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Lost in a Liminal Space?

Birte Heidemann

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In memory of my mother

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CHAPTER 1

Post-Agreement Northern Irish Literature: An Introduction

> *...there is now a new wave of writing coming out of this place that demands attention; a hugely varied body of poetry, prose and drama, some of it still raw or rough-edged, but all of it distinctive, timely and powerful.*
>
> *Daragh Carville, New Soundings: An Anthology of New Writing from the North of Ireland (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2003), xi.*

Since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (‘Agreement’ hereafter) in 1998,[1] Northern Ireland has undergone significant transformation in terms of its political governance, and its reception in the artistic, aesthetic and literary domains. As critics such as Aaron Kelly caution, the Agreement’s “bourgeois reconciliation *instructs* that we should be amazed, or at the very least *heartened*”[2] by its commitment to economic change, which is most visibly manifested in the aggressive redevelopment of Northern Ireland’s capital. A walk through the streets of post-Agreement Belfast reveals not only the changing terrain of the cityscape, but also the unchanging remains of its sectarian past. This rift between rhetoric and reality finds an even more pronounced expression in the way the City Council promotes Belfast as a place to “Be Inspired,” inviting the prospective visitors to “[d]o something out of the ordinary and do something extraordinary.”[3] Since 2008, the city centre has been plastered with

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posters that prominently feature a heart-shaped 'B' and a website whose very name reads like an instruction: *gotobelfast.com*.[4] This link leads to the official visitor website of Belfast, which builds on the heart-shaped, heart-felt imagery of the rebranding campaign, soliciting the visitors to post their favourite places on the "Lovin' Belfast" guide: "Like it, pin it, tweet it and share it!"[5] In a curious way, then, the rebranding of Belfast resonates with Kelly's cautionary remark that the Agreement 'instructs' as much as it 'heartens' its recipients by means of a "bourgeois reconciliation" with populism, neoliberalism and the rhetorics of economic and entrepreneurial 'progress.'

Notwithstanding the City Council's claim that Belfast is "packed with history,"[6] Northern Ireland's conflictual past remains conspicuously absent from the visitor's website: "Our great city blossomed from very humble beginnings…The perfect haven for repairing sea ravaged ships… And the rest is our history."[7] Although the Council is careful to acknowledge the city's colonial history (the "very humble beginnings"), it turns silent when it comes to Belfast's recent past. The use of the possessive pronoun in "our history" not only reaffirms the conformity forged by the Agreement by assuming a collective responsibility for *one* history—the one that is *ours*—but in doing so, it denies the disruptions produced by Northern Ireland's 'troubled' past. Sure enough, the city's topography of terror hardly configures in the tourist adverts; instead, Belfast's history is primarily identified with the Harland and Wolff shipyard which built the RMS *Titanic* in 1911. The redevelopment of Queens Island into the Titanic Quarter is indeed a glaring testimony to Northern Ireland's lofty, if not megalomaniac, redevelopment project.[8] The showcasing of the city's glorious past reveals nothing of the struggles of the workers, the labour politics and class hierarchies that ran along the colonially engineered sectarian divisions in the shipyards. On the contrary, the 'Titanicisation' of Belfast becomes a proxy narrative to post-Agreement Northern Ireland's rhetorical escape from history, which "seeks to re-brand and co-opt the Titanic as a symbol"[9] for a new political course. Thus, it comes as no surprise that by re-enacting yet another doomed history—that of the *Titanic*'s ill-fated maiden voyage—, Belfast's own doomed history is overwritten by a "persuasive but frail version of the future."[10] Indeed, the main objective of the redevelopment project is to rid itself of the "negative part of Belfast's past"[11] which would tarnish the polished, albeit porous, fabric of the post-Agreement city. As if "airbrushed from history,"[12] the city's sectarian past is thus systematically relegated to "the 'blank page' of the Titanic Quarter."[13]

In the last two decades, a number of Northern Irish writers have begun to fill the 'blank page' of the post-Agreement discourse and its (dis)engagement with the country's conflictual past. Their writings anticipated the rhetoric of economic 'progress' and 'prosperity' even before the Agreement had been signed. In Robert McLiam Wilson's novel *Eureka Street* (1996), for instance, this 'proleptic' perspective not only registers the shared sense of euphoria among Belfast's residents following the declaration of the first ceasefire of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in 1994, but also points to the dangers and drawbacks of joining the bandwagon of global capitalism.[14] In the course of the narrative, protagonist Jake paints a sorry sight of the post-ceasefire city, one that foresees Belfast's future redevelopment as a doomed project even before it had begun: "Belfast is a city that has *lost its heart*. A shipbuilding, rope-making, linen-weaving town. It builds no ships, makes no rope and weaves no linen. Those trades died. A city can't survive without something to do with itself."[15] As in Kelly's reading of the Agreement's "bourgeois reconciliation," the narrator's envisioning of Belfast serves as a periodic reminder of the city's frail foundations, rooted in the dead trade of shipbuilding. Given that it was not just shipbuilding but also rope-making and linen-weaving that had nourished its economy, the Titanicisation of post-Agreement Belfast seems all the more puzzling for a city that is struggling to rediscover its originality. The choice of the *Titanic* is perhaps neither incidental nor innocent, but one that seizes upon the populist rebranding of the *Titanic* story in James Cameron's Hollywood blockbuster of 1997. In either case, by anticipating how the Agreement seeks "to capitalise on the rhetoric of reinvention,"[16] Wilson's post-ceasefire novel provides a proleptic commentary on the object of critique in Northern Irish literature since 1998.

One day after the signing of the Agreement, the *Irish Times* published a response by the late Seamus Heaney in which he announced the birth of a new literary era: "it is at the level of creative spirit, in the realm of glimpsed potential rather than intransigent solidarity, that the future takes shape."[17] In an attempt to capture the "creative spirit" of what I call 'post-Agreement literature,' this book turns to the "hugely varied body of poetry, prose and drama"[18] to have emerged in the past two decades. Accordingly, the conceptual treatment of the term 'post-Agreement literature' in this book distances itself from the seamless blending of genres under the rubric of 'contemporary literature.' Given the new political situation of 'post-Agreement,' the term 'contemporary' in a Northern Irish context is misleading to say the least, for it is generally associated with

the times of the Troubles and, to some extent, with the early stages of the Peace Process. While this book carefully acknowledges the contributions of writers such as Seamus Heaney and Ciaran Carson (poetry), Brian Moore and Bernard MacLaverty (fiction), and Stewart Parker and Brian Friel (drama)—to name a few—to the country's "creative spirit," it separates them from the "new wave"[19] of writers, who approach the period of communal violence from an entirely new set of personal, political and cultural sensibilities. Most of the writers I classify under the category of 'post-Agreement' were born around the same time Heaney and his contemporaries began to publish their work—the beginning of the Troubles—and came of age during the Peace Process. As a result, post-Agreement writers are acutely aware of how this shifting political terrain breeds a *different* kind of 'conflict,' one that is certainly less violent but gestures towards new forms of violence exerted by the Agreement's rhetorical negation of the sectarian past and its aggressive neoliberal campaign. It is between these two coordinates of a suppressed and 'regressive' past, and the 'progressive' and 'agreed-upon' future that this book locates the generic parameters of post-Agreement literature.

Although the literature written in Northern Ireland since the Good Friday Agreement has received considerable academic attention in the past decades, post-Agreement literature as a literary genre, with its distinct formal-aesthetic parameters, remains largely unexplored. For a number of critics, this group of writers is defined as one that distances itself from the violent trajectories of the Troubles, but one that does not necessarily qualify for a literary genre in its own right, particularly in isolation from the preceding generations. Instead, dubbed variedly as the "new generation"[20] or, even more vaguely, as the "new voices"[21] of "some recent"[22] Northern Irish literature, these critics remain elusive to any uniform categorisation or classification. There are other commentators who tend to assign certain generic qualities to a particular group of writers, variously naming them "prodigal novelists,"[23] "emerging poets,"[24] "youngish poet[s] from Northern Ireland"[25] or, more specifically, "first-generation peace poets."[26] It is only Miriam Gamble's coinage of "peace poets" that comes close to demarcating generic parameters by echoing Heaney's views on the "creative spirit" of a new political situation. Having said that, the term 'peace' in the Northern Irish context has rather complex spatio-temporal connotations: it cannot be defined in terms of a temporal break signalled by the signing of the Agreement in 1998, as it is equally tenable to the transitional period of the Peace

Process. And while one may be tempted to strike a hopeful tone over the implementation of political peace, the "peace poets" category, too, fails to register the critical undertones in the works of post-Agreement writers.

Drawing from the existing literary criticism on the new impulses of 'contemporary' Northern Irish writers, this book goes a step further in constructing the genre of 'post-Agreement literature' through temporal, spatial and formal-aesthetic configurations. Distinguishing it from what is conventionally (and conveniently) labelled as 'contemporary literature,' the book defines post-Agreement literature as a body of texts—fiction, poetry and drama—that is shaped by the literary sensibilities of writers who grew up during the Troubles (1960s to 1980s) and published their works in the aftermath of the Agreement, and whose formal-aesthetic expressions not only draw upon but also deviate from the preceding generations of contemporary Northern Irish writers. In the domain of fiction, for instance, post-Agreement novelists inherit from the "self-conscious regional critique"[27] of pre-Troubles writers such as Michael McLaverty, Sam Hanna Bell, Brian Moore and Maurice Leitch, while transcending the latter's penchant for "conservative Realism."[28] By retaining a sense of "regional critique," the post-Agreement novel marks a decisive shift from the genre of 'Troubles fiction' that mediates the period of political violence through either 'realist,' 'romantic' or 'domestic' modes of narration.[29] Unlike the consensual notion of pre-Troubles novelists or the populist polemics of many writers during the Troubles, post-Agreement novelists are engaged in a quest for multiple subject configurations, as reflected in their formal experimentation with characters that duplicate one another, and narrative techniques that defy chronological movement and closure.

As a number of Northern Irish poets across three generations are affiliated with the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry at Queen's University Belfast, the creative continuity of the Heaneyan tradition finds a renewed expression in post-Agreement poetry. While reworking the naturalistic notions of place and belonging in the metaphors of 'digging' in Heaney's poetry and the revising tendencies of time and space in the metaphors of 'retelling,' 'imitation,' 'transgression' and 'translation' in the second generation—Ciaran Carson, Medbh McGuckian, Paul Muldoon and Tom Paulin—, post-Agreement poets employ the imagery of movement, motion and fracture in the metaphors of 'sky,' 'feet' and 'flight.' By turning to the morphing nature of the disputed territory itself, the poets dwell on the ontic rift between origin, place and belonging. Here, unlike the

regional 'rootedness' in Heaney or the exilic 'rootlessness' of his contemporaries Derek Mahon and James Simmons, post-Agreement poets read 'roots' through 'routes,' or rather 'home' through travels, emigration and displacement. Yet, post-Agreement poetry retains a certain degree of formal-aesthetic conservatism, while extending it to an accessible form that allows for the expression of free-floating subject positions in an age of cultural globalisation.

In what came to be known as "a working model of wholeness,"[30] the reparations of sectarian damage and an urge for cultural and national unity became the major undertakings of early 'Troubles plays' such as John Boyd's *The Flats* (1971) and Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City* (1973).[31] Taking this conflation of art and politics a step further, the foundation of Field Day Theatre Company (1980) had a major impact on the growing number of Northern Irish independent theatre companies in the 1980s and early 1990s. However, by addressing cross-communal concerns in site-specific performances, independent theatre companies such as Charabanc and Tinderbox broke away from the monotony of Field Day's cultural nationalism. Buoyed by the postmodern experiments of Northern Ireland's independent theatre practitioners, post-Agreement playwrights draw attention to the ideological interchangeability of sectarian politics, liminal subject positions and socio-economic exclusion by mimicking, mocking and suspending the new political situation of 'post-Agreement.'

The seemingly suspended category of 'post-Agreement literature' is indeed a glaring reflection of the *political* suspension that has come to undermine Northern Ireland's governance structure since 1998; the establishment of power-sharing institutions in 1999; their suspension in 2002 following the refusal of the Ulster Unionist Party to share power with Sinn Féin; and the renewal of the devolved government in 2007. Accordingly, despite the fact that the Agreement was signed more than 15 years ago, the country's political conundrum has forged a generic gridlock into its literary landscape by means of an indefinite continuum of 'the Agreement.' Yet, as indeterminate as the sociopolitical situation may be, it is within this generic gridlock of 'post-Agreement' that commentators such as Heaney find a "realm of glimpsed potential." Following Nicholas Allen and Aaron Kelly, who read Northern Ireland as "a place that can be imagined in suspension,"[32] this book conceives suspension as an aesthetic category which is played out in post-Agreement literature in myriad ways. However, my approach is particularly concerned with the way the writers respond to the disabling impact of the Agreement's rhetorical suspension of the country's

violent past in favour of "a new beginning,"[33] one which has received little attention in secondary criticism. At best, critics—from political sciences, history and sociology to literary and cultural studies—tend to express a certain degree of scepticism over the Agreement's successful implementation.

In light of the suspension of devolved government in 2002, social scientists were largely preoccupied with *how* the suspended situation could be brought to an end by means of political and institutional interventions. For instance, in their Introduction to the revised edition of *A Farewell to Arms? Beyond the Good Friday Agreement* (2006), political scientists Michael Cox, Adrian Guelke and Fiona Stephen observe that it is impossible to conceive "how long and difficult the process would be."[34] Instead of diagnosing the prevailing state of suspension, they propose strategic solutions to Northern Ireland's "'politics of simmering'"[35] during the early post-Agreement period. Similarly, in *The Trouble with Northern Ireland: The Belfast Agreement and Democratic Governance* (2006), Rick Wilford and Robin Wilson call for "a new, sui generis constitution for Northern Ireland" which would "transcend the unionist-nationalist antagonism."[36] The re-establishment of devolved government in 2007 notwithstanding, more recent works such as Brian Barton and Patrick J. Roche's *The Northern Ireland Question: The Peace Process and the Belfast Agreement* (2009) advocate the same institutional-centric reformism to reinforce the legal and constitutional content of the Agreement, particularly its impact on Loyalism and Republicanism, and go on to (prematurely) celebrate the "efficacy"[37] of the Agreement merely a decade after its adoption: "the most divisive political issues within Northern Ireland…have now been resolved (power-sharing, consent, the Irish dimension, police reform, arms decommissioning, the release of prisoners, etc.)."[38] However, contrary to Cox, Guelke and Stephen's tongue-in-cheek remark that "[a]cademics are well known for their ability to predict the past while invariably failing to see the future,"[39] social scientists say very little about the Agreement's rhetorical dismemberment of the violent past. Instead, even at the risk of echoing the same institutional rhetoric of the Agreement, their approach is geared towards 'ending' the conflict through structural, political and governmental interventions that are ill-equipped to register the struggles, aspirations and suspended histories of the ordinary populace. There are, however, notable exceptions in literary scholarship whose critical reception of the Agreement's neoliberal agenda has certainly helped shape the conceptual direction of this book. Far from undermining the Agreement's political impact, these critics expose the underlying

structures of post-Agreement politics; in particular, the socio-economic exclusion of the working classes from the Agreement's surge for prosperity[40] and the rhetorical removal of the conflict from collective memory.[41] By drawing attention to how Northern Ireland's unresolved past undermines the dominant discourse of economic development, they diagnose the post-Agreement period as a state of paralysed temporality. But it is perhaps Richard Kirkland's (1996) concept of 'interregnum' as a state of suspended decision (that is to be made), and his identification of the Peace Process as a period of political 'vacuum' (waiting for closure) that has paved way to new conceptual pathways in post-Agreement literary criticism.[42] John Brannigan's (2006) discussion on literary suspension, for instance, is framed around the temporal aporia that situates the devolved government between the "dark notoriety of the past" and the "infinitely abortive future."[43]

In order to demarcate these liminal coordinates, both in terms of temporal and spatial parameters, this book proposes a revision of the existing theories on liminality in postcolonial discourse and their relevance to the Northern Irish context. In fact, a great deal of criticism has been devoted to *Ireland*'s colonial bearings, and particularly its liminal position in postcolonial discourse.[44] While most of these works make a strong case for reading Ireland as a postcolonial society, others tend to conform to the prevailing approaches in postcolonial studies that conceive liminality as a site of negotiation and re-identification.[45] Such a positive vision of liminality, developed in postcolonial and diasporic contexts, does not lend itself to an easy extension or application to the *Northern* Irish case. Since the island's partition in 1921, the annexation of Northern Ireland to its bygone coloniser has effectively turned it into a 'border country' par excellence.[46] Thus, given Northern Ireland's ambiguous positioning within the geo-ideological coordinates enabled by postcolonial discourse, concepts such as hybridity and liminality, which are built on constellations of power between a European Empire and non-European colonies, require a careful revision of the conventional theories on liminal space that euphemise, eulogise and even celebrate indeterminacy and undecidability as normative subject positions. Hence, instead of conceding liminality as thoroughly enabling, the books advances the notion of 'negative liminality' as a *disabling* condition which, in the context of Northern Irish literature, pertains to a suspended state of (fictional) subject positions that resist closure and resolution. Yet, the conceptual exposition of negative liminality and its operational categories of 'liminal suspension' and 'liminal permanence' in this book do not necessarily negate the foundational

basis of liminality (Bhabha) in postcolonial discourse. Conversely, by questioning its functionalist genesis in anthropology and its appropriation of conceptual tenets developed in symbolic, semiotic (Lacan) and spatial (Freud) domains, and their reapplication to colonial contexts, it gestures towards the negative trajectories of liminality that are played out as a series of subject positions in the absence of clearly demarcated liminal coordinates between past and future, pedagogy and performance, oppressor and oppressed, time and space.

Chapter 2, "From Postcolonial to Post-Agreement: Theorising Northern Ireland's Negative Liminality," provides the theoretical grounding necessary for the literary analysis in the subsequent chapters. Following Homi K. Bhabha's original thesis on 'liminal' and 'interstitial' perspectives, this chapter develops a renewed concept of liminal space that allows for a literary rendition of the various states of suspension specific to the Northern Irish context. In particular, while recontextualising Bhabha's thesis on the 'pedagogic' (state-centric) and 'performative' (actor-driven) character of nationalist discourses to the Northern Irish case, the chapter explores the potential for indeterminacy, suspension and permanence produced by discrepant subject positions arising from a (post)colonial context that does not necessarily allow for a negotiation between oppressor and oppressed as in a dialogue among "peers."[47] Correspondingly, by forging a conceptual synthesis of spatial and temporal trajectories of negative liminality, the chapter retraces Northern Ireland's colonial past and its implications for the post-Agreement era, quite in spite of its omission from postcolonial discourse. A number of supplementary concepts will aid the discussion on Northern Ireland's negative liminality including 'liminal suspension' and 'liminal permanence' which are geared towards exposing the climate of institutional (re)engineering of the country's political conundrum through the Good Friday Agreement. By way of its rhetorical suspension of a troubled past, this chapter argues, the Agreement forges the very liminal impasse that Northern Ireland has sought to avoid since the Plantation of Ulster.

Chapter 3, "Retrospective (Re)Visions: Post-Agreement Fiction," provides a literary analysis of three novels that deal with how the failed legacies of the Agreement seep into the private sphere of the protagonists' lives, while disrupting their familial and social roles. The first reading, "A House of Fiction with a Million Windows: Tracing the 'Cultural Corridor' of Glenn Patterson's *Number 5* (2003)," focuses on five families which successively occupy a terraced house in suburban Belfast from the

1950s to the millennium. Notwithstanding their temporary residency, the inhabitants of Number 5 remain connected through the traces they leave behind in the house. Drawing upon Emmanuel Levinas's notion of 'trace,' the chapter reads Patterson's 'house of fiction' as a space of liminal suspension in which the fictional house Number 5 fulfils an allegorical function in tracing the sociopolitical matrix of contemporary Northern Ireland well into the post-Agreement period. The second reading, "'Conspiracies to Conspire': Archiving Meta-Fictional Fragments in Eoin McNamee's *The Ultras* (2004)," explores the novel's uncanny trope of myth-making, which is based on a real-life character, Special Forces operative Captain Robert Nairac, and the myths surrounding his disappearance (and demise) in 1977. The reading highlights how the police, paramilitary forces and secret service agencies systematically manipulate the memory of Nairac (as opposed to Nairac's memory), whereas other characters in the narrative attempt to archive every minute detail on his disappearance. In an attempt to unravel the novel's dialectical interplay of memory, the reading employs Aleida Assmann's notions of 'passive remembering' and 'active forgetting,' and Jacques Derrida's thesis of 'archive fever.' If the archive could be conceived as a negative liminal space, then Nairac's suspended existence bears a certain symbolic significance for post-Agreement Northern Ireland's political caesura of an unresolved past. Building on Derrida's distinction between calling *for* and calling *upon* forgiveness, the final reading, "Liquid Testimonies: The Substance of Truth in David Park's *The Truth Commissioner* (2008)," turns to the 'prescriptive' dimension of forgiveness in post-Agreement Northern Ireland. Emulating South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the novel revolves around the trial of a disappeared teenage informer that bears testimony to an increasingly institutionalised realm of truth and forgiveness. Instead of seeking societal reconciliation, Park's fictional Truth Commission is primarily concerned with preserving the political status quo through the 'liquid testimonies' of the respective characters. Invoking the imagery of water in the novel, the reading is mediated through the Derridean notions of the 'unforgivable' and 'imprescriptible' which help shed light on how a politics of non-resolution forges Northern Ireland into a state of negative liminality.

Chapter 4, "Between the Lines: Post-Agreement Poetry," is divided into three thematic currents that re-evaluate 'place' through a particular moment in time: (1) growing up during the Troubles; (2) journeys 'home'; and (3) the city of Belfast. Each theme discusses selected poems by Colette Bryce, Deirdre Cartmill, Leontia Flynn, Miriam Gamble, Alan

Gillis, Nick Laird and Sinéad Morrissey. The poems selected for analysis are characterised by an interplay between liminal suspension and liminal permanence in which notions of 'place' and 'belonging' are no longer tenable or relevant, as the poets rearticulate the physical landscape of the post-Agreement period through a temporal retrospection of their childhood, adolescence and young adulthood. The first section, "Remembering the Recent Past: Childhood and the Conflict," uncovers the ways in which the memory of the poets' childhood is linked to a spatio-temporal realm which has been violated by sectarianism. By way of fractured imagery, the poets' recollection of the Troubles is mediated by the memory of places that invoke both fear and familiarity in their respective speakers. The second section, "Traversing New Territories: Journeys 'Home,'" explores how the poets' sense of place is shaped by the time they spent abroad. Yet, as every poetic journey eventually ends at 'home,' the chapter observes that Northern Ireland serves them as a point of reference through which other worlds are perceived. This strategy, particularly the poetic portrayal of post-Agreement Belfast, undermines the 'progressive' politics of the poets' hometown. Correspondingly, the last section, "Reading the City: 'Progress' and 'Pretence' in Post-Agreement Belfast," analyses poems on Belfast that depict the city as a testing ground for the country's political status quo. The negative liminality of the speakers, this chapter suggests, is not merely inflected by their restricted movement between spatio-temporal coordinates, but their very familiarity with the old traces of Belfast that helps them navigate their hometown through the sensory violence inflicted by the aggressive transformation of the post-Agreement city into an unrecognisable cosmopolitan space.

Chapter 5, "Performing 'Progress': Post-Agreement Drama," examines the work of three post-Agreement playwrights: Tim Loane (*Caught Red Handed*, 2002; *To Be Sure*, 2007), Abbie Spallen (*Pumpgirl*, 2006) and Daragh Carville (*This Other City*, 2010). In line with playwright Stewart Parker's notion of political theatre—a defining feature of Northern Irish drama during the conflict—, the chapter explores the nexus between art and politics in the post-Agreement context. The first reading, "Playing for Time: States of Perpetual Suspension in Tim Loane's Political Comedies *Caught Red Handed* (2002) and *To Be Sure* (2007)," explores the ways in which the two plays deconstruct the 'political doublethink' of post-Agreement Northern Ireland. By staging opposed political camps (a Unionist party in *Caught Red Handed* and a Republican family in *To Be Sure*), the plays advance the notion of an ideological interchangeability that mimics the sectarian

iconographies of post-Agreement Northern Ireland. This approach allows for a parallel reading of the two plays, which encompasses both rhetoric and dramaturgical devices. The final two readings focus on the socio-economic effects of post-Agreement politics. "Making a Mark: The Forgotten Other in Abbie Spallen's *Pumpgirl* (2006)" examines how a tomboy—the eponymous Pumpgirl—from Armagh's borderlands finds herself at the receiving end of 'progress' and 'prosperity.' The reading exposes post-Agreement Northern Ireland's politics of socio-economic exclusion, which leave traces on the very liminal body and landscape Pumpgirl dwells in. "'Building a Better Belfast': Communicative Cul-de-Sac(s) in Daragh Carville's *This Other City* (2010)" focuses on the social pathos of a 'successful' family that is part of the city's increasingly affluent middle class. More specifically, it unravels the way the marginalised subjects in the play constantly disrupt and thereby unpack the liminal suspension inherent to seemingly stable relationships which, at the narrative level, is enabled by Carville's creative use of syntactic silences and semantic subversions.

Chapter 6, "Diagnosing the Post-Agreement Period: A Literary Detour," provides a concluding critique of Northern Ireland's liminal predicament. In particular, the chapter outlines how my readings of post-Agreement novels, poems and plays expose the fault lines of public discourses that forge historical amnesia into populist imagination. What these literary examples suggest is that, in spite of their repeated attempts to deal with past events, often by revisiting, commemorating, suppressing or even erasing them, there is a spectre of invisible, institutional(ised) mental and cultural divisions that haunt Northern Ireland, those that aesthetically foil the writers' (and thereby their characters') attempts to surge forward. Such a literary foil, however, is not a crushing judgment, the chapter concludes, but merely a *diagnosis* of Northern Ireland's dismembered past.

Notes

1. The Good Friday or Belfast Agreement of 10 April 1998 was a multi-party peace agreement by most of Northern Ireland's parties, and an international agreement between the British and Irish governments to end the 30 years of violence commonly referred to as the Troubles. The Agreement was approved by a large majority of voters across the island of Ireland in two referenda.
2. Aaron Kelly, "Geopolitical Eclipse: Culture and the Peace Process in Northern Ireland," *Third Text* 19, no. 5 (2005): 548 (emphasis added).

3. "Be Inspired," *Visit Belfast: The Official Visitor Website,* accessed 3 May 2014, http://visit-belfast.com/things-to-do/be-inspired.
4. Belfast's new logo is the result of a twelve-month rebranding exercise by London-based brand consultancy Lloyd Northover. The heart-shaped design bears resemblance to the "I Love New York" campaign that has been used to promote tourism in New York City since 1977. For a critical reading of Belfast's rebranding, see also Colin Graham, "B Branded," *19acres.wordpress.com* (blog), https://19acres.wordpress.com/more-vacuum/b-branded. This essay was originally published in *The Vacuum*, November 2008.
5. "Lovin' Belfast," *Visit Belfast: The Official Visitor Website,* accessed 3 May 2014, http://blog.visit-belfast.com/lovin-belfast.
6. "About Belfast," *Visit Belfast: The Official Visitor Website,* accessed 3 May 2014, http://visit-belfast.com/home/page/about-belfast.
7. Ibid.
8. Since its opening in 2012, Titanic Belfast—"it is not a museum. It is an experience"—has become the 'heart' of the Titanic Quarter as "the world's largest Titanic visitor attraction." "Titanic Belfast," *Titanic Belfast,* accessed 28 August 2014, http://www.titanicbelfast.com.
9. Kelly, "Geopolitical Eclipse," 551. See also Colin Graham, "Titanic Industries—Selling the Ship," *The Vacuum* 9 (2003), http://www.thevacuum.org.uk/issues/issues0120/issue09/is09arttitind.html.
10. Colin Graham, "Belfast in Photographs," in *The Cities of Belfast*, ed. Nicholas Allen and Aaron Kelly (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 153.
11. The Dock: Life in the Titanic Quarter. Business Plan, by Chris Hollies Leadership First, 7.
12. Rick Wilford and Robin Wilson, *The Trouble with Northern Ireland: The Belfast Agreement and Democratic Governance* (Dublin: tasc at New Island, 2006), 6.
13. The Dock, 7.
14. For a discussion on the proleptic potential of the post-ceasefire novel, see Neal Alexander, "Remembering to Forget: Northern Irish Fiction after the Troubles," in *Irish Literature Since 1990: Diverse Voices*, ed. Scott Brewster and Michael Parker (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 272–83. Chapter 3 builds on Alexander's distinction between "proleptic" (post-ceasefire) and "retrospective" (post-Agreement) Northern Irish fiction.
15. Robert McLiam Wilson, *Eureka Street* (London: Vintage, 1998), 215 (emphasis added).
16. Neal Alexander, "Belfast Is Lovely," *The Vacuum* 9 (2003), http://www.thevacuum.org.uk/issues/issues0120/issue09/is09artbellov.htm.
17. Seamus Heaney, "Unheard Melodies," *Irish Times Supplement*, 11 April 1998, 1.
18. Carville, *New Soundings*, xi.
19. Ibid.

20. Michael Parker, "Neither Here nor There: New Generation Northern Irish Poets (Sinéad Morrissey and Nick Laird)," in *Irish Literature Since 1990: Diverse Voices*, ed. Scott Brewster and Michael Parker (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 177–98.
21. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, *Writing Home: Poetry and Place in Northern Ireland 1968–2008* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), 249–86.
22. Caroline Magennis, "'. . . that Great Swollen Belly': The Abject Maternal in Some Recent Northern Irish Fiction," *Irish Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2010): 91–100.
23. Eve Patten, "Fiction and Conflict: Northern Ireland's Prodigal Novelists," in *Peripheral Visions: Images of Nationhood in Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. Ian A. Bell (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), 128–48.
24. John Brown, ed., *Magnetic North: The Emerging Poets* (Belfast: Lagan Press, 2006).
25. Fran Brearton, "Scissoring the Past," *The Guardian*, 11 August 2007, http://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/aug/11/featuresreviews.guardianreview24.
26. Miriam Gamble, "'The Gentle Art of Re-perceiving': Post-Ceasefire Identity in the Poetry of Alan Gillis," *Irish Studies Review* 17, no. 3 (2009): 362.
27. Patten, "Prodigal Novelists," 129.
28. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, "The Novel and the Northern Troubles," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel*, ed. John Wilson Foster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 240.
29. See Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation: Studies in the New Irish Fiction* (London: Pluto Press, 1997).
30. Stewart Parker, *Dramatis Personae: A John Malone Memorial Lecture* (Belfast: Queen's University Belfast, 1986), 19.
31. John Boyd, *The Flats* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1973); Brian Friel, *The Freedom of the City* (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 1992).
32. Nicholas Allen and Aaron Kelly, introduction to *The Cities of Belfast*, ed. Nicholas Allen and Aaron Kelly (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 13.
33. "Declaration of Support; The Agreement: Agreement Reached in the Multi-party Negotiations (10 April 1998)," *CAIN Web Service*, accessed 6 May 2014, http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/agreement.htm#support.
34. Michael Cox, Adrian Guelke and Fiona Stephen, "Introduction: A Farewell to Arms? Beyond the Good Friday Agreement," in *A Farewell to Arms? Beyond the Good Friday Agreement*, ed. Michael Cox, Adrian Guelke and Fiona Stephen, 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 2.
35. Brian Barton and Patrick J. Roche, *The Northern Ireland Question: The Peace Process and the Belfast Agreement* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 269.
36. Wilford and Wilson, *The Trouble with Northern Ireland*, 8.

37. Barton and Roche, *The Northern Ireland Question*, 3.
38. Ibid., 269. For a critical review of the debates on power-sharing in post-conflict societies like Northern Ireland and the Balkan region, see Robert Wilson, *The Northern Ireland Experience of Conflict and Agreement: A Model for Export?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010). For a comparative analysis of post-Agreement Northern Ireland and the conflicts in the Basque Country, Israel and Palestine, South Africa, and Sri Lanka, see John McGarry, ed., *Northern Ireland and the Divided World: Post-Agreement Northern Ireland in Comparative Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
39. Cox, Guelke and Stephen, "Introduction: A Farewell to Arms?," 2.
40. See, in particular, Kelly, "Geopolitical Eclipse."
41. See Colin Graham, "'Every Passer-by a Culprit?' Archive Fever, Photography and the Peace in Belfast," *Third Text* 19, no. 5 (2005): 567–80; Stefanie Lehner, "The Peace Process As Arkhe-Taintment? Glenn Patterson's *That Which Was* and Eoin McNamee's *The Ultras*," *Irish Studies Review* 15, no. 4 (2007): 507–20; and Alexander, "Remembering to Forget."
42. Richard Kirkland, *Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland Since 1965: Moments of Danger* (London: Longman, 1996), 7.
43. John Brannigan, "Northern Irish Fiction: Provisionals and Pataphysicians," in *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. James F. English (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 142.
44. See, for instance, David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993); Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1996); Colin Graham, *Deconstructing Ireland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001); Glenn Hooper and Colin Graham, eds, *Irish and Postcolonial Writing: History, Theory, Practice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Clare Carroll and Patricia King, eds, *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2003); and Marisol Morales Ladrón, ed., *Postcolonial and Gender Perspectives in Irish Studies* (A Coruña: Netbiblo, 2007).
45. See Irene Gilsenan Nordin and Elin Holmsten, introduction to *Liminal Borderlands in Irish Literature and Culture*, ed. Irene Gilsenan Nordin and Elin Holmsten (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), 7–13.
46. See Eamonn Hughes, "Introduction: Northern Ireland—Border Country," in *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland, 1960–1990*, ed. Eamonn Hughes (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991), 1–12. For a more recent account of how the island's partition has had a far-reaching impact on contemporary Northern Irish cultural production, see Maureen E. Ruprecht Fadem, *The Literature of Northern Ireland: Spectral*

Borderlands (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). See also Colin Younger, ed., *Border Crossings: Narration, Nation and Imagination in Scots and Irish Literature and Culture* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), which examines contested spaces between nation-states in the British Isles.

47. Benita Parry, *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* (London: Routledge, 2004), 63.

CHAPTER 2

From Postcolonial to Post-Agreement: Theorising Northern Ireland's Negative Liminality

Post-colonial theory…has the ability and potential to comprehend the complex and the hybrid in Irish culture.

Colin Graham, "Theory, Post- and Nation in Ireland," in Space and Place: The Geographies of Literature, ed. Glenda Norquay and Gerry Smyth (Liverpool: Liverpool John Moores University Press, 1997), 112.

As we enter the second decade after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, it is becoming increasingly clear that internal divisions, communal strife and periodic outbreaks of violence in Northern Ireland have not fully abated. Instead, the failed legacies of the Agreement have found a renewed expression in the domains of art, literature and cultural politics. For instance, not only did the post-Agreement period see a meteoric rise in the country's literary output, but it marked the advent of a new generation of writers who approach the conflict with an entirely new corpus of political and cultural sensibilities. This chapter aims to develop a discursive platform that helps diagnose the political predicaments of post-Agreement Northern Ireland at large, and in doing so, it attempts to forge the means of new conceptual possibilities and perspectives into the literary texts and contexts that represent them. Arguing that both Plantation and Partition have had far-reaching impacts on the outbreak of political violence in the late 1960s, the chapter engages with the implications of British

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colonialism for post-Agreement politics, which requires a critical examination of Northern Ireland's place in postcolonial discourse. By situating Northern Ireland in the broader geopolitical framework of an unfinished colonialism, the chapter examines how the various claims and counterclaims over its geopolitical and territorial mapping have gradually (d)evolved into a geo-ideological conflict of contested identities. Within this, the concept of negative liminality is introduced as the exegesis of Northern Ireland's transition from a geopolitical to a geo-ideological domain of conflictual identities. Extending the theoretical discussion to the post-Agreement era, the chapter presents a critical reading of the Agreement text which provides the basis for a temporal articulation of negative liminality through two interrelated concepts: liminal suspension and liminal permanence. If negative liminality helps articulate the postcolonial geo-ideological coordinates of Northern Ireland, then liminal suspension and liminal permanence link the structural trajectory of postcolonialism to the post-Agreement period.

Although it is entirely possible to argue that Northern Ireland has been structurally shaped by the same governing principles of colonial powers as found elsewhere, its status as Britain's first and, arguably, last colony sets it apart from the rest of the colonial experience. Moreover, unlike the 'postcolony' which encompasses a whole host of former colonies in the Global South, or the settler colonies where the (former) colonisers and colonised populations continue to cohabit and share the same space, Northern Ireland remains a mere 'annexation' to its bygone Empire. Having said that, however, this chapter does not propose a generic postcolonial reading of Northern Ireland or a general application of postcolonial discourse to the texts selected for analysis. Instead, the postcolonial framework employed in this chapter serves two specific purposes: (a) to rework the concept of liminality through a critique of its inception, development and application within postcolonial studies, and (b) to explore the unavoidable collusion and complicity between the colonial past and its implications for post-Agreement Northern Ireland.

Postcolonial Peripheries: The Case of Northern Ireland

> Could a white, literate and Christian society on the edge of Europe have anything like the necessary credentials to discuss the realities, never mind the oppressions, of colonial endeavour?[1]

Glenn Hooper's rhetorical lamenting of the omission of Ireland from post-colonial discourse notwithstanding, Colin Graham argues that Northern Ireland remains "either particular of or, more often, exceptional within colonialism, as [Britain's] first and/or last colony."[2] By articulating what David Lloyd calls the "atypicality"[3] of its postcolonial status,[4] the following discussion (re)traces the elusive genealogies of routing/rooting Northern Ireland—as opposed to Ireland at large—within "an already embittered discourse."[5] Despite its discursive polarity—or perhaps precisely for that reason—,"the introduction of the Irish case to the debate," as Declan Kiberd suggests, "will complicate, extend and in some cases expose the limits of current models of postcoloniality."[6] Here, it is important to note that while Ireland's controversial positioning in postcolonial studies has been addressed by Irish scholars themselves, it remains conspicuously absent from standard works in the field.[7] For instance, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin's seminal study *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), as Kiberd observes, "passes over the Irish case very swiftly, perhaps because the authors find these white Europeans too strange an instance to justify their sustained attention."[8] Echoing what Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge call the "homogenizing drive of *EWB*,"[9] Kiberd's observation concedes, albeit ironically, Hooper's rhetorical claim for the exclusion of the Irish from postcolonial studies. Nevertheless, the case of Ireland has been instrumental to the recognition of the heterogeneity of "the 'colonial' relationship between the imperial centre and the colonized in the various parts of the former empires"[10] in the later postcolonial discourse. Within this, Graham locates postcolonial theory's innate potential for devising a heterogeneous discourse, for "contemporary post-colonial theory thrives best on a continual overturning of the settled, the accepted and the critically dominant."[11] Hence, the very ideological premise of postcolonialism as an anti-foundationalist or anti-essentialist discourse opens up space for a pluralised politics of difference through inversion and inclusion within which, as Seamus Deane contends, "the Irish-English collision has its own importance."[12]

In a curious way, it is perhaps Ireland's "racial and spatial closeness to its former colonizers"[13] that further challenges postcolonial discourse from a provisionally peripheral position, even though the province of Ulster was used as "a testing-ground"[14] for British colonists to conquer and colonise on a global scale in the first place. Thus, while there can be no doubt that the geographical affinity between coloniser and colonised tends to distort the mapping of Ireland's postcolonial predicament, it is somewhat