

“FRIGHTENED WITH MY OWN HATRED”: TELLING VIOLENCE IN
JENNIFER JOHNSTON’S *FOOL’S SANCTUARY*
AND *THE INVISIBLE WORM*

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Introduction

I would like to start by quoting two writers. Colm Tóibín writes in his “Introduction” to *The Penguin Book of Irish Fiction*:

How is it then that we can find a shape for Irish writing which goes beyond the personal into the communal? How is it that we can make the following statements about Irish writing: there is almost no version of domestic harmony at the beginning of an Irish novel; there is no Irish novel which ends in a wedding, or a match being made. Irish fiction is not like that; Irish fiction is full of dislocation and displacement. (Tóibín xxiii)

Jennifer Johnston said in an interview given to Michael Kenneally in 1984:

I think that we have all misunderstood each other, but I also think we understand each other terribly well. I think that the two cultures in Ireland cannot live without each other and that we have created in the past fifty years a situation that is hanging by very narrow threads as to how we’re going to go in the future. [...] We have to realize how much we gain from each other and from the past and the suffering. And we seem to be finding it very difficult to do so. (Johnston, Interview, Kenneally 16)

Towards the end of his “Introduction,” Tóibín notes, on the one hand, that “the violence of the past thirty years has also come back to haunt Irish fiction in the work” of various writers, while, on the other hand, he raises the question of whether “now that the violence is fading and the society moves slowly towards Anglo-Irish Agreement and European Union, [we] will see a waning of the national themes in Irish writing” (Tóibín xxxiii). Implicit in Tóibín’s words, and explicit in many critical accounts of Irish representations of the family,¹ is the assumption that the absence of domestic happiness in fiction mirrors the national misunderstandings pointed out by Jennifer Johnston in her diagnosis of the state of affairs between the so-called “two cultures in Ireland.” As the two communities hopefully learn to co-exist, and as Ireland increasingly opens to the European Union and to contemporary migrations, other cultures may emerge into representation, and new formats for co-existence may be required in order to accommodate plurality rather than the traditional duality between Catholics and Protestants that finds its cultural and biological representation in heterosexual

1 For recent studies, see Backus, Corbett, and Ferris.

marriage.² However, the late 1980s, which are the backdrop to the novels under discussion, reflect Johnston's assessment of the thorny relations between "two cultures" seemingly unable to acknowledge a shareable ground, which has been made vividly present by the polarised results of elections in Northern Ireland.³

In this essay I will argue, first, that *Fool's Sanctuary* (1987) and *The Invisible Worm* (1991) can be read as allegories of pre- and post-independence Ireland, respectively; secondly, that the relation between conflicting cultures is rendered through a dialogic discourse; and finally I will assess the implications of such an intersubjective representation of reality and its relation to the open endings to be found in Johnston's novels. In other words, I will be looking at how discourse relates to the issue of violence and the maiming effects of hatred raised in these novels.

Allegories of Pre- and Post-Independence Ireland

My pairing of these two novels does not proceed from a strictly chronological convenience – nor, for that matter, from a wish to appropriate binary models and marriage allegories for my own purposes. It so happens that, just as Johnston's novels constantly engage in intertextual relations with other works (as *Fool's Sanctuary's* variation upon *The Tempest* and the Blakean title of *The Invisible Worm* illustrate),⁴ there are intertextual links among her novels. In fact, *Fool's Sanctuary* and *The Invisible Worm* can be read as two complementary views of the difficult relations between the two cultures in Ireland: had Miranda, the protagonist of *Fool's Sanctuary* and the daughter of a Protestant Anglo-Irish household, married her Catholic love, Laura, the

2 A film such as Eugene Brady's *The Nephew* uses the locus of the family to address the scope of the notion of Irishness: can Irishness, and the metaphor of the Irish family, accommodate a black nephew, the offspring of an interracial marriage? Is blackness compatible with Irishness? Among other things, this refers to the racial homogeneity traditionally associated with Irishness, be it of Catholic or Protestant denomination. As in Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game*, where Jody, the black British soldier stationed in Northern Ireland, complains that "[t]his must be the only place on earth where they call you nigger to your face," the conspicuous foreigner highlights overlooked features of home.

3 I refer to the election of 26 November 2003, the results of which show a marked radicalisation of the two communities' political allegiances, with Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party and Gerry Adams's Sinn Féin attracting the majority of Protestant and Catholic votes, respectively.

4 On Ireland and *The Tempest*, see Baker and Callaghan. On the Blakean undertones in *The Invisible Worm*, see Diaz Fabre. *The Invisible Worm* has attracted careful critical attention in studies on Irish representations of the family: for a perceptive reading of the novel within a study of the fictional daughters of the Big House, see Frehner; for a comparative reading of the novel within the Gothic family romance, see Backus 216-40. On incest in recent Irish fiction, see St. Peter's "Petrifying Time." On *Fool's Sanctuary*, see Peach 38-67 and Lanters.

main character in *The Invisible Worm*, could have been her granddaughter and hence her story can be one possible answer to Miranda's what-if questions.⁵

Set in the Anglo-Irish house of Termon, the anglicised form for the Irish word meaning 'sanctuary,' *Fool's Sanctuary* features Miranda Martin as its narrator and protagonist. On her deathbed in the mid-1980s, she sets out to assemble "the cast of [her] play" (FS 3),⁶ that is to recast and reassess in her mind the events which took place in the family home in the early 1920s, a time which was as crucial for the shaping of the rest of her life as it was for defining the future of her nation. The first-person opening of her narrative – "There are no new days ahead of me" (FS 1) – misleads her readers into thinking that her re-visitation of the past is prompted by purely personal circumstances, hence her need to face the question of "how [life led her] to that moment" (FS 1). However, when trying to answer that question after staging her mental play, she confesses to another motive behind her gesture, thereby linking past and present violence and projecting her personal act of retrospection into a communal frame:

Sometimes now when I read the papers, hear the news on the wireless, I try to conjure up those dreams again, recreate the pain of the past.

I can't any longer.

My indifference to the events of the last few years, the re-stirring of the pot of violence, frightens me, even now as I lie here. I suppose I must have destroyed in myself the power to feel passion, pity, rage.

My only hope is that God will forgive me for the wilful destruction of myself. (FS 131-32)

What happens then in that Indian summer of 1920 in a house called Sanctuary, yet with its walls "cluttered [with] the paraphernalia of war" (FS 30) of its past inhabitants? Eighteen-year-old Miranda, like her Shakespearean predecessor, hardly remembers her late mother and has a surrogate mother in her Irish Nanny. She lives with her father, Mr. Martin, who, instead of fighting for King and/or Country like all his male ancestors, followed his mother's example and became a landlord.⁷ Assisted by

5 I agree with Peach's remarks both on the frameworks underlying much "adverse criticism of Johnston" and on more productive frameworks within which to read her novels: as he points out, much of the first comes "from naturalistic or historical approaches to [Johnston's] fiction that do not offer the best frameworks within which to discuss it." He contends that since her characters are rather "sites of ideological conflict or embodiments of ideological positions that are challenged, [...] this is where the interest of the reader who wishes to take Johnston on her own terms must lie and critical discussion must concentrate on following the ideological conflicts through the pattern of recurring motifs, of thesis and counter thesis, of the fusion of the natural with the mythical" (Peach 101).

6 All subsequent page references indicated in this manner are to *Fool's Sanctuary* (FS) and *The Invisible Worm* (IW), respectively.

7 Having kept her father's accountancy books in her youth (FS 8), it can be assumed, although she never returns to the issue, that Miranda ensured her survival by following in her father's and grandmother's footsteps and became a landlady herself, assisted on the home front by Nanny and, after her death, by Peggy Dillon, Mr. Dillon's sister.

his faithful employee Mr. Dillon, and by Dillon's son and Miranda's beloved Cathal,⁸ Mr. Martin wrote "pamphlets on re-afforestation and land reclamation" (*FS* 6) as a form of reparation to the land that had been ill-treated by his own kind.

During the weekend of life-changing events, everyone converges at Termon: Cathal, who has become involved with the IRA while studying in Dublin, and Miranda's brother Andrew together with his English comrade Harry Harrington, both in their military uniforms and invested with an intelligence mission for the British Armed Forces. The IRA plots to assassinate the two British officers, and Cathal is supposed to facilitate access to the house, since the rebels ignore the maxim that a door kept unlocked is a "welcoming" sanctuary – in fact, a "fools' sanctuary" (*FS* 99), as its owner calls it. After hesitating about whether to carry out his job (*FS* 99), Cathal enters the house, sees sleepy, tired and ageing Mr. Martin (*FS* 102) and, acting on his emotions rather than on his ideology, informs him of the plot to kill Andrew and Harry, thus enabling the two officers to escape while turning himself into an "informer [and] traitor" (*FS* 101) who is promptly executed by his own comrades. Miranda justifies her choice to remain "virgo intacta in so many ways" (*FS* 35) as a decision to "align [her] life with [Cathal's] death" (*FS* 98). She says "no, forever" (*FS* 59) to Harry's repeated proposals to her, thus refusing to re-enact the metaphor of an Act of Union between England and Ireland.⁹ She does, nonetheless, engage in "foolish speculations" (*FS* 131) about whether her "tentative love" (*FS* 131) for Cathal would have survived in post-independence Ireland and concludes that, had he "moved towards politics, after the fight was over; shifted into that grey area where expediency becomes a slogan, rather than a possibility" (*FS* 131), she "would have hated it [for] there was too much of [her] father in [her] for that to give [her] pleasure of any sort" (*FS* 131). The question with which she remains is whether her "self-imposed solitude was a sin" (*FS* 98) "for not exploring the possibilities of love" (*FS* 97-98).

Thus, the allegory of pre-independence Ireland provided here is centred and viewed from the microcosm of the Anglo-Irish stronghold, its own conflicting allegiances, and its ambivalent relations to the surrounding Irish human and natural environment. The

8 Mr. Martin finds in Cathal his "sounding board" (*FS* 31) and sponsors his studies at University College Dublin.

9 Miranda's and Harry's incompatibility is recurrently associated with his Englishness. Harry is considered to embody some English features or, at least, some of the Irish prejudices about the English: although "he doesn't ride badly, for an Englishman" (*FS* 69), he is considered "uncomplicated" and "unaware" (*FS* 43-44), refraining from looking beyond the surface of things and thus "[v]ery English [in] not wanting to disclose things" (*FS* 59). Mr. Martin corroborates Miranda's view by noting that he is "the sort of straightforward chap it's pleasant to have around. Uncomplicated" (*FS* 122). Harry, although "seduced" (*FS* 59) by Ireland – "He saw us in radiant autumn light [...]. We were never plain, pain-filled people to him" (*FS* 59), says Miranda –, has his own prejudices about the Irish, hinting at their alleged emotional garrulousness: "I think that like most Irish people I've ever met you just talk on about things you don't understand very well" (*FS* 45).

political issues of legitimacy and betrayal that are central to *The Tempest* are addressed in *Fool's Sanctuary* in problematising and non-conclusive ways. In *The Tempest* the previously overthrown order is restored according to Prospero's assertive design. In *Fool's Sanctuary* two conflicting notions of order are displayed, a militaristic and a utopian one: the militaristic is materialised in the Anglo-Irish War and represented in the text by the two contending parties, the British military and colonial power, embodied in the Anglo-Irish Andrew Martin and his English friend Harry Harrington, and the Irish Catholic and IRA commandant Cathal Dillon, who defends war as a means to gain freedom for Ireland; the utopian model, which is conservative in its means and progressive in its aims, is represented by the Anglo-Irish landlord Mr. Martin and his Irish friend and employee Mr. Dillon. It is the militaristic model that is sanctioned by history, but it is also its premises, namely its foundations in violence and war, that are questioned and set against Mr. Martin's ideas for gradual transformation through a fair redistribution of "seized land" (Bowen 31).¹⁰ These are considered more threatening than a mere change from English to Irish rule and alarmingly branded as "Bolshevism" (FS 44). Like Gonzalo in *The Tempest*, Mr. Martin is scorned for his unrealistic ideas,¹¹ and it is only in the course of her retrospective re-assessment of history that Miranda sees "how much closer he was to sanity than we gave him credit for" (FS 35).

Unlike Miranda Martin, Laura Quinlan, the thirty-seven-year-old Protestant Anglo-Irish protagonist of *The Invisible Worm*, chose to marry Maurice Quinlan, who, like her own father, belonged to the Republic's "new nobility" of "energetic[,] powerful" (IW 111) Catholics who achieved success in business and politics. Like Cathal, Maurice was a protégé of her father's, who hired him to look after the mill, even if Laura later claims that she "could have run that mill [...] just as well as he [did]" (IW 59), adding that she "shouldn't have married Maurice" and should instead "have lived [in her family home] alone" (IW 59), in other words, should have followed Miranda's course. Laura chose to marry Maurice in order to take possession of her mother's house¹²

10 Bowen's description of Bowen's Court ("Imposed on seized land, built in the rulers' ruling tradition") betrays a self-consciousness akin to Mr. Martin's sense of inherited guilt and responsibility (Bowen 31).

11 Andrew dismisses his father as "a foolish, rather boring old man [who] passed his life in a dream" (FS 111). Mr. Martin's position is reminiscent of Shaw's Fabian socialism which, as Duddy points out, "distinguished itself from revolutionary Marxism by working with a 'top down' rather than a 'bottom up' model of strategic action" so that "its first appeal was to well-placed, influential, middle-class individuals and groups rather than to a prospectively revolutionary proletariat." Duddy further adds that the "non-revolutionary nature of Fabian strategy does not imply a complaisant vision of the future society, certainly not as far as the role of the state is concerned" (Duddy 289).

12 As she remarks: "This is my house. [...] [F]or three generations it had descended through the female line" (IW 4). She also admits to Dominic that she "wanted to deprive [her] father of this place [and] sling him out. Maurice thought [she] was crazy" (IW 170).

and make her father leave it and to avoid the fate of “the traditional Irish daughter” (*IW* 121) who is supposed to look after her father. She also “did try to have a daughter” (*IW* 4), for she “believe[d] in continuity, the handing down of secrets” (*IW* 4), but “all those seeds were rejected” (*IW* 4).

At the beginning of the narrative Laura’s father has just died, asking for her forgiveness (*IW* 170), while she remained “frightened [...] with [her] own hatred” (*IW* 170). Again suggesting a collusion of personal and communal forms of hatred, news of Anglo-Irish talks over Northern Ireland as well as of talks in Brussels over subsidies are on the radio (*IW* 99-100).¹³ Maurice brings home Dominic, a former priest who had been forced into the priesthood to fulfil his parents’ expectations and left after his mother’s death. Trust grows between Laura and Dominic as they realise that they are both “sacrificial lambs” (*IW* 121). Dominic becomes a catalyst for Laura’s unbidden memories, while he articulates his own story. Although no longer a priest, he acts as a confessor to the Protestant Laura, and only in him does she find the willingness to listen that she had sought in her mother when she told her about the events in the summerhouse. Then, upon hearing the fifteen-year-old (*IW* 66) Laura saying that she had just been raped by her father, Mrs. O’Meara first disbelieved her daughter (*IW* 174-5) and, on the following morning, after bidding Laura “to carry on as if nothing had ever happened” and begging her not to “hate him” (*IW* 178), she “went out and drowned herself when she wasn’t able to handle things” (*IW* 141). As Laura tells Dominic this, she also commits herself before a witness to “see the whole thing through. Life and all that” (*IW* 141). This “emergency exit” (*IW* 141) implies facing precisely what her mother had avoided: the pain, the past, and the “empty page” (*IW* 181) of the future. As she confesses that she is “tired of hating” (*IW* 179), Laura also refuses Dominic’s proposal to run away with him (*IW* 179), thereby refusing to re-engage in the available pattern of a patriarchal marriage, with its inherited notions of female fragility and dependence upon male power and protectiveness.

Post-independence Ireland is thus represented through the childless mixed marriage of a successful and charming Irish Catholic male and a girlish Anglo-Irish female who had been abused by her seductive and powerful Catholic father and abandoned by her cold and “mocking” (*IW* 116) Protestant mother.¹⁴ The fact that the house had

13 The latter often provide the excuse for the “daft ritual” (*IW* 163), which is the shared code for Maurice’s extra-matrimonial escapades.

14 Of her parents’ respective social status Laura says, “The triumph of the successful wrapped him [whereas m]y mother was never treated with such deference. I always got the feeling they didn’t want her over the threshold, staring perhaps, evaluating, making judgements in her head” (*IW* 97), thereby rendering, not only how her mother was viewed by her father’s community, but also how she presumably viewed them. Laura responded positively to her father’s “smiling confidence [and] the warmth of his power” (*IW* 97) and, like her father’s Catholic friends, feared her mother’s “mocking laughter” (*IW* 116) and was “aware of [her] aloneness when she was with her [mother], but never with him” (*IW* 117).

descended through the female line for three generations (*IW* 4) hints at the emasculation of the Anglo-Irish since independence and reverses the colonial representation of the relation between the two communities, where the coloniser is featured as "imperially male" (Heaney 74)¹⁵ and the colonised as vulnerably female. Even though power has changed hands, the power- and property-based nature of the relation has remained. Just like Prospero, who claimed to be the authoritative voice in his island, just like Andrew, in *Fool's Sanctuary*, who echoed the coloniser's position and tried to discredit Cathal, the "emotional hothead" (*FS* 110) who ironically saved his life, so do Laura's father and husband voice the authoritative discourse in the Republic. While Laura's father casts himself as a hero who fought for independence, both men are critical of the Anglo-Irish "empire building" and "soldiering" (*IW* 12) connections, even though they like "things to be done with style" (*IW* 34) and hence find the Anglo-Irish museum-like houses to "have their uses" (*IW* 81).

Both Miranda and Laura thus feel the need to engage in a critical appraisal of inherited discourses in order to build their own narratives. Like Miranda, Laura rejects her husband's version of her family when echoed by Dominic and warns him that "Maurice isn't always right, you know" (*IW* 23). In her own version, she is not confined to sectarian alliances and divides, but also focuses on gender and class, thereby pointing to a more complex and interdependent social network than the inherited one based on sectarian antagonism. Referring to her great-grandfather's travels accompanied by his servant Markey, Laura notes women's ability "to keep things going" at home:

Weren't women amazing, that they could cope with all that? Such strength. I envy them that strength. It would have been easy enough, I suppose, for my great-grandmother, but I often used to wonder if Mrs. Markey hated my great-grandfather for taking her husband away like that. (*IW* 22-23)

However, if her father's and husband's version of history is publicly sanctioned, Laura's and her mother's are confined to the private sphere of their household and

15 Heaney's opening of the second stanza of his poem "Act of Union," "And I am still imperially / Male, leaving you with the pain" (74), echoes the popular iconography of colonisation (e.g. as represented in *Punch*), in which Ireland figured either as a vulnerable female in need of protection (akin to Miranda requiring protection from her Caliban) or as a wild, simian, Calibanesque creature driven by instinct and requiring the guidance of reason. In either case, Heaney's notion of the pain caused by this imperial guidance is conspicuously absent; on representations of the Irish in caricature, see Cheng 15-74. In *The Invisible Worm*, what Laura says of her mother could well stand for the subaltern position and the self-alienating attitude of the Anglo-Irish in post-independence Ireland: "I think she hated being a woman. I think she hated having to turn over her independence to someone else. She escaped inside her head, and of course in her boat" (*IW* 82).

discredited by husbands who choose what to hear (*IW* 23).¹⁶ The underlying implication in these conflicting views of history is that, as was suggested in *Fool's Sanctuary*, empire-building and nation-building share the same male-centred militaristic notions of heroism. Being based on antagonism,¹⁷ both are self-assertive and refuse to listen to the other, thus proving unwilling to create a space inclusive of diversity.

Telling the Pain of the Past

Unlike Laura, who needs an interlocutor to help her reconnect her fractured self, Miranda has no material interlocutor, and it is in the mind that the dialogue with her cast takes place as one last attempt to “search for the clue” (*FS* 7). Miranda acts as a female, post-magic Prospero who steps down from the aloofness, omniscience, and omnipotence that characterises Shakespeare’s Prospero. Her status as narrator and main character and the dynamics inherent in this are dramatised through a grammatical split between the first-person (telling) and the third-person (told).¹⁸ This narrative device establishes some dispassionate detachment between narrator and character and emphasises the temporal vantage point and the benefit of hindsight of narrator over character. The dialogic nature of her words (addressed to someone, be it Cathal, God, or the audience of her mental play) further present the act of making sense as relational and language-based so that thinking and writing become means of re-inscribing her solitary life within the community. By explicitly resorting to the frame of a play, itself a variation of a very well-known play, she also pays tribute to the relevance of aesthetic experience in as much as it provides common ground for private experience to be shared through empathy. The impulse behind Miranda’s re-

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- 16 Just as Dominic is the sole listener to Laura’s version of things, she had been the recalcitrant listener to her mother’s warnings about her husband’s heroic version of his role in Ireland’s independence: “Daddy fought for freedom,” [Laura] said, eliciting the following reply from her mother, “Don’t you believe it. [...] Daddy fought for Daddy” (*IW* 31).
- 17 The relation between these two views is itself antagonistic, in that the colonised rebels against the coloniser but is caught in the same dynamic. Memmi argues that the colonised and the coloniser are caught in a similar and mutually defining predicament which results in a “painful discord” (296) within themselves, while the coloniser either “rejects colonialism [and] resigns himself to a position of ambiguity” (111) or accepts “the reality of being a colonizer [...], that is, a usurper” (118). The colonised, in turn, “always considers the coloniser as a model or an antithesis [and] continues to struggle against him” (296).
- 18 In the novel’s structure, first-person sections alternate with third-person ones: while the first are often evocative, interpretative or speculative, the latter are dramatic and offer an immediate rendering of scenes and dialogue. Sometimes the grammatical shift occurs within the same narrative section, as the reflective mood gives way to a dramatic one, as is illustrated in the following passage which introduces the encounter of the four youngsters on the beach: “If I could be there again. / If I could change time around, I could have said, Run Cathal. [...] Above *us* [Miranda and Cathal] I saw two men [Andrew and Harry] [...]. / *He* [Cathal] stopped walking and put both his arms around *her* [Miranda]” (*FS* 19-20; my italics).

creation of the past is to “look properly” (*FS* 43) at her characters, while acknowledging that she “may not be right [for] people are so complicated [that] even if you watch carefully, they’re hard to understand” (*FS* 43). However, she tries to understand the misunderstandings between her mother and father from their respective points of view and distances herself from her brother’s ‘hard words’ such as “Order. Discipline. Obedience,” which she considers “frightened [...] and frightening” (*FS* 95), thus pinpointing that the source of their apparent strength is an unacknowledged fear. By assembling the cast of her play, she is thus seeking imaginative closeness with her characters and engaging in a language more tentative, less assertive, and more inclusive of human complexity than either her brother’s fear-ridden ‘hard words,’ or her previous silent indifference.

If Miranda’s memory play dramatises the various voices and points of view of her characters, it does so within the very dramatisation of her own internal dialogue between an experiencing young ‘she’ acting as the object of a reflective dying ‘I.’ It is in this internal space and split that her subjectivity emerges as distinctive from the dogmatic ideological discourses evoked and highlighted in Cathal’s fate. The procedure illustrates what Luce Irigaray describes as “[t]he subject’s highest task”:

[It] is to constitute himself as human, to constitute the objectivity of his subjectivity as human. This subjectivity is essentially relational. Whoever is capable of providing in oneself a place not only for the other but for the relation with the other is human. (Irigaray 80)

Whereas the relation between Miranda’s present ‘I’ and past ‘she’ creates the space for a “relational becoming,”¹⁹ whereby she “constitute[s] the objectivity of [her] subjectivity,” Laura’s narrative starts out by dramatising a split, where ‘I’ and ‘she’ remain disconnected and fluid, and a relation between them needs to be created:

I stand by the window and watch the woman running.
Is it Laura? [...]
I am Laura. [...]
Perhaps, I think to myself, she is running towards something.
I think that on good days.
On the other days I know she is running away.
That makes me laugh.
What’s the point in that? (*IW* 1)

19 “Human being only exists thanks to a relational becoming which is proper to it” (Irigaray 81). Irigaray’s subsequent remarks on the nature of the ‘I’ who engages in the relational process of subjectivity corroborates my point on the self-reliability of Miranda’s use of personal pronouns. Miranda differs from Laura, who is “not sure in which tense [she] live[s], the present or the past” (*IW* 83). This may explain why Laura needs a catalyst to her unbidden memories, while Miranda can stage this dialogic space by herself. As Irigaray puts it: “In order that the ‘you’ take place in a relation with the ‘I,’ the ‘I’ has to secure a faithfulness to its Being in which the other can trust. In the elaboration of this temporality, the ‘I’ must be listening both to the ‘you’ and to the self” (Irigaray 82).

The narrative thus becomes the site where the woman watching and the woman running finally run towards each another, so that, in the end, one ceases to run away from the other, "*Prehaps*" (*IW* 182).²⁰ The missing link between the woman watching and the woman running as well as the fluid identity of the running woman, who "could be any age," "all ages[,] all women" (*IW* 66), feature as symptoms of the repressed memory, which becomes embodied memory, of survivors of extremely violent experiences. In Roberta Culbertson's words:

The survivor most often [...] becomes silent about his victimisation [...]. This silence is an internal one in which the victim attempts to suppress what is recalled [...], or finds it repressed by some part of himself which functions as a stranger, hiding self from the self's experience [...]. It is external as well: the victim does not tell what she recalls, in part because others do not seem to hear what is said, partly because of a conviction that she will not be believed, and more basically because she cannot make the leap to words. (Culbertson 169)

As it happened, Laura's first impulse after her father's abuse was to tell her mother.²¹ However, Mrs. O'Meara disbelieved her daughter and then abandoned her by committing suicide. It is therefore Dominic who provides the context wherein the loose, haphazard syntax of Laura's memories emerges. The story begins to surface unexpectedly, "as if possessed of a life independent of will or consciousness" (Culbertson 169), when, following the cue of the music on the radio, Laura tells Dominic that she had "killed [her] mother" (*IW* 48), then wondering why she had said that, since she "had never really brought to the front of [her] mind such a possibility" (*IW* 48).

Yet, this is by no means a purely verbal phenomenon: abuse, hatred, and guilt lodged in the body (a body that refused to forget as much as it refused to procreate) are released through a multifarious process of "disinterring the past" (*IW* 42), which includes verbal and physical action. Laura's inadvertent confession is preceded by a decision made shortly after her father's funeral to "rediscover the old summerhouse" (*IW* 42), where she had been abused and which had been let to "drown" (*IW* 41) un-

20 "Prehaps" is the way Dominic used to pronounce that word of hesitation and doubt as a child; this is the childhood token that he involuntarily leaves with Laura, just as she offers him a toy train, which stands for the "immaculate vision of the past" (*IW* 180) and with which she "was never allowed to play [...] unless someone was in the room with [her for it was] just so perfect" (*IW* 13). As she integrates his word into her vocabulary and considers that "*Prehaps* [her] dreams in the future will be of him," she also hopes that "he won't carry [her] burden, as well as the present [she] gave him, for too long" (*IW* 181, my italics). The tokens exchanged thus signal the instrumental role performed by the encounter itself, which enabled Laura and Dominic to begin to re-connect, both within their fractured and bruised selves, and with the world from which they felt exiled. Yet, the fact that they part as well as Laura's parting wishes also suggest that, for the process of re-connection and re-integration to proceed, this encounter needs to be balanced by separation and differentiation.

21 In fact, she had already tried to persuade her mother to send her to boarding school, but Mrs. O'Meara did not oppose her husband's decision to keep their daughter at home and within his reach. Facing her doubting mother after the rape, she retorts: "I am telling the truth. Why do you think I wanted to go to boarding school?" (*IW* 175).

der shrubs and bushes after her mother's drowning. Moreover, Laura's body undergoes a form of death and rebirth, a slumber punctuated by feverish memories which re-enact her pain and her impotence (*IW* 128), before she can go back to the previously oppressive light (*IW* 128). In her longing for the pre-verbal "safe, lapping waters of the womb, darkness" (*IW* 125), Laura relives the same impulse that prompted her mother to drown, even if she is too drained of energy "to kill [her]self" (*IW* 125); yet, a competing impulse to be released from the voices of the dead makes her ask Dominic for help, accepting his offer to listen (*IW* 159). Through telling, she separates herself from both her parents and, in that sense, is born as an individuated subject.

Pain thus makes its way through the body into consciousness in three interconnected ways: through dreaming, one of the means by which one's unconscious offers itself as an object to one's consciousness; through deliberate confrontation with the material remains of the past; and by embodying memory into shared word. All of these processes are relational: dreaming involves a relational space within the self; physical action involves relation between the self and the world; and a shared or shareable word enables the emergence of a subjectivity capable of mediating between the conscious and the unconscious, affective and cognitive experience, the private logic of dreams and the public form of narrative.²²

Implications

Narrative thus works for Miranda and Laura as a stage where not only the voices of different characters can meet (as in Bakhtin's description of the dynamics of the polyphonic novel), but also for the different voices of herself. Narration is therefore represented as a relational (inter- and intra-subjective) space, both in the dynamics that it enacts and in the dynamics in which it participates vis-à-vis its addressees. This awareness of separation and relation within the self and between the self and the other requires language awareness, and this includes languages of the mind as well as of the body. As we have seen in *Fool's Sanctuary*, Cathal acts against his ideological beliefs and according to his yet unacknowledged affections when he responds to the sense of vulnerability and abandonment emanating from Mr. Martin's sleeping body. It is also in the silent language of embrace that the two men acknowledge their mutual affection (*FS* 120). However, this is a shared, hence socialised, non-verbal language, quite unlike what happens with Laura, in *The Invisible Worm*,

22 Laura's processing of her painful memories enacts Culbertson's description of survivors' accounts, as Ruth Frehner has pointed out (Frehner 212). See also Culbertson: "The task then is to render body memories tellable, which means to order and arrange them in the form of a story, linking emotion to event, event with event, and so on. In so doing it becomes possible to return the self to its legitimate social status as something separate, something that tells, that recounts its own biography [...]. Telling, in short, is a process of disembodying memory, demystifying it, a process which can only begin after memories have been re-membered and the mystical touched by a buried self seeking its own healing" (179).

whose alleged madness derives from the fact that the secrets lodged in her body are manifested in the body only and remain socially unacknowledged. This causes not only her isolation from society, but also her alienation from her own pain, which is but a more acute form of the numbness which frightens Miranda.

These novels feature characters afflicted by inner and outer exile and stage the moments when they break out of the deadlock of destructive violence by engaging in a tentative language of relation and thereby reparation of broken links. This is, however, not a language of fusion, as is ostensibly shown, first, by the fact that it is and remains dialogic and questions precisely the dogmatic and self-enclosed language of ideologies; and, secondly, by these women's rejection of marriage, of the "act of union," as their form of "self-begetting."²³ In fact, if this refusal of marriage as a solution is clear in *Laura*, it is no less present in Miranda's regret at having "align[ed her] life with [Cathal's] death" (*FS* 98), in that her option echoes a heroic and self-sacrificial notion of love and is the romantic counterpart to the heroic notions of male bravery in the service of King or Country.

If both military and romantic heroism may lead to "wilful" (*FS* 132) self-destruction; if, in Miranda's words, life is associated with "the power to feel passion, pity, rage" (*FS* 132) and love with "the discovery of a mutual language" (*FS* 36), how do these two women engage with language in their attempt to understand their own past? Both use an interrogative, rather than an assertive language; both address someone, living or dead or God, and even God ceases to be a bearer of certainties and becomes a willing listener. The possibility of a mutual language is thus explored in the space between an inherited language of fear and a tentative language of trust. If the future is to be an indeterminate "empty page" (*IW* 181) rather than a predictable repetition of the past; if, as Johnston put it, "Ireland [is to be] united in a different sort of way, a way that is not going to create more violence,"²⁴ then her novels seem to suggest that dialogue within the self and between the self and the other is the means to break away from the "frightened and frightening" (*FS* 95) idiom of violence. Perhaps.

23 Drawing on Gayle Greene's use of the term, Christine St. Peter studies three Irish 'self-begetting novel[s]' which "[fictionalise] Irish women's struggle to write and publish" (St. Peter, *Changing Ireland*, 3; 16-39). I use the term more inclusively to account for the process whereby women (or men struggling to emerge from pre-formatted identities) beget their sense of self, regardless of whether it be for artistic or other purposes, since the development of a sense of self is inherent to the process of becoming authors of their (possibly tentative) narratives.

24 Johnston, Interview, González 18.

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