"BEYOND THE TROUBLES": PARODY AND THE NORTHERN IRISH THRILLER IN CEASEFIRE CINEMA

Stephanie Schwerter

The Troubles Thriller Before and After the Ceasefire

After the outbreak of the Northern Irish conflict in 1968, a large number of cinematographic works depicting the consequences of political violence have been produced. Feature films such as *Angel* (1982) and *The Crying Game* (1992) by Neil Jordan, *Cal* (1984) by Pat O'Connor, Jim Sheridan's *In the Name of the Father* (1993) or Thaddeus O'Sullivan's *Nothing Personal* (1995) spring to mind among many others. Most of the films made in the 1970s, 1980s, and even at the beginning of the 1990s, render a rather grim picture of Northern Ireland, focussing on paramilitary fighting, the British Army, imprisonments or the Hunger Strikes. One of the most popular subgenres of films dealing with the Northern Irish conflict is the so-called Troubles Thriller. It is not surprising that the tense political climate has made Northern Ireland a "thriller writer's dream" (Pelaschiar 19). Belfast became one of the main thriller settings due to its urban space divided into numerous Catholic and Protestant areas. Boundary markers such as peace lines, murals, flags and kerbstone paintings literally transformed the city into the „adventure playground *par excellence* for the urban terrorist" (Seymour 57). Bill Rolston states that thrillers lend themselves to transposition into different socio-cultural contexts, as long as their distinctive features are maintained: "whether the hero chases the villain and gets the girl in Belfast, Beirut or Moscow is irrelevant as long as all the elements of the thriller are present" (41). As its political situation provides the essential ingredients for a thriller action, Northern Ireland is naturally chosen by writers and filmmakers as a convenient setting for their works. Hinting at James Bond, Alan Titley argues that the region has even managed to replace the Soviet Union as an important thriller location: "since the melting away of the worst icicles of the cold war – Northern Ireland has come as a boon to the thriller writer" (25).

However, after the first ceasefire declaration by the IRA in 1994, a new tendency towards a humorous depiction of the Troubles can be observed. The more relaxed atmosphere generated a "new mood of optimism" (Kennedy-Andrews 189), which encouraged an intellectual and emotional distance towards the committed violence. The change in the region's political climate, as well as the emergence of new forms of financial support for local cinematographic productions encouraged innovative filmmaking activities. In the 1990s, the newly-established Northern Irish Film Council (NIFC) and the National Lottery started funding local cinema (Hill, "Divorcing Jack" 228). Many of the resulting films are considered as "ceasefire cinema." The term suggests that these films have not only been enabled by the ceasefires, but also are engaged in exploring the new situation in Northern Ireland shaped by the peace

process (Hill, “Divorcing Jack” 229). In this context, a young generation of producers started to shoot films undermining conventional power structures ingrained in Northern Irish society. In line with Mikhail Bakhtin, who argues that laughter is vital in order to see the world realistically, they aim at the derision of established authorities and tackle received visions of the Troubles (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 1). John Hill states that only after the ceasefires it became possible to turn the conflict into “a comic matter” (*Cinema* 210). Examples of films with a humorous take on the remaining political tensions are among others Colin Bateman’s *Cycle of Violence* (1998), Dudi Appleton’s *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* (2003), Adrian Shergold’s *Eureka Street* (1998) – a BBC television series in four episodes – Steven Butcher’s television film *Two Ceasefires and a Funeral* (1995), as well as *Give my Head Peace*, a popular TV series running on BBC Northern Ireland from 1995 until 2005. The latter being produced by Tim McGarry, Damon Quinn and Micheal McDowell, a group of filmmakers calling itself the Hole in the Wall Gang.

The following analysis focuses on two ceasefire films: *Divorcing Jack* by David Cafferty (1998) and *An Everlasting Piece* by Barry Levinson (2000). I shall argue that both films function as parodies of the Northern Irish thriller. On the basis of a choice of characteristic scenes, I shall explore the different ways in which the two films not only subvert form and content of the traditional Troubles thriller but also mock received perceptions of the political situation in Northern Ireland.

According to Margaret Rose, parody is created through the comic incongruity between an original and its new form or context. In parodies, humour is generated when the “serious” becomes contrasted with the “absurd”, the “high” stands out against the “low” and the “ancient” is compared to the “modern” (33). In *Divorcing Jack* and *An Everlasting Piece*, traditional thriller features are deconstructed through their comic distortion. The spectators’ expectations become disrupted through the films’ humorous tone, which stands out against the gloomy atmosphere dominating conventional Troubles thrillers.

Kelly defines the thriller genre as a “radical form, wherein crime functions as a connective fabric through which an otherwise increasingly meaningless and shadowy society may be not only mapped, but also investigated and judged” (170). This statement applies as well to *Divorcing Jack* and *An Everlasting Piece*, however, in a slightly different sense. Through the very parody of the thriller genre, contemporary Northern Ireland becomes at the same time scrutinised and humorously subverted.

Concerning the thriller genre, Rubin argues that its most distinctive features are “suspense”, “fright”, “mystery”, “exhilaration”, “excitement”, “speed” and “movement” (5). These elements are particularly central to conventional Troubles thriller, where violent scenes frequently involve riots, car chases, shootings, bomb explosions, as well as abductions. In this way, the audience gets drawn into a frightening and exhilarating plot. Apart from that, the rapidity of the action creates suspense and contributes to an exciting atmosphere. In conventional Troubles thrillers, the events commonly take place in obscure settings such as the backrooms of pubs, derelict no-man’s-

lands or territories, which are clearly marked out as Catholic or Protestant areas due to their respective boundary markers.[1]

Furthermore, a certain set of reoccurring stereotypical characters can be found. Among those count male heroes depicted as paramilitary fighters, soldiers or policemen, as well as female characters in the role of mothers or seducers. Gerry Smyth describes the Troubles thriller's main "stock characters" as the "terrorist godfather", the "conscientious gunman", the "*femme fatale*" and the "reluctant agent" (114). In most Troubles thrillers, the protagonist is depicted as a strong character, who either becomes involved in criminal action or is fighting against violence which has been inflicted on him. In the two films chosen for analysis, the conventional heroes become either distorted through the comic amplification of stereotypical features, or are entirely replaced by characters, who traditionally do not occur in Troubles thrillers.

Humorous Deconstruction of Northern Irish Power Structures in *Divorcing Jack*

Divorcing Jack is based on Colin Bateman's eponymous novel, focussing on the comic misadventures of the journalist Dan Starkey. Bateman himself provided the screenplay and the young Irish director David Cafferty was recruited to direct his first feature film (Hill, "Divorcing Jack" 229). *Divorcing Jack* is set in the future during an imaginary election campaign, in which the Alliance Party, a supposedly "neutral party", promotes Michael Brinn as the new first Minister of Northern Ireland. The latter presents himself as the ideal candidate – neither Catholic nor Protestant – only a man devoted to peace. Hill rightly describes the film as "black comedy that has few 'no go areas' in what is prepared to turn into a joke" ("Divorcing Jack" 231). One of the most striking features of *Divorcing Jack* is the fact that its protagonist is precisely the opposite of the habitual Troubles thriller hero. Played by David Thewlis, Dan Starkey is depicted as a hard-drinking clumsy journalist, who unwillingly attracts one catastrophe after another. Through the character's unkempt appearance and his thin statue, Cafferty illustrates the protagonist physically as an anti-hero. Starkey's main occupation is to write humorous columns on Northern Ireland as well as poking fun at politicians and paramilitaries from both communities. The fact that Catholics and Protestants are mocked to the same extent is a typical feature of ceasefire film. This approach stands out against the customary one-sided representation of the Troubles in film and fiction.

Divorcing Jack begins with Starkey being summoned to the office of his boss in order to be admonished for his satirical writing. Choosing a situation in which the protagonist is criticised and shamed as an opening scene, Cafferty represents Starkey as laughable character, who diverges from the usual paramilitary hero, soldier or po-

1 As examples of typical Troubles thriller are among others *Resurrection Man* by Marc Evans (1998), *Nothing Personal* by Thaddeus O'Sullivan (1995), *Harry's Game* by Lawrence Gordon (1982) and *The Crying Game* by Neil Jordan (1992).

liceman in the main role of Troubles thrillers. Palmer argues that in order to excite or entertain, a thriller must persuade the audience to accept the hero's point of view. In *Divorcing Jack*, however, the spectator is discouraged from identifying with the protagonist, as Starkey's erratic and unpredictable behaviour rather confuses the audience. Rose explains the function of parody as "raising an expectation for X and giving Y, or something else which is 'not entirely X'" (33). Concerning the protagonist of *Divorcing Jack*, an audience tuned into the functioning of traditional Troubles Thrillers would expect an imposing hero, who leads the action. Nevertheless, in *Divorcing Jack*, the spectators are confronted with its opposite, that is an individual at odds with the world around him, who merely becomes the victim of a chain of grotesque events. In this sense, the spectators are presented with a character, who does not coincide with the thriller protagonists they are used to see.

In the opening scene, Ian Woods, the chief editor of the journal, dismisses Starkey's latest article as "bollocks" and furiously quotes the following lines from it: "If elected, Brinn is gonna swapp West Belfast for the Guinness Brewery in Dublin – they can have our Troubles and we can drink theirs." Starkey's statement does not only undermine the authority of the promising candidate, but also questions the seriousness of the region's politicians. With "West Belfast", Starkey refers to the Republican stronghold of the city. Exchanging this particular part of Belfast against the Guinness Brewery in Dublin – seen from a Protestant perspective – would mean to eliminate a substantial source of trouble. Starkey's farcical comment ironically hints at the impossibility of peace: substituting political "trouble" with beer seems to be as absurd as the possibility of solving the conflict. In this way, Northern Irish politicians from both sides are subversively represented as powerless in face of the current situation.

A further line from Starkey's article criticised by his boss is the following: "My girlfriend is going to sponsor paramilitary coffee mornings with an Armalite in one hand and a package of Jaffa cakes in the other." This sentence functions as an ironic intertextual reference to an often-quoted statement made by Danny Morrison. In 1981, the notorious IRA member declared: "Who here really believes we can win the war through the ballot box? But will anyone here object if, with a ballot paper in this hand and an Armalite in the other, we take power in Ireland?" (English 224-25). Doubting the politicians' capacity to reach a peaceful solution of the conflict through democratic elections and diplomatic negotiations, Morrison expresses his support of violence in order to attain political aims. With the images of the weapon and the ballot box, he suggests to bribe the population into supporting the Republican movement by voting for Sinn Fein. Thus, Starkey's article can be seen as a carnavalesque subversion of Morrison's declaration.

The ballot box is humorously replaced by biscuits, which deconstructs the serious tone of the original. However, through the intertextual reference to Morrison's proclamation, the political subtext of the initial message is maintained. Once again, the impossibility of obtaining a peaceful solution to the conflict is suggested, as a non-violent meeting between Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries seems to be impos-

sible. On a more abstract level, the remark derides the two political camps and underscores their unwillingness to cooperate. The fact that not a single community but both sides are blamed for the political tensions is one of the major features of ceasefire cinema.

Starkey defends himself against the criticism of his boss by pointing out that his writing is meant to be satire. Rejecting Starkey’s articles as inacceptable, Woods underscores the new editorial line of the journal: “We are talking happy! Joyous! Optimistic! We are throwing our weight behind Michael Brinn, Dan!” Pronounced with emphasis and exaggerated gestures, the chief editor’s statement does not appear convincing. It rather suggests manipulation and corruption, as the journal’s false pro-peace attitude seems to be influenced by the Alliance Party. Furthermore, the fact that Starkey’s satire is not allowed in a supposedly peaceful Northern Ireland implies a restriction of the freedom of speech, while at the same time questioning the role of journalism as an instrument of criticism. Starkey’s ironic writing exposes traditional power structures of Northern Irish society, which become attacked through the created laughter. According to Bakhtin, the deconstruction of received perceptions and value systems gives rise to new worldviews (*Rabelais* 16). In this sense, it could be argued that through the humorous illustration of Dan’s behaviour, the spectators are encouraged to perceive the malfunctioning of contemporary Northern Irish society in a new light.

In the course of the film, the audience understands that Brinn is not as neutral and harmless as he pretends to be. In the past, he had planted a bomb for the IRA, which killed a number of innocent civilians. Through a sequence of coincidences, Starkey comes in the possession of a tape comprising a recording in which Brinn confesses his deeds in a drunken state. As the incriminating material would help to cause the candidate’s fall, the IRA, the UDA, the RUC and the British army are eager to come into the possession of the tape. Ignoring its content, the innocent Starkey is chased by the paramilitary organisation of both sides as well as the state forces of law and order. The ironic twist in the story is that the official institutions and the counterhegemonic organisations are interested in tracking down Brinn not with the intention of punishing him for his crimes, but in order to prevent him from establishing peace in the region. None of them is interested in a quiet Northern Ireland, as peace would question their *raison d’être*: the paramilitaries’ existence would be as irrelevant as the presence of the British army and the police in the region. Through a humorous depiction of the different organisations, their political pretentions become mocked so that the Northern Irish conflict is depicted as a war carried out for war’s sake. The organisations’ comic representation stands out against their intimidating illustration as “forces of right and evil” (Seymour 56) in conventional Troubles thrillers.

Apart from the politicians, the paramilitary organisations, the RUC and the British army, a further instance of power ingrained in Northern Irish society is derided. The Catholic Church becomes the target of mockery in a key scene of the film, where Starkey is chased by the paramilitaries before being saved by Lee, an alleged nun, played by Rachel Griffith. The director enhances the comic tone of the scene by giv-

ing the journalist a grotesque outfit, which at the same time serves as a disguise. Apart from a wig, which he is about to lose, Starkey wears a jacket and pair of trousers far too small for him. His ludicrous outward appearance diverges from the serious, mostly threatening looks of the protagonists of conventional Troubles thrillers.

When Starkey is wounded by a bullet, he flees into a car driven by Lee, wearing a headpiece, lipstick and suspenders. In the course of the scene, the audience learns that Lee is not a sister but an NHS nurse, who makes ends meet thanks to a part time job as a stripper. Seductress and religious sister at the same time, the character of Lee functions as a parody of the "*femme fatale*" (Smyth 114) frequently occurring in Troubles thrillers. Noel Carroll argues that religion is "a serviceable topic" for humour as it provides occasions for "gods, angles, priests, rabbis, ministers, nuns, and so forth to act irreligiously or to misbehave" (8). In the case of *Divorcing Jack*, Lee's behaviour violates the code of conduct prescribed by the Catholic Church. When Starkey enters her car, she is on her way home from a priest's retirement party where she performed. Through Lee's job as a stripper in a nun's outfit and the priests' eagerness to employ her, the film undermines the Church's authority and reduces it to a derisory establishment.

Apart from her unusual appearance, Lee's rough language does not conform to the way of articulation expected from a nun. The scene in which Starkey enters Lee's car is characteristic of the subversive use of language throughout the film. Simultaneously, it can be seen as a parody of the car chases occurring in conventional Troubles thrillers. In the given scene, irony and humour are expressed through word plays and a frequent change of registers. According to Carroll, the key to comic amusement is a deviation from a presupposed norm. The incongruity created through the digression from an assumed standard has the intention of generating laughter (17). In *Divorcing Jack*, this incongruity is reached through Lee's departure from an expected linguistic register. Apart from that, the dialogue between Starkey and the nun takes on a carnivalesque tone due to a considerable gap between the language used by the two characters. Whereas Starkey employs a polite and respectful register, Lee expresses herself in a colloquial, almost vulgar way. Entering the car, Starkey exclaims: "In the name of God, help me!" With his reference to God, Starkey appeals to Lee's supposed devotion to saving lives in her role as a nun. Instead of the expected understanding behaviour, Lee shouts at Starkey "Fuck your way off!" When two bullets hit the car, Lee drives off furiously in her old Citroen 2CV. In traditional Troubles thrillers, the protagonist is persecuted or persecutes other characters in exhilarating and frightening scenes, in which tension is created through physical violence. In *Divorcing Jack*, however, the car chase scene does not generate tension but humour. The fact that the car is perforated by bullets does not prevent Lee and Starkey from engaging in a witty conversation, which in the light of the given circumstances appears entirely absurd. Through the comic use of language, Cafferty trivialises the surrounding violence.

When Lee starts the engine of the car in order to escape, Starkey gratefully answers: “Thank you sister.” Reverentially calling Lee “sister”, he respects the sanctified status conferred to her through her tunic. Despite her religious rank and her moral obligation to act as a helper, Lee merely scolds Starkey because of his blood dripping on the car seats: “You can stick ‘your sister’ up your hole. And you are bleeding all over my frigging car.” Taken aback by the nun’s coarse speech, Starkey asks: “May I ask you from which particular order you are? You strike me as more Armalite than Carmelite.” Playing with the phonetic similarities a subversive connection between terrorism and the Catholic Church becomes established, which questions the credibility of the institution. The scene particularly parodies the idiom of the gangster milieu, which is usually employed by Troubles thriller heroes. According to Rose, a parodic attack on language can be determined when changes in sociolect, idiolect or other elements of the lexicon emerge (37). In *Divorcing Jack*, the nun’s idiolect as well as Starkey’s sharp wordplays mock the sociolect employed by the habitual Troubles thriller characters. In the sense of a Bakhtinian carnavalisation, the established divisions between “high” and “low”, “sacred” and “profane” are dissolved by mockery and irony (*Rabelais* 16). Here, the distinctions between religious conventions and sacrilege become blurred and thus the religious institution is represented in a grotesque light.

Subversive Humour in *An Everlasting Piece*

The script of the film was written by Barry McEvoy, who also plays the main character. Similar to *Divorcing Jack, An Everlasting Piece* is shaped by irony and humour. The subversive use of language is equally one of the film’s main features. Different from *Divorcing Jack*, the action of *An Everlasting Piece* takes place in the 1980s. Nevertheless, the film can be considered as ceasefire cinema as its humorous tone is created by the emotional and intellectual distance generated by the more relaxed atmosphere after the IRA’s ceasefire declaration in 1994. *An Everlasting Piece* concentrates on the Catholic Colum and the Protestant George, who work together as barbers in a psychiatric hospital in Belfast. The two colleagues decide to set up a hairpiece selling business covering the whole of Northern Ireland. The fact that the protagonists spring from different communities is one of the salient features of post-ceasefire cinema.

In *An Everlasting Piece*, Colum’s and George’s friendship stands in sharp contrast to the habitual antagonism between characters from opposing political camps, occurring in traditional Troubles thrillers. Their ambition of doing business together does not only imply a reconciliation of the two communities but also subversively suggests that in a contemporary Northern Ireland, materialistic values have become more important than political ideals. Similar to *Divorcing Jack*, the protagonists of *An Everlasting Piece* are not drawn from the criminal world, but are civilians who unwillingly become involved in violence. As Troubles thriller characters, the two ambitious barbers are as unusual as the false nun and the alcoholic journalist in *Divorcing Jack*. Furthermore,

the film's setting in a psychiatric hospital considerably differs from the conventional Troubles thriller locations, such as pubs, no man's lands or derelict factories.

One of the most striking characteristics of *An Everlasting Piece* is the use of witty language which at times takes a poetic tone. According to Carroll, the key to comic amusement is a deviation from a presupposed norm, that is a certain framework governing the ways "in which we think the world is or should be" (17). In the context of *An Everlasting Piece*, this means that humour is generated through the disruption of the audience's expectations. The language employed in *An Everlasting Piece* does not conform to the spectators' viewing habits and stands in sharp contrast to the crude gangster slang of traditional Troubles thrillers. Considerably diverging from the lingo of the gangster milieu, it functions as a parodic attack on the conventions of the Troubles thriller genre.

A particularly subversive use of language can be found in the title of the film as well as in the name of the two protagonists' company. Colum and Georges baptise their business "Piece People", which is a carnivalesque pun on an eponymous Northern Irish peace organisation founded in 1975 by Betty Williams and Máiread McGuire (Feeney 57).[2] While "Piece People" refers to the two hairpiece-selling barbers in a literal sense, the reference to the peace movement of the 1970s also suggests a business transgressing ethno-religious boundaries. Colum explains their company to his girlfriend Broughna as "non-sectarian" and "pacifist." Broughna cleverly states: "Pacifists make good money. Have you ever heard of a broke pacifist?" This comment ironically implies the importance of profit over ethical considerations, letting the "pacifist" dimension of the Piece People appear as mere marketing.

The title of the film playing on the homonymy of "piece" and "peace", humorously alludes to the quality of the wigs, which are presented as "everlasting." This can also be read as an implicit criticism of the region's political situation as in the context of the film, an "everlasting peace" seems not yet to be in reach. Furthermore, the pun also implies that the sold hairpiece might last longer than peace in Northern Ireland. Thus, Northern Irish politicians become indirectly mocked, being presented as unable to cope with the current situation.

The way the two barbers meet their first customer amounts to an ironic subversion of sectarian animosities. In order to help them starting their business, Bronagh arranges an appointment with a certain Mr Black, a Loyalist paramilitary, persecuted for having killed a Catholic. Having seen Black's picture in the newspaper, Bronagh deduces from his baldness that he might be a potential customer, as he would have to change his appearance in order to deceive the police. However, Colum and George ignore that Black is wanted for murder. The meeting of the two barbers with Black is characteristic of the humorous play with language throughout the film. When they knock at

2 This interdenominational initiative was taken by a local group of people in order to protest against the on-going violence in Belfast. It turned into an internationally supported peace movement for which Williams and Maguire received the Nobel Peace Price in 1976 (Feeney 57).

Black’s door, Georges introduces them with the following jingle: “From Ballymuck to Ards – from chapel to steeple – be sure and bet your cards on the old Piece People.” As Ballymuck, a village in the Republic of Ireland, is situated on Catholic ground and the Ards Peninsula in the vicinity of Belfast on Protestant territory, Georges underlines that both communities are treated by their company equally. And indeed, the two barbers will do business with paramilitaries from both sides.

In the scene taking place on Black’s doorstep, humour is created through a series of misunderstandings between the two barbers and their potential customer. When Black asks them about the reason of their presence, Georges explains that they have come for a “hairpiece demonstration.” The incredulous Black inquires whether the “hairpiece demonstration” would be “a kind of government thing.” His grotesque question mocks the general atmosphere of suspicion in Northern Ireland. Yet again, the politicians deciding on the region’s fate are presented as undependable.

The conversation turns into an absurd dialogue as the two barbers and Black keep on talking at cross-purposes. Black’s answer appears to be entirely out of context: “I don’t know whom you have been talking to, but she’s a fucking liar. I’m a good Christian man, a man who avoided the sins of the flesh. My body is a temple.” The fact that Black denies everything before having understood the reason for the barbers’ visit implies a guilty conscience. The audience would expect Black to be afraid of being tracked down because of the previously committed murder. However, Black rather seems to be eager to reject a supposed accusation of having cheated on a woman, potentially his wife or girlfriend. According to Bakhtin, laughter liberates from the fear of “the sacred”, of “prohibitions”, of “the past” and of “power” (*Rabelais* 94). In the light of the given scene, this means that through comic amusement, the authority of the paramilitaries as counterhegemonic instances of power and control becomes subverted. As a paramilitary fighter, Black is more concerned about his sentimental life than the consequences of his crime. His nonsensical utterances let the organisation appear in a grotesque light.

The scene ends with Black finally buying a wig. Colum compliments him on his choice with the comment: “Sheds years of your appearance.” Aesthetic and political motifs interact here: comic amusement is created through “an anomaly or an incongruity relative to some framework governing the ways in which we think the world is or should be” (Carroll 17). The irony of the scene becomes heightened through the fact that Colum innocently makes a deal with a member of the UDA, an action, which would be judge as a betrayal by his own community.

Similar to *Divorcing Jack*, Levison’s film contains a key scene which functions as a parody of the typical car chase in conventional Troubles thrillers. After having sold the wig to Black, Colum and George discover that the check they received from their customer is not covered. Accidentally, the two friends come across Black on his way to work place, the shipyard Harland and Wolff in the east of the city. Colum manages to snatch the wig from Black’s head and runs off with it. Taking the shipyard as a starting point for the chase, the director consciously increases the tension of the

scene, as for the Catholic Colum, East Belfast's Protestant heartland represents dangerous ground.

Again, unconventionally, the chase does not happen by car but by foot. Running off with the wig, Colum is followed by the furious Black and his Protestant colleagues. Wigless and enraged, Black's appearance renders a comic image of a UDA combatant. Colum manages to leave his persecutors behind as the latter are held up by a number of obstacles. The first one is a gate which Blake and his friends try to break while Colum dances on the other side of it, waving the wig at them. The chaseis accompanied by joyous Irish fiddle music which contrasts with the chilling soundtracks of traditional Troubles thrillers. Black and his colleagues continue hounding Colum but are held up by a passing train. Colum finally manages to shrug off Black and his friends by wading through a river up to his chest in water. As his persecutors are unwilling to overcome the final obstacle for fear of cold water they limit themselves to threatening Colum from the other shore of the river. In the context of the analysed scene, we could argue that the authority of the paramilitaries becomes undermined through a comic exaggeration of their faint-hearted conduct. Though Blake is able to kill a Catholic, he is not courageous enough to cross a cold river. The paramilitaries are all the more ridiculed as in the end a dog snatches the wig from Colum's hand and runs off with it. Thus, a dog is subversively portrayed as more intelligent and successful than Black and his friends. Yet again, the paramilitaries are illustrated as laughable characters. In the same way, the surreal fight about a wig, presents Colum and George, the money-seeking "peace makers" in an ironic light.

Conclusion

In conclusion we can state that the films *Divorcing Jack* and *An Everlasting Piece* combine a metafictional parody of the Northern Irish Troubles thriller genre with a parody of the remaining political tensions of the region. Denith claims that in particular "social situations" or "historical moments" parody is likely to flourish and "to become the medium of important cultural statements" (31). In the context of the Northern Irish conflict, the IRA's ceasefire declaration of 1994 could be regarded as such a "historical moment", as the less tense political situation generated a more optimistic atmosphere. This new condition demanded innovative ways of artistic expression in order to come to terms with the past. As parody possesses a range of subversive possibilities such as "attacking the official world" and "mocking the pretensions of authoritative discourse" (Denith 20), it is not surprising that a number of directors have chosen parody as a subversive means of communication. In this way, Cafferty and Levinson attempt to make their personal "cultural statement" concerning contemporary Northern Ireland (Denith 31). Michael Storey claims that humour and laughter cannot actually liberate people from repression, but help expressing the desire to be so liberated (91). In this sense, it could be argued, that the parody of the Northern Irish situation communicates the wish of eliminating received interpretations and explanations of the Troubles.

In *Divorcing Jack* and *An Everlasting Piece*, habitual thriller elements such as car chases and shootings reappear in burlesque forms in order to generate carnivalesque scenes. The two films particularly stand out against conventional Troubles thrillers through a subversive use of language. Whereas in most of the thrillers the characters employ the lingo of the gangster milieu, the language in *Divorcing Jack* and *An Everlasting Piece* is shaped by witty world plays, humorous neologisms, rhymes and comic puns.

Apart from a metafictional parody of the traditional Troubles thriller, both films provide a comically distorted vision of Northern Ireland. The defamiliarising light shed on the animosities of the two communities gives rise to innovative readings of the political situation. Contrary to conventional Troubles thrillers, *Divorcing Jack* and *An Everlasting Piece* attempt to deride state and counterhegemonic institutions to the same extent. According to Linda Hutcheon, parody does not serve to destroy the past but to “enshrine” and question it (126). Concerning *Divorcing Jack* and *An Everlasting Piece*, we can state that by means of a comic presentation of the present, both films engage with the past in an indirect way, as they shed a new light on the events having lead to the current political situation.

According to Bakhtin, laughter is the first step in the deconstruction of repressive hierarchies (“Epic and the Novel” 23). In this sense it could be said that through a carnivalesque depiction of the region, *Divorcing Jack* and *An Everlasting Piece* plead to go beyond the Troubles. In their films, Levison and Cafferey challenge conservative Northern Irish power structures shaped by the Churches, the British government, as well as the paramilitary organisations of both political camps. Thus, they attempt to incite their audience to adopt new ways of thinking to encourage the creation of a less atavistic society.

Works Cited

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984.

-----. “Epic and the Novel.” *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays.* Ed. and trans. M. Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1988. 259-422.

Bateman, Colin. *Divorcing Jack*. London: HarperCollins, 1995.

Carroll, Noël. *Humour. A very short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014.

Dentith, Simon. *Parody*. London: Routledge, 2000.

English, Richard. *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005.

Feeney, Brian. *The Troubles*. Dublin: O’Brian, 2004.

Hill, John. *Cinema and Northern Ireland. Film, Culture and Politics*. London: British Film Institute, 2006.

-----. “Divorcing Jack.” *The Cinema of Britain and Ireland*. Ed. Brian McFarlane. London: Wallflower, 2005. 227-36.

Hutcheon, Linda: *A Poetics of Postmodernism. History, Theory, Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1988.

Kelly, Aaron. “*Terror*-torial Imperatives: Belfast in Eoin McNamee’s *Resurrection Man*.” *The Cities of Belfast*. Ed. Nicholas Allan and Aaron Kelly. Dublin: Four Courts, 2003. 168-82.

Kennedy-Andrews, Elmer. *(De-)constructing the North: Fiction and the Northern Ireland Troubles Since 1969*. Dublin: Four Courts, 2003.

McIlroy, Brian. *Shooting to Kill: Filmmaking and the Troubles in Northern Ireland*. Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 1998.

Palmer, Jerry. *Thrillers. Genesis and Structure of a Popular Genre*. London: Edward Arnold, 1978.

Pelaschiar, Laura. *Writing the North. The Contemporary Novel in Northern Ireland*. Trieste: Edizioni Parnaso, 1998.

Rolston, Bill. “Escaping from Belfast: Class Ideology and Literature in Northern Ireland.” *Race and Class* 31:1 (1989): 41-57.

Rose, Margaret A. *Parody: Ancient, Modern and Post-Modern*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993.

Rubin, Martin. *Thrillers.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999.

Seymour, Gerald. *Harry’s Game*. London: William Collins, 1975.

Smyth, Gerry. *The Novel and the Nation. Studies in the New Irish Fiction*. London: Pluto, 1997.

Storey, Michael L. *Representing the Troubles in Irish Short Fiction*. Washington: Catholic U of America P, 2004.

Titley, Alan. “Rough Rug-Headed Kerns: The Irish Gunman in the Popular Novel.” *Éire-Ireland* 15.4 (1980): 15-38.

Films

Divorcing Jack. Dr. David Cafferty. Mosaic Movies, 1998.

An Everlasting Piece. Dir. Barry Levison. Dreamwork Pictures/Columbia Pictures, 2000.