"I'M THEIR GHOST": TRAUMA, RADIANCE, AND THE MACABRE IN ANTHONY GLAVIN'S "LIVING IN HIROSHIMA"

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Introduction

Anthony Glavin (1945-2006) was a poet, musician, and professor at the Royal Irish Academy of Music. In 1989, the Gallery Press published his poetry collection, *The Wrong Side of the Alps*, which contains the first three sections of the poet's un-finished, yet most notable work, "Living in Hiroshima", the subject of this essay. A submission of his work had earned Glavin the prestigious Patrick Kavanagh Award for a first poetry collection in 1987, leading to the publication of his collection in 1989. In 1990, he was awarded an Irish Arts Council bursary, and in the same year, *The Wrong Side of the Alps* was shortlisted for the Irish Book Awards. Glavin's clear aptitude and early successes did not lead to the production of further collections, however. This was due in no small part to an ongoing illness, emphysema, which hastened his passing at the age of sixty-one in 2006. *The Wrong Side of the Alps* stands as Glavin's sole collection, and "Living in Hiroshima" remains an unfinished work of literature.

Despite the scope and quality of Glavin's work, and favourable critical reception of his poems, even posthumously (Longley; Johnston), Glavin's slim yet significant output has been understudied to date. This is excepting the work of scholar Irene de Angelis, who has produced a welcome summary of the sequence in her monograph, *The Japanese Effect in Contemporary Irish Poetry* (2012). This essay will further scholarly engagement with Glavin's work by examining some of the most compelling aspects of "Living in Hiroshima", namely, the poet's use of radiant and macabre imagery, and the theme of trauma which underpins the composition of the sequence itself.

Description and Context of the Poem

Despite its incomplete state, "Living in Hiroshima" is a compelling poetic sequence. It represents various aspects of twentieth-century history, with a focus on the ethical implications and the traumatic aftermaths of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on 6 August 1945. The bombing of the city, a manoeuvre by the United States of America to bring a decisive end to the war against Japan during World War II, led to the immediate deaths of tens of thousands of Hiroshima residents, as well as further deaths and suffering from radiation sickness in subsequent years (Pope 305). "Living in Hiroshima" is a long work, comprising fifty-eight individually titled quatrain poems, each of which is separated into two couplets. The sequence is also further divided into three subsections: "Oblivion's Throe", "Ions", and "Half-Lives".

Scholars of Irish literature may note significant similarities between the tone, content, and reception of Anthony Glavin's "Living in Hiroshima", and the bilingual writer Eoghan Ó Tuairisc's[1] Irish-language poem on the Hiroshima bombing: "Aifreann na Marbh" (translated by Colbert Kearney as "Mass of the Dead"), a long sequence in the collection *Lux Aeterna* (1964). Both "Aifreann na Marbh" and "Living in Hiroshima" consider the aftermaths of the bombing of Hiroshima from an Irish perspective, albeit in different languages. Both are challenging works, embellished with layers of reference and meaning, including, but not limited to: classical, biblical, and philosophical allusions; intertextual references to other literary works; examples of ekphrasis in references to visual arts such as sculpture and painting; mentions of electronic media such as video, news reports, and cinema; and references to various historical events and people.

Notably, both poets, and their Hiroshima poems, initially attracted relatively scant attention. Conleth Ellis, an acolyte of Ó Tuairisc, in a special edition of *Poetry Ireland Review* dedicated to Ó Tuairisc on the event of his passing, acknowledged the lack of recognition that Ó Tuairisc's work had received, in Irish or in English: "to write in two languages is to invite being ignored by the readers of each" (8). An important point of divergence, however, is that Ó Tuairisc's "Aifreann na Marbh" and wider literary output in both Irish and English has gained deserved recognition over the years, in Irish-language literary studies and far beyond (Kearney; Mac Craith; Nic Eoin; McCabe; Markus; O'Leary; de Angelis). Glavin's "Living in Hiroshima", as well as the wider contents of *The Wrong Side of the Alps*, however, have not yet received due attention in any field of literary criticism.

Similarly to "Aifreann na Marbh", "Living in Hiroshima" deserves scholarly engagement, inasmuch that it is a rare poem. Considering the breadth of war poetry, comparatively few authors of Western traditions wrote about Hiroshima. In discussing the significance of Ó Tuairisc's "Aifreann na Marbh" in 2004, the literary scholar Máirín Nic Eoin underlined this fact in noting the remarkable lack of poetry written about Hiroshima included in recent Anglophone war poetry anthologies:

> Níl oiread is dán amháin le fáil in *The Oxford Book of War Poetry* ná i ndíolaim Paul Fussell *The Bloody Game: An Anthology of Modern War* a thagraíonn don eachtra. Tá dán amháin faoin mbuama adamhach le fáil i ndíolaim Victor Selwyn *The Voice of War: Poems of the Second World War*. Agus é ag cur sleachta ó dhán Edith Sitwell "The Shadow of Cain" i láthair ina dhíolaim *The Terrible Rain: The War Poets 1939-1945*, luann Brian Gardner gurb éard atá i ndán Sitwell "one of the few attempts to write a major poem about a supremely major event". (212)
>
> [There is no poem in *The Oxford Book of War Poetry* nor in Paul Fussell's anthology *The Bloody Game: An Anthology of Modern War* which references the event. There is one poem about the atomic bomb in Victor Selwyn's *The Voice of War: Poems of the Second World War*. Introducing an excerpt from Edith Sitwell's "The Shadow of Cain" in his anthology, *The Terrible Rain: The War Poets 1939-1945*, Brian Gardner mentioned

1 Eoghan Ó Tuairisc used the English version of his name, Eugene R. Watters, when writing and publishing in English.

> that Sitwell's poem was "one of the few attempts to write a major poem about a supremely major event".]

Since Nic Eoin's time of writing, Gerald Dawe's consequential anthology, *Earth Voices Whispering: An Anthology of Irish War Poetry 1914-1945* has been published (2009), which includes sections from "Aifreann na Marbh" in Irish, and in English translation. The entirety of Glavin's "Living in Hiroshima" is also included in the anthology, the first comprehensive publication of the sequence since its initial appearance in 1989. The fact that two extended poetic sequences about the bombing of Hiroshima exist in each of the Irish state's official languages is notable,[2] and the similarities and differences between these works deserve sustained critical attention in further studies. Some points of comparison will be mentioned as part of the main discussion of this essay.

Before the content of "Living in Hiroshima" is examined, however, in the light of this essay's venture it is pertinent to define what is meant by trauma, and to explore some of the ethical dilemmas of trauma and witnessing from the perspective of the poet who considers the extremity of the bombing of Hiroshima from a distance.

Trauma and Transference

The work of trauma scholar Cathy Caruth is invaluable in the understanding of trauma theory. She defines trauma as being

> an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. (11)

Caruth's exploration of trauma is centred on the psychoanalytical tradition of Sigmund Freud, whose seminal work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* described the repetitive detrimental psychological effects of war, accidents, and disasters on the human psyche:

> A condition has long been known and described which occurs after severe mechanical concussions, railway disasters and other accidents involving a risk to life; it has been given the name of "traumatic neurosis" […] The symptomatic picture presented by traumatic neurosis approaches that of hysteria in the wealth of its similar motor symptoms, but surpasses it as a rule in its strongly marked signs of subjective ailment (in which it resembles hypochondria or melancholia) as well as in the evidence it gives of a far more comprehensive general enfeeblement and disturbance of the mental capacities. (6)

"Living in Hiroshima" describes many facets of an experience of "traumatic neurosis", as Freud describes it. However, if it is accepted that this sequence is a work that explores an experience of trauma, can it be stated that those who are far removed from the direct effects of bombing of Hiroshima may write a trauma narrative of

2 Not mentioned in this essay's discussion is Watters's long poem in English about the bombing of Hiroshima and its implications for humanity, *The Week-End of Dermot and Grace*. This poem, published on the same day as the Irish language collection, *Lux Aeterna*, in 1964, is similar in theme to "Aifreann na Marbh", but is significantly longer.

Hiroshima? The question must be posed here, as there is a clear conflation between the poet himself and the narrator(s) of the sequence, an occasional use of "we" to describe the witnessing of the bombing itself, as well as stark and brutal imagery of war which the poet did not and could not have directly witnessed. The scholar and poet Carolyn Forché has discussed this conundrum in terms of witnessing and writing about atrocity in relation to the Holocaust:

> In an age of atrocity, witness becomes an imperative and a problem: how does one bear witness to suffering and before what court of law? Such is the dilemma of Ariel Dorfman, in "Vocabulary": "But how can I tell their story / if I was not there?" The poet claims he cannot find the words to tell the story of people who have been tortured, raped, and murdered. Nevertheless, it is vitally important that the story be told. Who shall tell it? The poet answers: "Let them speak for themselves." […] Witness, in this light, is problematic: even if one has witnessed atrocity, one cannot necessarily speak about it, let alone for it. ("Introduction" 36-37)

Viewed in this context, Glavin's poem may also be considered problematic. He did not directly witness the atrocity of Hiroshima, and indeed, was not even alive when it happened. For an alternative viewpoint, I refer to Eoghan Ó Tuairisc, who asserted that the poet had a moral duty to witness and to respond to world events. He believed "i ról an fhile mar fhinné, mar dhuine a léiríonn freagracht i leith gníomhartha daonna, agus a bhfuil cumas freagartha ann" [in the role of the poet as a witness, as a person who shows responsibility regarding human actions, and for which he possesses the ability to answer] (Nic Eoin, "Scéal an Tuirimh Nua-aoisigh" 213). Perhaps, similarly, Glavin feels an ethical responsibility to "answer" for the bombing of Hiroshima and the events of the twentieth century in his poetry. It may be that, for Glavin, the imperative to account for the atrocity of the bomb is of greater import than the potential ethical issues raised by his own secondary or tertiary accounting of the events.

While Ó Tuairisc and Glavin may have felt a similar imperative to write about the bombing of Hiroshima, "Aifreann na Marbh" and "Living in Hiroshima" diverge in terms of the spatial positioning of the works to the event itself. Ó Tuairisc's response to Hiroshima, while forthright in its ethical stance regarding the bomb, stands at more of a distance from Hiroshima, even as it implicates all of humanity – including the Irish themselves – in the act of the bombing, and its aftermaths; the Irish are simultaneously the bombers, and the bombed. The events of the poem occur chronologically as the narrator journeys through Dublin city, with the aftermaths of the bomb being superimposed onto the city of Dublin itself:

> Sinne na mairbh fuair bás
> In Áth Cliath is in antráth
> Lá gréine na blaisféime
> Shéideamar Hiroshima. (*Lux Aeterna* 29)
>
> [We are the dead who died
> In Dublin in an evil hour
> The sunlit blasphemous day
> We blasted Hiroshima.] (Kearney 173)

The narrative stability, linear chronology, and relative spatial distance of Ó Tuairisc’s sequence is in stark contrast with Glavin’s fragmented work. The poems of “Living in Hiroshima” witness events in Hiroshima, in the B-29 aircraft that dropped the bomb, in the narrator’s own life, in concentration camps, and so forth, with unstable and shifting viewpoints, topics, voices, perspectives, and chronology, and with an emphasis on the brutal aftermaths of war on individual minds and bodies:

> ***Lovers***
>
> They crawl through charred bamboo to the river’s edge.
> The water is hot to touch, but they slither in
>
> And stroke and hold. At each caress, the skin
> Dries instantly, then glows, then splits like porcelain. (Lines 57-60)

Unlike “Aifreann na Marbh”, which ponders the ethical stance that the artist must take in relation to human rights violations, the shattered narrative of “Living in Hiroshima”, in its staccato presentation of vignettes of stark brutality and suffering, leaves little space for the poet’s own ethical manifesto to be considered. Each sequential poem displaces the reader anew within the narrative, as the narrative itself strains under the weight of trauma. This contrasts with the careful framing of “Aifreann na Marbh” around the pre-Vatican II Latin Mass. Also of note is that the main narrator of “Living in Hiroshima” (although the number of narrators in the sequence is in question due to the fragmented perspectives therein) is coded as being Glavin himself. The historian Dominick LaCapra’s insights into the issue of positioning and transference are instructive here:

> I think one begins investigation already inserted in an ongoing historical process, a positioning toward which one may attempt to acquire some transformative perspective or critical purchase. A crucial aspect of this positioning is the problem of the implication of the observer in the observed, what in psychoanalytical terms is treated as transference. (36)

Glavin undertook extensive research into the Hiroshima bombing for this sequence, as noted by his friend and fellow poet Mark Granier (2007). Perhaps because of his engagement with writings, diaries, testimonies, and imagery from Hiroshima (and from other extreme events of the twentieth century as a whole), Glavin may have experienced a transference of trauma with the victims of the bombing that rendered psychic distance from the victims of the bomb impossible. The circumstances of his birth, as will be discussed, may also play a role in this. As Glavin, unlike Ó Tuairisc, did not publish any accounts of his writing or research process, this can only be speculated. Psychic transference with the Hiroshima bomb victims is described by Japanese philosopher and scholar Akiko Naono, whose descriptions of transference as a result of studying drawings made by Hiroshima survivors are uncannily similar to the macabre imagery of the “Living in Hiroshima” sequence. While she is Japanese, Naono, like Glavin, did not live through or witness the bombing directly. Nevertheless, she is deeply affected by testimonies and artwork of those who did:

> Sometimes I was the one trapped in the flames. Occasionally I felt disoriented, pursued by the stench of death, and even struck by the 'flashbacks' of corpses floating, as I walked along the river of Hiroshima. I was captured by the traumatic force of the drawings, the visual representation of the memories of original trauma, as if the force of other's trauma was being transmitted to my body. ("Transmission of Trauma")

Returning to LaCapra, he advocates not for complete identification with the victims of historical disaster, but for "empathic unsettlement" on the part of the researcher and writer: "Being responsive to the traumatic experience of others, notably of victims, implies not the appropriation of their experience but what I would call empathic unsettlement." (41)

This essay speculates that Glavin, through the narrator of the sequence, is forced beyond "empathic unsettlement". Like Naono, he overly identifies with the victims of Hiroshima due to the transference of their trauma, likely because of his research for "Living in Hiroshima". However, the sequence clearly shows the narrator's awareness of this overidentification with the trauma of the Hiroshima victims. The narrator's references to undergoing psychoanalysis at several points in the poem, as well as his attempts to explain and overcome his trauma, or "Metempsychosis" as he calls it, with his analyst, indicate Glavin's recognition of his own transference with those who suffered.

Any problematic conflations with the victims of Hiroshima aside, the sequence effectively portrays the fragmentation of the traumatized psyche and the struggle of the human mind to overcome the severity of twentieth-century warfare, and of extreme events which may yet come. On this point, Paul K. Saint-Amour, referencing Susan Sontag, has argued that the trauma of the modern Nuclear Age is not solely founded upon events that have happened, but events that may happen:

> Sontag seems to have been among the first to posit what we might call the hysteron proteron of the nuclear condition: the literally preposterous phenomenon of traumatic symptoms – denial, disassociation, fragmentation, repression, the compulsive repetition of extreme violence – that exist not in the wake of a past event, but in the shadow of a future one. (61)

In this sequence, the reader is forced into a close engagement with the brutal effect of nuclear bombings which, while uncomfortable in their imagined proximity to the events, forestalls the averting of the reader's eyes from the reality of Hiroshima, at least how Glavin has perceived it. This sequence may overstep "empathic unsettlement", in LaCapra's terms, but Glavin's drive to witness the effects of the bomb on Hiroshima, and on his own psyche, have led to the creation of a compelling poetic account of the extremities of twentieth-century warfare. Like Ó Tuairisc, who stated that "an dualgas sóisialta atá […] ar an Fhile ach go háirithe, fírinne an tsaoil a lorg agus a léiriú don saol" [the social responsibility of (…) the poet in particular, is to search for, and show to the world, the truth of life] (*Religio Poetae* 17), Glavin feels an ethical imperative to present his own truth of the bombing of Hiroshima in "Living in Hiroshima".

Descriptions of Trauma in “Living in Hiroshima”

The opening poem of the sequence, “Everybody Lives in Hiroshima – *Time*, August 1985”, indicates the disjointed chronology of the sequence’s trauma narrative. While subsequent poems anticipate the bomb’s detonation, this verse describes the physical and psychological aftermaths of the bomb as already having transpired, with the long-term detrimental effects of radiation indelibly imprinted in the human body and psyche. The long-standing effects of the nuclear bombing are described here, before the bomb itself even appears in the poem:

> ***Everybody Lives in Hiroshima* – Time*, August 1985***
>
> By now it’s in the blood and nobody’s immune –
> T-Cell amnesia, a kind of lightstain
>
> Whiting-out memories and the memory of memories,
> A video shimmering after the picture’s gone. (1-4)

This poem opens the sequence, even as it foreshadows its end. In this, this opening poem may be read as a “displaced conclusion to the text itself”, as Lyn Marven writes in relation to the opening section of another trauma narrative, *Herztier*, Herta Müller’s novel about living in Ceaușescu’s Romania (182). Like the unnamed narrator in *Herztier*, who is coded with the author’s own life experience in Müller’s genre of ‘autofiction’, the narrator of “Living in Hiroshima” is indicated to be Glavin himself. The poem “A Month Early”, for instance, describes Glavin’s own premature birth the day after the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima:

> ***A Month Early***
>
> Even then I must have raged at being confined.
> But to push for freedom that Bank Holiday weekend!
>
> My father homing from Youghal in his chrome V8
> To hold my mother, then me, then celebrate… (85-88)

Mark Granier gives valuable insight into Glavin’s own mindset about his birthdate, underlining the sense of historical misfortune that he believed had plagued his birth:

> Anthony was haunted by the fact that his birth date, the 7th of August 1945 (a bank holiday in Ireland), was just one day after ‘Little Boy’ was dropped on Hiroshima; that his coming into the world coincided with an event that abruptly altered the world’s “historical velocity”. (30)

The use of the term “haunt” in Granier’s piece is significant. Whether intentionally included by Granier or not, his use of the word to describe Glavin’s uncanny connection to the bomb is notable, as haunting and ghosts are concepts closely associated with trauma in trauma theory literature, in direct witness testimonies from Hiroshima, and, indeed, in the sequence itself. For instance, consider how Caruth describes the process of becoming traumatized by an originating event:

> trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely not known in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on. (4)

Since Glavin's own birth and the bombing of Hiroshima almost coincide, he appears to view the bombing as an original trauma which forced his premature birth and continues to haunt him. The short article "Hiroshima and Ourselves", by American psychologist and scholar Robert J. Lifton, includes notable testimony from Hiroshima directly after the bombing, highlighting the ghostliness of the scene:

> People were literally uncertain of whether they were dead or alive. A grocer described the strange, slow gait of severely burned people, their arms held out in front of them, many dying along the road. To him, "they didn't look like people of this world", but rather, "like walking ghosts". (631)

Glavin's sequence uses strikingly similar imagery, such as in the poem "Not There", which describes the uncanniness of Hiroshima, in which the "haunted" and "haunting" survivors now struggle to understand their surroundings:

> ***Not There***
>
> Haunted, haunting, those eyes that stare and stare,
> Their freeze-frame half-lives shimmering on the air –
>
> They are searching for their loved ones in the streets
> But the once familiar streets are no longer there. (133-36)

In an attempt to deal with his trauma, the narrator undertakes a process of Freudian psychoanalysis, as referenced in the poem "Metempsychosis". Again, the macabre imagery of haunting is utilized, yet inverted: the narrator, though haunted by the voices of the victims of the bomb, is described as "their ghost". The analyst doubts the narrator's claims of being haunted, instead ascribing it to the narrator's improper "identification" with the victims of the bombing, which could be read as relating to LaCapra's idea of "appropriation of experience" (41):

> ***Metempsychosis***
>
> A myth, according to my analyst –
> "Projective identification. An ego mechanism."
>
> But all these voices shrieking in my ear –
> If I write as I hear them, I'm their ghost. (185-88)

The shrieking voices in the narrator's ear are reminiscent of an acting out of his trauma, in which he is "haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes" (LaCapra 21). Haunting is also referenced again in the poem "Grief". The ion-burst of the bomb continually haunts the narrator:

> ***Grief***
>
> An ion-burst of rage that haunts me always
> Like an all too elegiac word or phrase
>
> That sighs a million sighs like ricochets
> And dies away and leaves an empty space. (149-52)

From the poem "Sky High" onward, the poet creates tension as the moment of the bomb's detonation looms. The precise time given in the poem's title, "8.16 am", as well as the staccato sentences in the third line of the same poem, cause the reader to

anticipate the impact of the bomb in the next poem, “Ground Zero”, the title of which describes the area beneath the nuclear bomb’s explosion. However, the immediate aftermath of the explosion in Hiroshima is elided, and the next poem in the sequence comprises a scene in which the narrator himself “snaps awake” as he is photographed from above by a companion. The reader’s anticipation for witnessing the immediate aftermath of the bomb is thwarted, as the poet circumvents the direct impact of the bomb on the city by describing the narrator’s sudden awakening under a different, innocuous, flash of light – not the bomb’s explosion, but a camera. The brilliance of the flash is conflated with a break in the narrator’s own psyche, incited by the unexpected light. Indeed, his reaction to a mere camera flash – “I freak” – appears hyperbolic.

Sky High

B-san, lightened, screamed in a 60’ dive
To clear the “All-Clear” delta, to watch and wait.

The tail-gunner put on his special-issue glasses.
No one knew quite what to expect. No one.

8.16 am

A fleeing Nazi skis across an Alpine glacier.
Pius XII bows low to intone the Agnus Dei.

Heartbeats. Lifetimes. Seconds ticking away.
The sky blurts open like a Morning Glory.

Ground Zero

Morbid incandescence. I snap awake.
A warhead, sky high? No, you’re standing there,

Flashing your instamatic, grinning. I freak.
How should I ever bring home to you the horror? (9-20)

The antecedent verses of “Ground Zero” are portrayed as a nightmare or re-imagining of the event of the bomb by the poet himself, similar to the scenes repeatedly witnessed in Akiko Naono’s dreams: a traumatic hallucination from which he is woken by the innocuous camera flash. The sudden change from the use of the past tense in “Sky High” to the present tense in “8.16 am” also alters the narrative’s temporal relation to the event, as the bomb’s detonation appears imminent. The missed moment of the impact of the bomb, in both the narrator’s nightmare and in the layout of the sequence itself, and the narrator’s adverse reaction to his forced awakening, gain significance in the light of Caruth’s description of the fright caused by a belated recognition of threat:

> It is not simply, that is, the literal threatening of bodily life, but the fact that the threat is recognized as such by the mind one moment too late. The shock of the mind’s relation to the threat of death is thus not the direct experience of the threat, but precisely the missing of this experience, the fact that, not being experienced in time, it has not yet been fully known. (62)

This might lead the reader to interpret Glavin's premature birth – one day after the bomb dropped – as a belated result of the bombing, which "miss[es] the experience" of the true immediate aftermath. His abrupt awakening here from his vision of Hiroshima *again* misses the aftermath of the detonation. Marven, in discussing the traumatic narrative of Müller's *Herztier*, notes that "trauma […] is defined primarily by the fact that it cannot be integrated into a narrative memory; it exists only as a gap and cannot be articulated" (Marven 181). In describing traumatic nightmares, Caruth connects the traumatic neurosis with not the vision itself, but the abrupt awakening, and the knowledge that one has survived without understanding this gap in the narrative:

> the trauma of the nightmare does not simply consist in the experience within the dream, but in the experience of waking from it. It is the experience of waking into consciousness that, peculiarly, is identified with the reliving of the trauma. […] What is enigmatically suggested, that is, is that the trauma consists not only in having confronted death but in having survived, precisely, without knowing it. (64)

The narrator of the poem, it is implied, only awakens to the full horror of the bomb upon the "morbid incandescence" of the camera flash, which has interrupted his vision of the dropping of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima. In describing Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, or belatedness, Bistoen et al. posit that it is a subsequent event (i.e., the harmless camera flash) which awakens the full "pathogenic power" of the initial event: that is, in Glavin's case, the bombing of Hiroshima:

> Essential to this notion [of *Nachträglichkeit*] is that an initial event only becomes traumatic, in the sense of exerting its full pathogenic power, at a later stage in psychical development, when the initial event to which the subject was unable to react adequately is revived by a subsequent encounter. (672)

As this awakening occurs in poem five of the sequence, this could be interpreted as an early turning point in the narrative. It is after this awakening that the sequence describes the full effects of the bomb's detonation on the city of Hiroshima, employing the use of imagery of radiance and the macabre to call back to the "morbid incandescence" that was the narrator's own belated awakening to the horrors of Hiroshima:

> ***The Scream***
>
> A sudden scald of sun melts through the room.
> Would Saul have recognised it? Or the heat?
>
> You try to blink. No eyelids. You try to scream.
> Fishtails of windowglass blither in your throat. (25-28)
>
> ***Aioi Bridge***
>
> Slime-strips of skin that flapped like seaweed,
> No mouths, no noses, eyeless, faceless, screaming,
>
> They dived in hundreds off the twisted girders.
> The river was warm and merciful. It killed quickly. (45-48)

In these verses, the radiance of the bomb is compared with the blinding of Saul on the Road to Damascus, a significant event in Christian theology which led to his

conversion and new identity as the apostle Paul. The bomb – the pinnacle of human scientific endeavour – appears as omnipotent as God. The theological reference here leads to macabre descriptions of the ruined bodies of the citizens of Hiroshima, throwing themselves into the river, possibly an allusion to the river Styx of Greek mythology. The contrast between the "warm and merciful" river and its action of "killing quickly" is stark, further highlighting the hellish scenes of the bombed Hiroshima. There are notable similarities between Glavin's macabre imagery and the psychological studies on the citizens of Hiroshima conducted by Robert J. Lifton. In this excerpt, one of Lifton's subjects, a young university professor, recounts the long-lasting effects of the bomb on his psyche, as he tells of the hellish scenes he witnessed:

> Everything I saw made a deep impression […] the most impressive thing I saw was some girls, very young girls, not only with their clothes torn off but with their skin peeled off as well… My immediate thought was that this was like the hell I had always read about. ("Psychological Effects" 467)

Glavin appears to have been aware of Lifton's research into the psychological effects of the atomic bomb, and to have drawn upon his writings for the material of "Living in Hiroshima". This supports Granier's assertion in his obituary for Glavin that the sequence was "diligently researched" (31). This is also apparent from the clear parallels between the descriptions of Hiroshima in the sequence and in the volume 126, issue 7 of *TIME Magazine*, of August 1985, which contained many articles and writings on the bomb. The title of the sequence is even derived from an article in this edition, "What the People Saw: A Vision of Ourselves". Returning to Lifton's psychological research, Glavin's poem "Magic!" contains a specific phrase uttered by a psychoanalyst, which appeared in Lifton's *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima*, first published in 1967. This poem describes the deity-like power of the bomb, which engulfs Mount Fuji, melts bicycles, and causes stones to bleed.

> ***Magic!***
>
> Thunder like Mt. Fuji swallowing itself alive.
> A bicycle sagged and melted in its own shadow.
>
> Stones bled. Birds fell roasted out of the sky.
> We just stood there, helpless. You can't hate magic. (41-44)

Compare this with the following excerpt from Lifton's study, which refers to the lack of vitriol directed towards the Americans by the Japanese after the bomb:

> Such relative absence of hostility is consistent with the 'stunned' conditions of victims of any disaster, which has been termed the 'disaster syndrome' and with what I have called psychic closing-off. More than this, the special dimensions of Hiroshima would seem to have created a holocaust too vast and incomprehensible for locating object of hate. As one psychoanalyst put it after listening to a description of the event: "You can't hate magic." (52)

The narrator's own implied psychic "closing off" has been halted with the "morbid incandescence" of the camera flash, awakening his latent trauma. The macabre and unsettling imagery of the poem, often contrasted with images of heat and radiance,

implies a disturbing transference of trauma on the part of the narrator with the victims of Hiroshima:

> ***Vertigo***
>
> Heat-buckled girders. Alive with bodies. No choice.
> Fistfuls of skin and tissue slimed each palm.
>
> A squelch of something yellow where stepped-on eyes…
> She sickened, steadied herself, continued to climb. (101-104)
>
> ***Fire Child***
>
> She knelt to cover her suppurating nakedness
> As the men raced past with water, not noticing.
>
> Flame licked her thighs, then climbed and immolated.
> Her arms unfolded in a gesture of beseeching. (109-12)

Glavin's "Living in Hiroshima" has never been finished. However, the final poem of the sequence in *The Wrong Side of the Alps* ends with the narrator grappling with visions of Hiroshima during a session of psychoanalysis. The title of this last poem, "In Plato's Cave", is significant. Plato's Cave is a philosophical allegory questioning the nature of reality and truth. What is most relevant to this discussion, perhaps, is how one of the cave's prisoners, who has existed in complete darkness, escapes into the real world and is initially blinded by the glare of the sun. This reference, also echoed in the poem in the "contamination" of the sunlight itself, recalls the "scald of sun" which burns through Hiroshima in "The Scream", as well as the "morbid incandescence" which similarly forced the narrator awake in "Ground Zero":

> ***In Plato's Cave***
>
> "Our present historical velocity…" Godspeed!
> Can there be sunlight now without contamination?
>
> My analyst sighs – no comment, he can wait…
> The ceiling flickers like a video screen. (228-32)

The sequence ends with the narrator in a supine position, gazing up at the ceiling in the classic pose of Freudian psychoanalysis. The psychoanalyst in the poem appears frustrated, echoing his previous dismissal of the narrator's Hiroshima ghosts in the poem "Metempsychosis": "A myth, according to my analyst – / 'Projective identification. An ego mechanism'" (185-86). The positioning of this poem at the end of the sequence implies that the traumatic imagery of the individual poems, particularly those after the awakening in "Ground Zero", has emerged during the narrator's psychoanalytical session, as he attempts to work through his traumatic transference with the victims of history. Indeed, the final line of the poem, "the ceiling flickers like a video screen", implies a fragmented visual experience of the working through of trauma, as though the frenetic imagery of the poems has flashed upon the ceiling as he recounted them to the analyst.

This provisional conclusion to the poem, however, is haunted by the opening poem of the sequence. The contaminated sunlight of the final poem echoes the “lightstain” of the first poem, and the flickering video of the narrator’s traumatic memories is foreshadowed in the “whiting-out memories and the memory of memories, / A video shimmering after the picture’s gone” (3-4) at the very beginning of the sequence. This belies any satisfactory conclusion to the narrative. The conclusion recalls the beginning, and the beginning foreshadows the conclusion, in a cyclical fragmented narrative that underlines the narrator’s repeating experience of trauma.

Conclusions?

The fragmentary conclusion to the sequence is reminiscent of the nature of the sequence itself, whose many poems describe vignettes from varying locations, presenting disjointed snapshots of the bombing of Hiroshima and of the extreme events of the twentieth century. In the introduction to the volume *Against Forgetting: Twentieth Century Poetry of Witness*, Forché describes the fragmentation of literary form in the modernist tradition, as well as the urgency of the fragmented narrative in the wake of extremity: “Extremity, as we have seen, demands new forms or alters older modes of poetic thought. […] Fragmentation is a standard feature of literary modernism. But the fragment gains urgency in the wake of extremity” (“Introduction” 42).

Glavin’s fragmented sequence of twentieth-century trauma is rendered more fragmentary still by its own lack of conclusion or definitive publication, owing partly to Glavin’s illness and perfectionism: “it demanded all his energy to redraft small sections, then, eventually, single poems, attempting to salvage as much as he could from the project” (Granier 31). Further poems from the sequence have seen publication in *Poetry Ireland Review*, and yet more material exists, unexplored and unpublished to date. This sequence may be interpreted as reflecting the fragmentary nature of postmodern existence, as noted by Forché:

> Our age lacks the structure of a story. Or perhaps it would be closer […] to say that narrative implies progress and completion. The history of our time does not allow for any of the bromides of progress, nor for the promise of successful closure. (“Introduction” 43)

Despite its fragmentary state, and the uncomfortable questions of positioning, transference, and trauma at the heart of any poetry of witness written by those who did not witness, this sequence succeeds in describing the narrator’s struggle with what Gene Ray has called “collective trauma”, a product of the extreme twentieth century: “since no one is unaffected by the violence of the last century, it is necessary to speak of collective trauma and social damage” (136).

The fragmentation and trauma which are some of the central themes of the “Living in Hiroshima” sequence have been borne out in the fragmented materiality of the sequence itself. Anthony Glavin’s “Living in Hiroshima” stands as an uncanny metaphor for the haunting aftermaths of twentieth-century wars and conflicts, whose ongoing traumatic effects upon the human psyche, among survivors, victims, and those who live in the realities of a post-Hiroshima world, are far from fully resolved or understood.

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