope to Irish history of the twentieth century, while discussions of Ireland's earlier,

'colonial' past only appear sporadically. The predominant focus on this temporal frame, and these specific national contexts, might be explained as follows: the focus on the twentieth century appears to result from the fact that in all poems of liminal remembrance, as shown above, the past is reflected through the lens of a personal memory perspective. As indicated in Section 2.3, the temporal range of personal reflections of the past is naturally limited by the life span of the remembering individual. Thus, a speaker can only remember either more recent historical events directly experienced by him/her (e.g. the Troubles) or events/contexts that the speaker has indirectly witnessed through public representations or the experiences of the parent/grandparent generation (e.g. the World Wars, Struggle for Independence). Furthermore, the specific selection of national contexts being remembered can be related to the practice of liminal remembrance as well. The events displayed in the poems above must all be seen as moments of conflict and crisis. Like any other conflict, these moments are highly liminal in nature, as they define transitional phases in Irish history, in which established social and political structures are 'softened' and challenged, in order to be rearranged toward a post-liminal solution of the conflict. This observation allows to draw an interesting parallel between the form and the content of contemporary poetry on Irish history: liminal contexts are negotiated in a liminal memory space. The liminal form of commemoration, therefore, appears to mirror the liminality of the national events it addresses.

5.2 Considerations for Future Research

As shown in Chapter 4, regarding the contextual level of poetry, the phenomenon of recollecting national history in between remembrance and oblivion can be read in two ways: if one assumes that there is a correlation between a literary form and the cultural context in which it occurs, poems of liminal remembrance become both an *expression of* and a *reaction against* a cultural memory crisis. Liminal remembrance emerges in Irish poetry as a literary challenge which serves as a platform to make the unstable conditions of contemporary Irish commemoration visible, by showing the 'downside' and insecurities of a liminality, and, at the same time, suggesting an alternative access to the past. Liminal remembrance, therefore, like the concept at its very core, is neither the one nor the other but both a positive *and* a negative reply to an Irish culture seeking answers at a time when its relationship to the past is put into question.

In the end, however, as in any study focusing on a specific phenomenon, some questions must necessarily remain unanswered and need to be addressed in future research. More specifically, there are two important aspects that have not been discussed in this study and that require more attention: what is the relationship between the phenomenon of liminal remembrance and other forms of accessing the national past in contemporary poetry? Furthermore: How can one describe the historical development of liminal remembrance?

Regarding the first aspect, next to poems displaying the dominant phenomenon of liminal remembrance, there are other poems which do not make use of a liminal memory practice and/or the notion of the album and the lexicon. Thus, to merely name one example, there are a number of poems specifically recollecting the Celtic Tiger era (e.g. poems by Rita Ann Higgins or Dennis O'Driscoll), which do not keep the national sphere in a liminal vagueness but seemingly shift towards a more overt and direct perspective on history. They explicitly address problems on a societal level in a detailed manner, and not in the form of minimalised references. In this context, it would be interesting to see if this more overt way of remembering national history is restricted only to various poems about the Celtic Tiger, where it seems to be most visible, or if this kind of remembrance can also be found in poetic reflections on other eras of Ireland's past. If it is exclusively applied in poems about the Celtic Tiger, the follow-up question must be considered, of why this specific era needs a more explicit reconstruction than other contexts of Irish history. Only a proper analysis might reveal the scope of this more direct access to the past and the underlying understanding of history upon which these poems operate. Furthermore, in this way, the exact position of liminal remembrance in Irish poetry could be contoured in more detail, as it could be compared to and differentiated from other forms of poetic memory.

A second issue concerns the historical dimension of liminal remembrance. Although liminal remembrance only became a dominant mode of accessing the past in the context of Ireland's transformation during the Celtic Tiger years, one might additionally examine the poetic 'forebears' of this phenomenon. Thus, Patrick Kavanagh and Derek Mahon, for example, already experimented with the liminal properties of waste and writers such as Eavan Boland or Frank Ormsby applied more personal and restricted perspectives on the past, before the 'New Irish Poets' entered the scene. Where, then, can one find early 'precursors' of today's liminal remembrance and how can liminal remembrance be contextualised in the larger context of the Irish poetic tradition? Questions such as these make abundantly clear that much is still to be done on the 'liminal front' and that many 'New Irish Poets' require more attention overall. The present study is only the first attempt to initiate the transition of liminal remembrance from a phenomenon that lies in the dark of utter oblivion to a phenomenon that is illuminated by the light of academic recognition; in this process, many things have yet to be uncovered and, most certainly, many thresholds need to be passed.

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