

# *Tá Súil Agam: Deadly Visions of History in Ireland*

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**Abstract:** *In Sophocles' Antigone, the unburied dead and the too quickly buried narratives of their deaths are more than a ghostly present-absence or absent-presence, they are an undead over-presence that haunts generations. Trauma is never about episodes, so much as how episodes cannot be symbolised, therefore remembered / known. The Irish lost over two million people within five years, but more significantly, their language, their capacity to linguistically symbolise their loss. The Great Irish Famine known in Gaelic as An Gorta Mór evokes both the word gort (crop / field) and more significantly gortaigh (to wound / injure). Nationalist Irish history proffers narratives of suffering that can only be incorporated within a dead filled history, a deadly present with horrific statistics and frequencies of child abuse, endemic national alcoholism, suicide and depression. The historical legacies inherited within the Irish unconscious are forged through narratives of suffering, while disavowing re-memorying, silently and repeatedly denying the transgenerational trauma of Irish subjectivity.*

**Keywords:** *Transgenerational Trauma, Irish History, Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity, The Great Irish Famine.*

“I had a deadly weekend.”  
“What did you get up to?”  
“I haven't a clue, I was smashed out of it.”  
“Deadly!”  
(Hiberno-English colloquial speech)

For Sigmund Freud, words possess a godlike, “magical power. By words one person can make another blissfully happy or drive him to despair, by words the teacher conveys his knowledge to his pupils, by words the orator carries his audience with him and determines their judgements and decisions. Words provoke affects and are in general the means of mutual influence among men.” (Freud, 1916, 17)

For Jacques Lacan, Freud's psychoanalytic unearthings were not like those of Columbus discovering a new continent but rather those of Jean-Francois Champollion, the decryptor of the Rosetta Stone: “A psychoanalyst is not an explorer of an unknown continent, or of great depths; he is a linguist. He learns to decipher the writing which is under his eyes, present to the sight of all; however, that writing remains indecipherable if we lack its laws, its key”. (Lacan, 1957)

In Hiberno-English, the English variant spoken in Ireland, there is an inclination to the using of ordinarily negative and violent words and phrases to describe things positively; thus “went down a bomb” means worked successfully and popularly. Similarly, the word “deadly” in Hiberno-English signifies immense enjoyment. An immense jouissance that demands oblivious absence. The only other cultural group to harness this English signifier “deadly” in the same way are Aboriginal Australians, another indigenous people whose history

with English colonialism has undeniably been a deadly encounter.

You taught me language; and my profit on't is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you; For learning me your language! (Shakespeare, I.ii, 517-19)

Shakespeare's Caliban, another colonised subject, comes to bewail language's castrative gift of consciousness. The irony of Language's creative power is that it produces and therefore limits and castrates. Language is Deadly.

Researching what is written regarding The Great Irish Famine, that period in Irish History between 1845 and 1850 of mass starvation, disease, and emigration, has truly been deadly. And this is only through the spoken discourses of information, statistics, of History. What of the other stories, silences, the unspoken dead stories, the languages of the dead? It is hard to remain objective, neutral when reading, and in silences only imagining, the horrors, inhumanities, ignorance and cruel indifference. Yet the fantasy of neutrality significantly haunts much of academic research and psychoanalytic schools and discourses. Lacan's argument of the analyst's desire as the analytic catalyst, never to 'cure', but to manoeuvre the analysand's unconscious manifestations is far from neutral; desire can never be. Yet we, as researchers, academics and psychoanalysts, cling to our fantasy of the neutral researcher, Freud's "evenly suspended attention", (1912, 110) observing but not involved, dismissing and minimising our own prejudices, counter-transference, and blind spots.

## **The Stories of/in History**

Producing history is both a key weapon and tool in the control of thinking. Production and exclusion, language and silence within historical discourses establish and define not just visibility or invisibility, but potential for power. There is political reasoning why most people struggle to name three women in history who were not wives or mothers, when 'historically' this is all women have ever been, and thus can ever be. Whoever writes history excluding or limiting peoples does so in the present to produce a past. Comparing an Irish schoolbook on Ulster history to one produced in England evinces how controlling discourses of the past can both limit and dictate the future. Only archaeological acts aiming to unearth what is buried, discarded below the surface can create new knowledge and thus questions. Foucauldian interrogations of the past demand an archaeology of language and discourse themselves. How did things come to be said; how did others come to be silenced.

History's focus may seem to be on the past, but it is always written in and from the present. It always consciously and unconsciously evidences more of the "here" and "now" than the "there" and "then"; it is always a history of the present. Hence why Michel Foucault's philosophical interrogations, his archaeologies and genealogies are critical. Foucault's methodology operates more as guiding strategies than a prescribed method for analysis, a "problematization of truth ... ensuring that the process of reasoning is correct in determining whether a statement is true or concerns itself with our ability to gain access to the truth" (Foucault, 2001, 170). There is a critical approach to truth "concerned with the question of the importance of telling the truth, knowing who is able to tell the truth, and knowing why we should tell the truth" which founds the "roots of what we could call the 'critical' tradition in the West" (ibid).

Modern historical studies recognise the impossibility of neutral objectivity with greater

awareness to how history is mediated through language rather than with ‘what’ happened. There is greater recognition that ‘the past’ is indeed, not only a foreign country, but a deceased idiom for which there are only ever, at best, highly subjective second-hand accounts. History is not grounded in a past that actually occurred, but in the discourse of the historians who create it; as Orwell recognised “He who controls the past, controls the future; he who controls the present, controls the past.” (1989, 37).

Psychoanalysis is unique among psych discourses in its cautious attendance to the personal histories, narratives we were told, we are told, that we tell, that tell us. All narratives and histories must be spoken and listened to with a self-consciousness that recognises its own slippages, inadequacies and desires. This is rigorous postmodern academic practice; this is a psychoanalytic training. History and meaning can only exist in fragments. Psychoanalysis approaches this fragmentation through exploring language to draw conscious attention to the gaps between the signifier, the representation, history and the signified, the represented, the past.

## **Holocaust Studies and the Impossibility of History**

Theodore Adorno calls all historical representations into question. For him, the Holocaust was not merely a crisis in itself, but it became a crisis beyond its own events, its past, because it destroyed the possibility of conceiving of history in the traditional way, as a rational progression but instead can now only be understood as discontinuity.

For Adorno, the barbarism of writing after Auschwitz lies in a narrative’s inability to acknowledge its own inadequacy for representation. It is barbaric because in the reification of knowledge, the totalitarianism of science, or the subjection of the One who knows, all self-reflection is lost. Adorno is advocating for narratives which bear witness to their own impossibility, their inability to represent fully or fully represent, which acknowledge their failing attempt to represent something that is fundamentally unrepresentable.

The more total society becomes, the greater the reification of the mind and the more paradoxical its effort to escape reification on its own. Even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter. *To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.* And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today. Absolute reification, which presupposed intellectual progress as one of its elements, is now preparing to absorb the mind entirely. Critical intelligence cannot be equal to this challenge as long as it confines itself to self-satisfied contemplation. (Adorno, 1981, 34. Our emphasis)

Psychoanalysis approaches hearing just how clients’ narratives and histories are flawed, fictional, subjective; but to also hear how they are ruptured, how the trauma is not only just the events of the past, but in the very crisis to represent such events, to speak them in words, to have them spoken, heard, listened to. In the song lyrics of ‘Zombie’ by the Irish band *The Cranberries*, whose lead singer Dolores O’Riordan died tragically alone in January 2018 at 46: “And the violence caused such silence, / Who are we mistaking?”

As Michael Rothberg notes, even in the late 1940s when Adorno was first writing, he could not fully appreciate the rupture of the Holocaust which splits humans and humanism into before and after Auschwitz.

The temporal break which we retroactively infer in the phrase ‘after Auschwitz’ had not yet taken place in the 1940s’ public consciousness. An event alone does not always rupture history; rather, the constellation which that event forms with later events creates the conditions in which epochal discontinuity can be thought. (Rothberg, 1997, 51)

In other words, events from the past do not present themselves with an expedient or ready meaning but can only derive their import from how they come to be conceived, produced and reproduced in the writings of historical narratives, which psychoanalytic discourses are conscious of as often changing, developing, or indeed contradicting themselves over time.

In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno asks if one can live after Auschwitz and what that living demands:

Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems. But it is not wrong to raise the less cultural question whether after Auschwitz you can go on living ... especially whether one who escaped by accident, one who by rights should have been killed, may go on living. His mere survival calls for the coldness, the basic principle of bourgeois subjectivity, without which there could have been no Auschwitz; this is the drastic guilt of him who was spared. By way of atonement he will be plagued by dreams such as that he is no longer living at all, that he was sent to the ovens in 1944 and his whole existence since has been imaginary, an emanation of the insane wish of a man killed twenty years earlier. (Adorno, 1973, 362-3)

The price of such perennial suffering is an atonement plagued by dreams that he is no longer living at all. He is not alive, not dead, a perennially suffering undead.

For George Steiner “The world of Auschwitz lies outside speech as it lies outside reason. To speak of the *unspeakable* is to risk the survivance of language as creator and bearer of humane, rational truth. Words that are saturated with lies or atrocity do not easily resume life.” (1986, 123) Auschwitz lies beyond any age of enlightenment, western cultural advancement, rational evolution. The man of “culture”, of speech and reason, as bystander, worker, guard, murderer, passive witness abetted and propagated Auschwitz, so why, Steiner asks, should speech and reason, the Master’s tools, be privileged to fathom the Holocaust?

Has our civilization, by virtue of the inhumanity it has carried out and condoned—we are accomplices to that which leaves us indifferent—forfeited its claims to that indispensable luxury which we call literature? ... I am not saying that writers should stop writing. This would be fatuous. I am asking whether they are writing too much, whether the deluge of print in which we seek our deafened way is not itself a subversion of meaning. ... Silence is an alternative. When the words in the city are full of savagery and lies, nothing speaks louder than an unwritten poem. (ibid. 54)

For Maurice Blanchot, whom Lacan described as “poet of our literature, who has certainly gone further than anyone in the present or the past along the path of the realisation

of the phantasy” (1985, 309), the Holocaust impacted on all representations, regardless of when they were produced, even those predating it. Without utilising the terms of Lacan’s registers, Blanchot maintains something of the Lacanian Real in the Holocaust being both unrepresentable and demonstrating the limit case for representation, thus paradoxically and simultaneously becoming the very basis for any representation. The Lacanian Real cannot be represented, yet mandates representation within and from the Imaginary and Symbolic registers. Understanding, for Blanchot, is only possible in terms of the Holocaust, but the Holocaust is impossible to understand.

Blanchot theorises about the relationship between the impossibility of representing something particular and the way it can be made communicable through language. In doing so, he argues that what is being represented must sacrifice its particularities in exchange for intelligibility. And therein lies the historiographical paradox of the Holocaust because in substituting particularities for generalities may fail to represent the unique events of the Holocaust and thus risk normalising it. Though Blanchot holds that representing the Holocaust is impossible, he believes that we should try.

The need to bear witness is the obligation of a testimony that can only be given—and given only in the singularity of each individual—by the impossible witnesses—the witnesses of the impossible--; some have survived, but their survival is no longer life, it is the break from living affirmation, the attestation that the good that is life (not narcissistic life, but life for others) has undergone the decisive blow that leaves nothing intact. From this it would seem that all narration, even all poetry, has lost the foundation on which another language could be raised— through the extinction of the happiness of speaking that lurks in even the most mediocre silence. (Blanchot, 1985, 68-69)

## **The Holocaust is Real**

The Lacanian Real is traumatic, unsymbolisable, utterly resistant to explanation and commentary; from his earliest writings, Lacan distinguishes between the Real from “the true” (Lacan, 2006, 75). The Real is not simply opposed to the imaginary or the symbolic but is located beyond both. Unlike the symbolic’s structuralism of differentiated distinct language elements called signifiers, language constituted through binary oppositions such as that between presence and absence, “there is no absence in the real” (Lacan, 1991b, 313). Thus, the real is, in itself, undifferentiated; “absolutely without fissure’ (97). As deconstructionism has unveiled, within the symbolic oppositions of presence and absence there lies, or is implied, the permanent possibility that something may be missing from the symbolic order, a tertiary realm, the real “is always in its place” (2006, 25); “that which resists symbolization absolutely” (1991a, 66).

Lacan’s 1970’s formulations on and of the Real reemphasised its unknowability. The Real is ‘the impossible’ (Lacan, 1964, 167), impossible to imagine, impossible to integrate into the symbolic order, and impossible to attain in any way. It is precisely this character of impossibility and resistance to symbolisation which proffers the Real its essentially traumatic quality. The Real is experienced, undergone. It is known, albeit unknowable. It is known by the body, marked there, carved, tattooed.

For Lacan, the Real is “the object of anxiety par excellence”; lacking any possible

mediation and thus “the essential object which isn’t an object any longer, but this something faced with which all words cease, and all categories fail” (1991b, 164). The Real is evidenced through and within hallucinations: “When something cannot be integrated in the symbolic order, as in psychosis, it may return in the Real in the form of a hallucination.” (1993, 321).

The Lacanian Real collapses the opposition of external / internal, for although it defers to an objective external reality that exists independent of any individual; it is also an internal register manifested in hallucinations or traumatic dreams. The Real is evoked through Lacan’s neologism *extimité* (an extimacy), *an external intimacy*.

## ‘When The Third is (Un)Dead’

Along with signifiers as formations of the Unconscious, another of Lacan’s four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis is transference, the unconscious process of redirecting one set of significations to another setting, most especially within the clinical dyad. For Lacan, language is always the third, the medium through which the unconscious and the transference is arbitrated: “that which represents a subject for another signifier.” (Lacan, 1964. 207) But what happens when language fails, when the medium cannot animate or invigorate?

Gerson’s ‘When The Third is Dead’ (2009) and Harris et al.’s books *Ghosts, and Demons in the Consulting Room* (2016) address the cultural and personal repercussions for a lack of register of a catastrophic trauma that has happened / is happening / seems already to be happening, “when social, personal and clinical witnessing fails and the registration of historic injuries becomes beyond the capacity of an individual or the collective” (Harris, 2016, 1).

These texts’ exploration of the ways uncanny and spectral presences, or absent presences, emerge within minds, bodies and consulting rooms as unwitnessed silences evoke a discourse, to my ear, of the Lacanian Real where such ‘ghosts’ are neither internal nor external objects yet disrupt the Symbolic and Imaginary orders within the body, the mind, the clinician, the transference, the unconscious. Gerson considers such ‘present absences’ as historic injuries amassing around, between, and within persons emotionally, viscerally, unconsciously.

Gerson utilises ‘thirdness’ as that which signifies, à la Lacan’s symbolic Order:

Thirdness is that quality of human existence that transcends individuality, permits and constricts that which can be known, and wraps all of our sensibilities in ways that we experience as simultaneously alien as well as part of ourselves. Thirdness is the medium in which we live and that changes events into history, moments into time, and fragments into a whole. (2009, 2)

When this third is dead, Gerson argues, symbolisation, registration moves beyond secreted affects, often shame-laden histories, within the clinic. They argue conceiving of the ghostly sphere “as the place to manage excess, to find a skin of strangeness and uncertainty in which to imbed things hard to bear or hard to fathom.” Like Lacan’s *jouissance*, such hauntings are unknowable, excessive, yet felt on/in the body.

Every ghost has a history. Every ghost secretes a hidden story. It is in the witnessing of its effects and affects that the clinical setting can trace, perceive, trace and listen to the unknowable but known narratives that haunt. As Harris (2016, 5) argues, the analyst’s work is “to cure old injuries, *bury the undead*, undertake the final repair of history.” (My Italics)

## Transgenerational Trauma

It was not long after Danish doctors, Hermann and Thygesen first coined the term “Concentration Camp Syndrome” in 1954 to ascribe sets of persistent disorders such as headaches, gastrointestinal disturbances, depression, insomnia and nightmares suffered by Holocaust survivors, that Canadian clinicians in 1966 observed large numbers of Holocaust survivors’ children presenting similar symptoms as their parental survivors. Grandchildren of Holocaust survivors are overrepresented by 300% among the referrals to a child psychiatry clinic in comparison with their representation in the general population (Fosson, et.al., 2003).

Transgenerational trauma is trauma transferred from the first generation of trauma survivors or immediate witnesses to their second and further generations of offspring via complex post-traumatic stress disorder mechanisms whether through genocide, colonial suppression, slavery, political totalitarian control, clerical abuse in religious organisations, or terrorism. Core to such transmission is the failure of the original trauma(s) being recognised or symbolically admitted, often remaining as a guilty or shame laden secret passed unknown through bearer and / or receiver.

Through clinical accounts, both of Harris’s books, *Ghosts, and Demons, in the Consulting Room*, track such ghosts and demons, absences and silences at the heart of the clinical trauma proffering “narrative and witnessing are possibly the antidote to haunting.” (2016a, 8) The clinical site is a place in which not only can the unspoken be said, and one’s traumatic legacies and heritage be traced, but under, and within the with-nessing of the psychoanalytic relationship.

From both Gerson’s and Harris’s considerations of transgenerational trauma, their clinical evocation, compounding and thwarting of such binary oppositions of external / internal and presence / absence, something echoed in terms of Irish History and its shadows within contemporary clinical work, and the Irish national psyche.

In a country where one in four people have experienced childhood sexual abuse, (<https://www.oneinfour.ie/>) the highest statistics in the European Union, and where alcoholism is a national joke, with the highest statistics per capita of Alcoholism and Tee Totalism, that is presence and absence, I consider how the Irish view and perceive their bodies as objects for mindless consumption, for use and abuse, in a context where “I haven’t a clue what happened” signifies a good night out drinking, where we are culturally driven to getting “out of my box” or “out of it”, where the endemic mindless taking of another’s body, a feeding on flesh, be it through endemic cycles of childhood sexual abuse or rugby players’ gangbanging teenage girls rape trials, something traumatic repeats and endures. I ask myself if the Irish are not haunted by something other than binaries of presence / absence, external / internal, ghost / demon. Are we not stalked by Zombies, the undead, the unburied? The mindless drive to self-destruction, the insatiable hunger?

### *An Gorta Mór*

The Great Irish Famine historically took place between 1845 and 1850, resulting immediately in the deaths of over one million, and the forced emigration of another million. One third of these people, who can only be understood more as forced refugees of a national disaster than as emigrants, never arrived at their destination but died waiting at ports or on ‘coffin’ ships of transportation. Twenty-five per cent of the population absented, gone, dead

within five years.

This period of Irish history has come to be known in the Gaelic language as *An Gorta Mór*, where the Gaelic signifier *gorta* (Famine) evokes both the word *gort* (meaning crop / field) and, more significantly, *gortaigh* (to wound / injure). The survivors of these times did not and could not speak of the times. In the immediate aftermath it was referred to only as *An Drochshaol* (the bad or awful Time / Life); and within a generation after that the [hi]stories, the language of those survivors, Gaelic Irish, would also be lost, and die. At first, as in all trauma, no one would speak of it. After a generation, with the loss of the language of those it directly affected, no one could speak of it.

To understand something of the traumatic impact of *An Gorta Mór* is to look at the Irish people's relationships to *gort* (fields, land, property ownership) and to homelessness. To understand the heart, and psyche, of the Irish relationship to land is to approach something of a history of a people not owning the fields they worked, whatever about the country they worked in. One of the root causes of the Irish Famine was that farmers did not own the land they worked, something the Irish 'land wars' of the 1870s and 80s sought to redress. This unbearable obsession with land ownership drove the Celtic Tiger boom of the noughties. Between 1996 and 2006, the average price of second homes in Ireland rose by over 300%. The average price of new houses rose by 250%. 2004 saw the construction of 80,000 new homes, compared to the UK's 160,000 for the same year, a nation that has 15 times Ireland's population<sup>2</sup>.

This over determination to buy property ultimately led to the financial collapse of 2008 and the subsequent recessionary 2010 European Union financial bailout with property prices halving in five years to 2013, before another property boom has emerged in the last five years.

A text that exhibits this Irish obsession with land while underlaid with allusions to the Great Irish Famine is the 1990 film *The Field*, based on the play by John B. Keane, which was in turn inspired by a real-life murder. It is a text that explores Bull Mc Cabe's determination to own a field he, and his family, have worked their entire life, and not have it sold to 'outsiders': "Are these the same outsiders who took the corn from our mouths when the potatoes went rotten in the ditches?"

The field is something he has given his life to, nursed, mothered and reared like a son "It's my field. It's my child. I nursed it, I nourished it, I saw to its every want. I dug the rocks out of it with my bare hands and I made a living thing of it. My only want is that green grass that lovely green grass and you want to take it away from me and in the sight of God I can't let you do that."

The transgenerational tragedy is that the field has already cost the life of both The Bull's mother and his thirteen-year-old first-born son Seamie, who takes his own life to remove himself, so as not to push the family into poverty or forced emigration; the famine options. For like the Famine, Seamie's suicide leaves his grave unmarked, marginalised, known but invisible, outside Church, outside law, undead "Go on father, go on. Lock the gates to God's house. Sure they were locked at the time of the Famine too. No priest died the time of the Famine: only poor people like us."

The director Jim Sheridan (2010) described the film as "about a land war that is under the surface", that it was "about Ireland itself, whether we own the country or not." He recognised that there is a primal intensity to the film: "It does appeal but more on an old-fashioned primitive emotion level." But, nonetheless, despite its Oscar nominations, it was perhaps too Irish and this may have held it back from performing well overseas.

I think it's a good movie, but I think there are difficulties with it, people in America and elsewhere don't get the concept of farming the land for somebody else. So 'The Field' has a hard time in America because of that fact, because it is medieval to them, a foreign concept. There was no real land war in America so they can't understand. (Sheridan, 2010)

*The Field* is for many *the* Irish film because of its themes, because of its history, because it evokes the Famine, without attempting to be a film about the Famine. As a result of the run of famous, celebrated Irish films through the Hollywood machine in the 1990s, a film about the famine was mooted, but the actor Stephen Rea, who "was invited to participate", reported that someone in America said, "The film is very heavy. Couldn't they lighten it?" To which Rea's agent could only say "How are you going to lighten it? Feed them?"<sup>3</sup>

For a film about the famine, one had to wait for Lance Daly's 2018's *Black '47*, a fantasy revenge film, which problematically rewrites history to give an Irish protagonist, played by an Australian actor, a violent, vengeful, driven agency. Thus *Black '47* as a violent rallying cry against British indifference, neglect, indeed genocide, functions to silence those parts of Irish History we are uncomfortable considering, our participation in our own genocide, the costs we paid and enforced for survival, the cannibalism of others, figuratively, and literally.

For the stories of the dead remained, like the dead themselves, unlawfully, unsuitably buried. This is why the dead character of Seamie in *The Field* is so critical; not missing nor absent but as a suicide, *shame*-fully buried in mass graves, located but unmarked, not wanting to be known, disremembered. And the truly traumatic stories of those that survived the Famine, and what they witnessed, and upon what silenced traumas and crimes their survival hung, these stories were lost, deliberately and passively, to and by the next generation who would not speak the language of these survivors, Gaelic. English was the only language to survive in lands of emigration; we colonised our own tongue, to make sure what happened could not be spoken.

There is not just an erasure of a people, but the histories, the stories of these people, who became and become complicit in their own erasure. Such is the price of survival, killing the language that suffered, that experienced, that witnessed. Such is one of the legacies in Irish cultural history, a legacy of silencing victims and survivors be it in domestic alcohol driven violence and neglect, Magdalene Laundries or clerical sexual abuse. To endure, the victims and survivors must never be heard. Might a similar psychology have influenced the State of Israel's abjection of Yiddish as a language to the sole promotion of Hebrew as "the language (which) serves to create a single heart for all parts of the nation" (Beatty, 2017, 322), a language which had not been a national tongue for over 1500 years?

Silence and silencing has been an official, personal and collective management strategy for Irish society. Be it through endemic childhood sexual abuse, Magdalen Laundries, infant mass graves, domestic violence and abuse, each was not spoken of, each was marginalised in full view, known and unspoken, with shame brought to any of the whistle-blowers or survivors that dared to speak the unspoken.

Irish history is dreadful, so dreadful that hope is unbearable. Culturally and historically, hope in Ireland could traditionally solely ever be located in the next life, the heaven of Catholicism, to be garnered only through suffering this life, as wished in the Catholic prayer *Hail Holy Queen*: "Mourning and Weeping In This Valley of Tears". Thus, in a comedic moment from the refused but highly popular 1990's Channel 4 comedy *Fr. Ted*, the Housekeeper Mrs. Doyle is offered a Tea-making machine which the salesman promises "takes the misery out of

making tea”, which she scornfully refuses, maintaining “Maybe I like the misery”.

It is this undead History that, lacking a grave, a location, a place, a signification, haunts the Irish psyche. As Stephen Dedalus perceives, history truly is a nightmare from which there is no awakening (Joyce, 1961, 34). Psychoanalysis underlines, the nightmare is never about ‘what’ actually happened, but more, how what happened has gone unspoken, unrepresented. The trauma is never an event, it is the failure of the event to be represented, to be signified.

During his childhood, the Ratman had heard these stories, some light-hearted, others covert. What is striking is the fact that what returns from the repressed is not a particular event or trauma; it is the dramatic constellation that ruled over his birth, his prehistory. He is descended from a legendary past. This prehistory reappears via the symptoms that represent that pre-history in an unrecognizable form, that weave it into myth, represented by the subject without awareness. (Lacan, 1957)

The Irish are a nation of poets and storytellers, yet there is a significant absence of narratives speaking An Gorta Mór. But this is precisely what psychoanalysis listens for and attends to, the stories that cannot be told, yet which haunt every narrative. Psychoanalysis witnesses through the words spoken, for what fears signification, being told.

The phenomena proper to psychoanalysis are of the order of language. That is, the spoken recognition of the major elements of the subject’s history, a history that has been cut, interrupted, that has fallen onto the underside of discourse. ... The analytical effects are of the nature of the return of the repressed discourse ... the subject is already introduced into the dimension of the search for his truth. (Lacan, 1957)

The repressed always returns within the symbolic of spoken words, the imaginary of unconscious transference and the real of the clinical encounter. It is only through with-nessing speech that something can be heard, something other. If there is to be hope clinically, individually and culturally it can only be through speaking the impossible to one who cannot understand but can with-ness, a psychoanalytic authentication of the authority of the silenced/silencing signifiers. To borrow Paul D’s words from Toni Morrison’s critically influential novel approaching the legacy of African American slavery, *Beloved*, “He wants to put his story next to hers. ‘Sethe, me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow.’” (Morrison, 1997, 273) The undead can only be laid to rest, if we lay our stories next to theirs, personally, culturally, transferentially.

## Notes

- 1 The phrase ‘Tá Súil Agam’ figuratively means I have a hope, I wish; but literally means I have an eye. The future in Gaelic is interlinked literally and figuratively with vision.
- 2 <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/house-price-statistics>
- 3 <https://www.independent.ie/entertainment/movies/movie-news/how-are-you-going-to-lighten-it-feed-them-stephen-rea-reveals-hollywood-rejected-famine-film-in-90s-as-it-was-too-heavy-37266822.html>

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