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Figuring Phantasmagoria: The Tradition of the Fantastic in Irish Modernism

Maria Beville

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the term phantasmagoria as '(a vision of) a rapidly transforming collection or series of imaginary (and usually fantastic) forms, such as may be experienced in a dream or fevered state, or evoked by literary description'.¹ This term is also defined as 'a shifting and changing scene consisting of many elements, *esp.* one that is startling or extraordinary, or resembling or reminiscent of a dream, hallucination, etc'.² This account of shifting fantastic visions is arguably one of the most important and subtle features of fantastic writing as it has been adapted through other literary modes in the twentieth century. Advancing from this point, I would argue that it is a definitive feature of much of Irish Modernism, linking the poetry and prose of three major Irish literary and cultural figures, namely, W.B. Yeats, James Joyce and Samuel Beckett. As a response to this, this article will discuss and critically analyse the presence of the fantastic in the Irish Modernist literature of the above writers with a focus on the concept of phantasmagoria. I will look into the visions of fantastic forms that permeate the selected works which appear to locate a national version of the literary fantastic that is closely linked to Modernism and contextualised in coetaneous social and political issues.

To form this discussion I will tie the three literary issues of the fantastic, Modernism and the socio-historical context together through an analysis of the various Gothic phantasmagoria that are evident in the chosen texts. My contention is that the figuring of phantasmagoria is evident in the visions of Ireland as an enchanted and fantastic realm in Yeats's poetry; in and through the stream of consciousness style of Joyce; and also in the shifting imaginary created by Beckett's fictional consciousness or characters in his later prose writing. Necessarily, I will begin with an account of the relationship between Modernism and the fantastic with a focus on how the fantastic changed at the beginning of the twentieth century. I will then turn to the role of the fantastic as a subversive literary mode, outlining its Gothic aspects and their relevance to the Irish context. Finally, I will discuss and analyse the chosen literary texts in chronological order to demonstrate how the fantastic in Irish Modernism may be seen to

work upon a particular agenda, giving reason to consider it as characteristic of a national version of the fantastic tradition.

In general, the fantastic has been regarded as the literary and artistic counterpoint or 'other' to modernity and progress. Fred Botting, for example, has commented that throughout post-Enlightenment literary history '[t]he Gothic existed in excess of and often within [contemporary] realist forms, both inhabiting and excluded from [their] homogenising representations of the world'.³ However, while on the one hand the fantastic seems at odds with the idea of literary Modernism, it is quite often a part of Modernism's essential paradox of 'making new' while simultaneously drawing on strands of older or traditional forms of classical art and literature. The nightmarish visions of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and the horror of the hallucinatory journey of Marlowe into the 'heart of darkness' in Joseph Conrad's novella offer examples of this, as might the eerie accounts of 'the Cambridge ladies who live in furnished souls' in the poem of the same name by e.e. cummings,⁴ or the time and gender transcending figure of Orlando, from Virginia Woolf's highly imaginative pseudo-historical work. It is thus considerable that obvious crossovers become apparent when we think of the fantastic in terms of Modernism, which, like the fantastic, is also strongly focused on negotiating reality and also the relationship between reader and text. Arguably, the hesitation that Tzvetan Todorov speaks of as being essential to the literary fantastic, which is 'experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting the supernatural event'⁵ is the rule with Modernism and so an important question emerges: may we reasonably say that Modernism took influence from the fantastic? Or, is it in fact, fair to use the fantastic, or one of its many subcategories, as an adjective to precede or follow such a difficult artistic term? In light of this, rather than think of the fantastic as a genre, it might be worth considering a point made by Christine Brooke-Rose, that the fantastic is 'an evanescent element' rather than 'an evanescent genre' in literature.⁶ From this angle, it is most accurate to speak of the fantastic in Irish Modernism, as opposed to Irish Modernist Fantastic or Irish Fantastic Modernism.

Continuing the discussion of the ties that bind these two literary forms, the literature of the fantastic, in many ways, can be seen to anticipate the formal experiments of Modernism, particularly if we account for the fantastic of the *fin de siècle*. A work like Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, for example, in its playful approach to narrative form and presentation of a plural narrative by means of the epistolary structure, or the narrative mosaic style that was developed by Robert Louis Stevenson in his novels, may be read as a prelude to more intense narrative offerings by later writers

like William Faulkner, who in his southern Gothic/Gothic Modernist *The Sound and the Fury*, presents us with no less than thirteen interior monologues. To find a point along this anticipatory line one could consider a work such as Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and deduce that this fantastic prophecy of Modernism was of the sort that foresaw the potential challenges that were to be posed in relation to general belief in external authoritative systems of order and reality. The fantastic, as a transgressive and subversive mode,⁷ was always ever-ready to play with the boundaries of established order (although in most cases, by crossing those lines, it readily reinforced them), and so the link between the literary fantastic and Modernism might be most clearly found in the transgressive spaces between the perception and presentation of the real. In this regard, one can also see importance in realism's rejection or 'othering' of the fantastic as a possible reason for Modernism's incorporation of the same.

Cultural theorist Jean François Lyotard spoke of Modernism and reality in terms of modern art's putting forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself, in its denial of the solace of good forms which allows us to share in the nostalgia of the unattainable.⁸ In a Lacanian sense, and probably in the most logical sense, the 'unrepresentable' may also be understood as the impossible or the 'impossible real'. This is a key to the definition of the fantastic, as C.S. Lewis describes it in his *An Experiment in Criticism*. According to Lewis, the fantastic is 'any narrative that deals with impossibles or preter-naturals'.⁹ Similarly, when we think of the unrepresentable, we are inevitably led to consider the sublime, to which the fantastic is directly linked.¹⁰ According to Slavoj Žižek, the sublime is 'paradox of an object which, in the very field of representation, provides a view, in a negative way of the dimension of what is unrepresentable'; it is that which may allow us to 'experience the impossibility of the thing'.¹¹ This fits with Rosemary Jackson's view on the fantastic, which regards it as pushing 'toward an area of non-signification [in which] the gap between signifier and signified dramatises the impossibility of arriving at a definitive meaning or absolute "reality"'.¹² It also connects to the hesitation and impossibility that characterises the fantastic, in the traditional Todorovian view; that 'hesitation' experienced on encountering the incomprehensible, marvellous or uncanny modalities of the supernatural. From a theoretical and critical point of view, the fantastic, therefore, points to the major concerns of Modernism in representing the real and as such can be recognised as a subtle though important literary facet of the movement.

Considering the fantastic in the context of literary history, Todorov argued that the fantastic received 'a fatal blow' in the early years of the

twentieth century,¹³ due most likely to the radical change in cultural attitudes which led to the general destruction of faith in the real. As a response to this 'blow' new kinds of fantastic literature were generated, which differed significantly from the fantastic writing that preceded it. Where previously, 'the fantastic started from a perfectly natural situation to reach its climax in the supernatural', in the 'new' fantastic (of which Kafka's seminal work is posited as an example) 'the fantastic becomes the rule and not the exception'.¹⁴ This change in the fantastic arguably led to more than just one new form of fantastic writing as many different subsidiaries of the fantastic began to take stronger form. Of these the Gothic, horror and science fiction tended to predominate until the emergence of postmodernism as a dominant literary style, which again resulted in new paths for the fantastic, toward the areas of cyberpunk and similar genres. Jean Paul Sartre was another commentator on this pre-modernist change in the fantastic and in an article on Blanchot's *recit* he accounts for a new approach:

there is now only one fantastic object: man. Not the man of religions and spiritualisms, only half committed to the world of the body, but man-as-given, man-as-nature, man-as-society, the man who takes off his hat when a hearse passes, who kneels in churches, who marches behind a flag.¹⁵

This had a significant outcome in relation to the Irish literature of the Modernist period and the ways in which the fantastic would be used. While the fantastic in this period is very much founded in the tangible world, namely, Joyce's Dublin, Yeats's Sligo, and Beckett's Paris/Dublin, this tangible world is represented via the metaphorical superstructure of the fantastic which renders this world mythical, surreal and phantasmagorical. Similarly, the supernatural, with specific links to a tradition of Irish Gothic became a ruling principle of literary representations of the Irish national experience. This was a tradition that followed through from James Clarence Mangan, to Bram Stoker,¹⁶ to William Butler Yeats and on to James Joyce.

Importantly, the fantastic phantasmagorical found a unique form of literary expression in the visions and prophecies of Yeats's poetry. More interestingly, it again took shape in the stream of consciousness style that was developed by Joyce. Stream of consciousness, which is understood as an introspective mode of narration, relates a succession of subjective, moment-by-moment perceptions in a fleeting and often dreamlike style. The shifting series of thoughts, memories, ideas and images, arguably,

recreates the experience of phantasmagoria which can be seen to be revitalised by Modernist experimentation.

To reiterate Todorov's point, the fantastic is 'that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting the supernatural event'.¹⁷ Considering the fantastic as such would imply that it is based on fearful uncertainty about the nature of reality. From this viewpoint, most critics would agree that it is most appropriately linked to periods in which accepted reality is brought under scrutiny, such as phases of political instability, or times of cultural change.¹⁸ The tradition of the fantastic in Irish Modernist literature, notably among writers such as Yeats, Joyce, and Beckett is particularly interesting, highlighting the importance of the fantastic as a tool in engaging with new creativity in Irish art and literature, and also as a device through which to represent, and critically comment on, the emerging cultural and political struggle for Irish identity in the turbulent period of the Irish Free State.

The early twentieth century in Irish history was a period in which Irish Catholicism began to assume a role as liberator from British rule and protestant ascendancy.¹⁹ Coinciding with a weakening of constitutional nationalism after the death of Charles Stuart Parnell, a new Ireland saw a general turn away from politics to a focus on culture.²⁰ This was crucial for the Irish Literary Revival and the emergence of Yeats's folkloric writings, which attempted to offer a redefinition of Irish national identity. The occult mysticism of Yeats's writing was an expression of personal spirituality tied closely to a sense of national history that was bound by Celtic mythology. As Seamus Deane points out, from the beginning there was an intimate connection between his political vision and his occultism,²¹ and his political ideals were founded upon the importance he placed upon the universality of art and legend. In Joyce's case it has been argued that his interest in the occult relates to his problems with institutional Catholicism,²² which might also be traced in Beckett's work, whose references to Christianity are inversive and subversive in most cases. One memorable example of his apathy and cynicism toward the Christian account of existence is the death of Malone in *Malone Dies*, when Malone is attended to by a nurse who has a crucifix engraved on her one remaining tooth.²³ Deane argues that the tension between the newly dominant Catholic Church and the new energetic Cultural Revival found its expression in 'the declarations of spiritual independence which form such an important part of the tradition of Irish fiction in Joyce, Beckett and others throughout the century'.²⁴ One could argue that despite the fact that the fantastic underwent a significant change at the beginning of the twentieth century, the fantastic continued, in Irish writing, to serve a

metaphorical and also perhaps counter-narrative or subversive function (to reiterate Jackson), in which the supernatural, linked to a tradition of Celtic and occult spirituality, became a ruling principle in representing modern Irish experience. Harry T. Moore generalises a version of this idea when he states that 'imaginative literature is the index to the consciousness of an age'.²⁵ As such, the fantastic elements of the literature of this important phase in the development of Irish history and culture is more than worthy of consideration.

In *To Ireland in the Coming Times*, written at the turn of the twentieth century in the early phase of Yeats's career, the poet invokes the balladeers of Ireland in the nineteenth century and their mystical sense of the nation 'whose history began / Before God made the angelic clan'. However, his rhymes, he claims, 'more than their rhyming tell / Of things discovered in the deep, / Where only body's laid asleep'.²⁶ Here, a sentimental nostalgia evokes an image of Ireland as an enchanted and fantastic world. The poet persona of this verse deems that the admirable Druidic poetry was inspired by the phantasmagoria of fantastical creatures who scurry about his writing desk inspiring 'unmeasured' thoughts of 'faeries, dancing under the moon' and can offer some hope to 'you, in the dim coming times' through its summoning of the spirits of the Irish Celtic past to their place in the construction of a beleaguered Irish identity.²⁷

According to Alexander Norman Jeffares, 'Yeats's imagination slowly but perceptibly took its colour from his reading of European literature'.²⁸ While in his early writing, and particularly in his prose collection *Celtic Twilight*, he anthologises the Celtic spirituality of Ireland and its foundations in the relationship between the people of Ireland and their ancestors, *na Sidhe* (the Fairies), Yeats's own profound mysticism increasingly influences the tone of the work, which results in a sort of early magical realism. However, more than just being evidence of the influence of Irish and European mysticism, this magical realist dimension demonstrates Yeats's conviction in the reality of the supernatural, a reality which he connects to Irish experience in *The Sorcerers*. In a footnote to *The Sorcerers*, Yeats claims that in Ireland '[w]e have the dark powers much more than I thought, but not as much as the Scottish, and yet I think the imagination of the people does dwell chiefly upon the fantastic and capricious'.²⁹

Many critics emphasise the occultism of Yeats's work as belonging to the earlier phases of his career. On closer analysis, however, we can see that, as a route to the fantastic, his occultism remains a potent connective aspect of his early and late writing. Even the last of his poems retain the fantastic elements, albeit with a more apocalyptic and 'modernist' focus. In

'Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop', for example, we encounter the fantastic as an instrument of Yeats's social commentary on the modern condition; its grotesque aspects functioning to startle the reader, which finds echoes in Beckett's prose work. Taking on the persona of Crazy Jane herself, the poem recounts the Bishop's dualistic attitude to life and religious faith and maintains a fantastic juxtaposition of the sublime and the grotesque in its representation of both characters, as in the following lines: 'Live in a heavenly mansion, / Not in some foul sty'. The grotesque is a powerful aesthetic aspect of the fantastic which distorts and subverts the real via excess and transgression. In Yeats's poem it is subtly part of a fantastic play in which even Crazy Jane can be seen to adopt a Blakean dark Romantic model of reconciling the assumed opposites of fair and foul 'Love has pitched his mansion on / The place of excrement' and adding that truth is as much 'Learned in bodily lowliness / And in the heart's pride'.³⁰ From this perspective, the fantastic spirit of Yeats's late poetry can be seen to move toward the spirit of the carnivalesque.

In 'The Spirit Medium' from 1938 we are presented with a standard Modernist approach to experience, where the speaker has lost his connection to the real, everyday world. In the poem, the poet is playing with the Modernist idea of making new from the traditional by reinvigorating the traditional ballad form and by using abstract metaphors. In terms of content, the poet persona's interests lie mainly in that which is beyond the grave and in the idea of life in death and vice versa: 'Because of those new dead / That come into my soul and escape / Confusion of the bed'.³¹ In his essay 'Swedenborg, Mediums and the Desolate Places', Yeats argues that 'the dead do not yet know that they are dead, but stumble on amid visionary smoke and noise'³² and so the lost souls of the poem, living or dead, 'those begotten or unbegotten', exist, bound by their own spectrality in a phantasmagoria of the poetic imagination. According to Yeats, 'those begotten or unbegotten [. . .] have bodies as plastic as their minds that flow so readily into the mould of ours [. . .] the face of a spirit [can] change continuously and yet keep always a certain generic likeness'.³³ The essay accounts for modern existence as a Gothic experience and in many ways echoes the fantastic visions of the 1914 poem 'To a Shade'. This poem offers the visitation of a ghost to his graveside monument as its fantastic premise and revels in the Gothic atmosphere of the unnamed town and its 'gaunt houses', which it figures as the site of the visitation. The 'unquiet wanderer', invoking Goethe's Mephistopheles and his Irish successor Melmoth, is asked to 'Go [. . .] and gather the Glasnevin coverlet / About your head till the dust stops your ear'. In these lines we find that death offers more safety and solace than the harsh mundanity of

life, and this idea is again repeated in a later line: 'You had enough of sorrow before death / Away, away! You are safer in the tomb'.³⁴ The Gothic connotations of this poem: its dark visions, its morbid fascination with death and its melancholic aesthetic, are clear, and arguably recall the graveyard poetry of the eighteenth century.

Death is central to the Gothic and to the fantastic in that it focuses upon the unimaginable. To a certain extent, Yeats can be seen to conform to Botting's reading of the Gothic, in which, he claims that '[t]o contemplate death and its accompanying signs is to recognise the transience of physical things and pleasures'.³⁵ Importantly, death is pivotal to the fantastic because it is both sublime and uncanny. Sigmund Freud wrote that 'no human being really grasps it [death], and our unconscious has as little use now as it ever had for the idea of its own mortality'.³⁶ Death is unimaginable and, as such, it 'pushes toward an area of non-signification' that is often dramatised in fantastic literature in attempts to name the unnamable.³⁷ Hesitation is definitive of this non-signification as the subject conceives of death but is unable to represent it and as such is mirrored in the suspension that is traditionally seen to define the fantastic and also its concerns with the sublime.

At this point, the perspective of this article on the relationship between the fantastic and the much debated genre of the Gothic deserves some elaboration. It seems fair to begin with Todorov's account, who, like Neil Cornwell,³⁸ approaches the fantastic from a structuralist position and classifies the Gothic as a subcategory of 'the fantastic'.³⁹ Undoubtedly, the Gothic fits well under the epithet of 'the fantastic' in literature in a broad sense of the concept, and José B. Monleón makes a relevant point when he claims that 'Gothic literature is only the initial expression of the fantastic'.⁴⁰ Significantly, the Gothic is essential to the concern of fantastic literature with the estimated presence of death in life as an existential problem but also as a cultural reality. This is precisely where we see the fantastic in Joyce's writing, most explicitly in *Ulysses*, which offers Gothic symbols and metaphors in the invention of an occult 'pseudo-magical prosopopoeia'.⁴¹

In terms of analysing the Gothic in Modernist works it is important to keep in mind what Botting notes in his writing on the subject, namely, that the Gothic can be conceived as both a part of but also an other to literary realist forms. The Gothic 'as the initial expression of the fantastic',⁴² has also been conceived quite accurately by David Punter as 'the literature of terror'.⁴³ In Gothic-Modernism, terror is often a terror of entrapment within language; an existential fear that revolves around phobias of fragmentation and the dissolution of identity. This is particularly the case in Beckett's late

prose writing, which will be later explored in some detail. It is also echoed in the linguistic obsession of Joyce and his concerns for his own relationship to a sense of both Ireland and Irishness.

The Gothic aspect of Joyce's fantasticism is evident especially in his sense of the unity between life and death, perhaps founded on his early story 'The Dead' from the collection *Dubliners*, which presents an uncanny communion between the living and the dead through Gretta's love for 'poor Michael Fury', a love that solidifies the developing theme of death which haunts each story of the collection. This is accompanied in 'The Dead' by an underlying urban uncanny aesthetic which can be seen in passages such as the following:

The morning was still dark. A dull yellow light brooded over the houses and the river; and the sky seemed to be descending. It was slushy underfoot; and only streaks and patches of snow lay on the roofs, on the parapets of the quay, and on the railings. The lamps were still burning redly in the murky air and, across the river, the palace of the Four Courts stood out menacingly against the heavy sky.⁴⁴

According to James Wurtz, Joyce's use of the Gothic to comment upon a situation engendered out of deep and repeated trauma emerges from his readings of earlier Irish writers who also adapted Gothic techniques for similar purposes.⁴⁵ In his commentary, Wurtz focuses on *Ulysses*, and has in mind the event of the Great Famine and the suppression of nationalist ideals with the death of Parnell, but he is also, significantly, referring to 'the internalisation of the apparatuses of control [which are] manifest in the power of institutional Catholicism'.⁴⁶

Importantly, 'The Dead', like *Ulysses*, moves toward a subversion of this power and does so also via tropes of the fantastic. In the story, the monks of Mt. Melleray are referred to as dark Gothic stereotype figures seemingly formulated from a combination of early Gothic romances and later vampire novels. Here, we have an explicit example of Joyce's use of the fantastic as a literary subversion of Catholic dominance in Irish society. Gabriel, the narrator informs us, 'was astonished to hear that the monks never spoke, got up at two in the morning and slept in their coffins. He asked what they did it for'.⁴⁷

Interestingly, some critics have argued for the importance of the influence of Yeats and his occult spirituality on Joyce's writing. This argument has particularly been maintained by Enrico Terrinoni, who finds, in opposition to arguments which classify the occult in Joyce as part of Joyce's own effort in mockery, that 'the supernatural, the paranormal, and

visions are massively present in *Ulysses*, though in distorted ways'.⁴⁸ His argument highlights the 'devilish, half demonic dimension' which is systematically created in Joyce's novel. Terrinoni also points out references to the writings of occultist and alchemist Cornelius Agrippa in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and connects *Ulysses* to the fantastic writing of earlier Irish authors Bram Stoker and Sheridan Le Fanu. Given that the potential examples of the fantastic from *Ulysses* are far too many and complex, I will instead summarise an account of the most obvious, maintaining the focus on phantasmagoria as the modernist link between form and content.

Episode 15, 'Circe', is without doubt the richest in fantastic devices. However, with Joyce, the reading process is necessarily one of close scrutiny and decoding. Thus, the fantastic may be read as extending beyond the text, in many cases through important references and puns, perhaps even linked in one particularly relevant case to the dominant presence of the proto-Gothic figure of Shakespeare's King Hamlet, with the play being referred to in thirteen of the sixteen episodes. But aside from this more cryptic presence of the fantastic, ghosts of the dead are seen to abound in the novel, from the ghost of Stephen's mother who is 'beastly dead', and Bloom's son, who haunts the narrative throughout, to his vampiric Hungarian uncle Lipote Virag, who is introduced in the following terms: 'Virag: (A diabolic rictus of black luminosity contracting his visage, cranes his scraggy neck forward. He lifts a mooncalf nozzle and howls)';⁴⁹ not long after he 'chutes rapidly down through the chimney flue and struts two steps to the left on gawky pink stilts. He is sausaged into several overcoats and wears a brown macintosh under which he holds a roll of parchment'.⁵⁰

On a more Yeatsian note, in Episode 2, 'Nestor', Stephen accounts for himself as something akin to Frankenstein's monster: 'Ugly and futile: lean neck and tangled hair and a stain of ink, a snail's bed. Yet someone had loved him, borne him in her arms and in her heart. But for her the race of the world would have trampled him under foot, a squashed boneless snail. She had loved his weak watery blood drained from her own. Was that then real?'.⁵¹ And his mother is referred to as the one who 'was no more: the trembling skeleton of a twig burnt in the fire, an odour of rosewood and wetted ashes'.⁵² Stephen's mother exists now in the phantasmagoria of his consciousness, somewhere between heaven and earth, connected to the scuffling of a sly fox scrapping about on a heath in the night's shade. Thus, his thoughts, and consequently Joyce's writing, become phantasmagorical and fantastic in parts:

Across the page the symbols moved in grave morrice, in the mummery of their letters, wearing quaint caps of squares and cubes. Give hands, traverse, bow to partner: so: imps of fancy of the Moors. Gone too from the world, Averroes and Moses Maimonides, dark men in mien and movement, flashing in their mocking mirrors the obscure soul of the world, a darkness shining in brightness which brightness could not comprehend.⁵³

This passage from the narrative is particularly resonant of Yeats, recalling 'To Ireland in the Coming Times', in which the Druid poet's writing experience is fantastically inspired. This is seen in the image of the imps of fancy of the Moors, the vision of which is succeeded by references to ancient heroic figures. Here, Stephen reads writing itself as tantamount to the preservation of the dead in phrases such as 'the mummery of the letters' and the adjective pun on 'grave'. The Gothic references are clear in the sensory perceptions recreated in the passages; in the sublime succession of extreme light and dark: the dark men, the flashes of the mirrors, and darkness shining in brightness. We get the sense that the obscure soul is lost, as much as it is in Beckett's *The Lost Ones* and perhaps even in Yeats's 'The Spirit Medium'.

The fantastic phantasmagoria, which is by now linked closely to the stream of consciousness narrative, continues in the third episode 'Proteus'. Here it becomes more openly a Gothic mockery of Catholic spirituality, fitting with perceived functions of fantastic writing as subversive, as we can see in the following passage: 'Behold the handmaid of the moon. In sleep the wet sign calls her hour, bids her rise. Bridebed, childbed, bed of death, ghostcandle. Omnis caro ad te veniet. He comes, pale vampire, through storm his eyes, his bat sails bloodying the sea, mouth to her mouth's kiss'.⁵⁴ The 'ineluctable modality of the visible' is here possibly tied to the unavoidable forms of perception that originate in the tangible world of the body but come to existence in the mind. The line of 'The Holy Rosary', memorised by every Irish Catholic at this time, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord' is replaced with an image of a maiden of the moon, linked to the satanic by pagan reference. Her bridal bed is 'ghostcandle' and deathly and visited upon by Dracula himself, who performs the vampiric act amid shifting images of his eyes, bats, his ship at sea, and a storm of blood.⁵⁵ This use of the fantastic to subvert Catholic ritual comes up again, significantly in episode five, 'The Lotus Eaters', where the Christian rite of communion is read as a cannibalistic act with heavy sexual undertones performed within the Gothic space of the chapel:

The cold smell of sacred stone called him [. . .]. Women knelt in the benches with crimson halters round their necks, heads bowed. A batch knelt at the altar rails. The priest went along by them, murmuring, holding the thing in his hands. He stopped at each, took out a communion, shook a drop or two (are they in water?) off it and put it neatly into her mouth [. . .]. Shut your eyes and open your mouth. What? Corpus. Body. Corpse. Good idea the Latin. Stupefies them first. Hospice for the dying. They don't seem to chew it; only swallow it down. Rum idea: eating bits of a corpse why the cannibals cotton to it.⁵⁶

Again, the phantasmagoria of the fantastic comes into play in the subversive weaving of intertextual and cultural references with a series of shifting memories and dark images, and it appears to be connected to the stream of consciousness style of the passage which recreates the tortured mind of the narrator.

Following the fantastic thread of Modernist Irish writing, the prose writing of Samuel Beckett, particularly the later prose works, offer perhaps the most intensely fantastic examples of the literary corpus considered in this article. While the Irish tag on Beckett's writing is often debated, given his self-imposed exile and evasion of Irish cultural and political issues within and beyond his literary work, we can categorise Beckett's writing within the cultural tradition of Irish Modernism through his literary indebtedness to James Joyce and indirectly to William Butler Yeats. Sharing their concerns with the grotesque aspects of modern life, the rejection of a Christian view of existence and the afterlife, and a fascination with the tropes of the fantastic, and in particular the Gothic, he can be regarded as offering writing that presents a culmination of fantastic elements of Modernist prose. The fragmented and Gothic textual universe of Beckett's work incorporates characters who inhabit the fictional world as spectral beings. Trapped within consciousness and language, their protean existence is one bound only by memory and desire which prove to be futile and essentially continuous.

Most obviously, Beckett's characters are often disembodied and exist solely in textual form and are further intensified as ghostly beings by Beckett's solipsism. Being in itself is terrifying for them, perhaps even a Gothic experience. In this sense, Graham Fraser has referred in particular to Beckett's late prose work, including *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *Unnamable*, *The End*, *The Expelled* and *The Calmative*, as '[t]he late Beckettian Gothic'.⁵⁷ Notably, disembodiment is a dominant theme of fantastic writing; *Frankenstein*, *Dr. Faustus* and *Dracula*, probably deserve mention here. Similar to these characters, Beckett's consciousnesses exist as lost souls,

bound to being by language alone. Their bodily existence, where present, is also grotesque and disgusting, and their psychological existence is paranoid and terrified.

The Unnamable is possibly the novel where most of the Gothic and fantastic features converge. The main voice of the story envisions a frighteningly fantastic and phantasmagorical scene in which 'icy tumultuous streets, the terrifying faces, the noises that slash pierce, claw, bruise;⁵⁸ and it also has visions of 'two burning eyes'.⁵⁹ Similarly, in the short story 'The Calmative', the undead voice tries to communicate

alone in [his] icy bed [. . .] [t]oo frightened this evening to listen to [himself] rot, waiting for the great red lapses of the heart, the tearings at the caecal walls, and for the slow killings to finish in my skull, the assaults on unshakeable pillars, the fornications with corpses. And so I'll tell myself a story.⁶⁰

Stories such as the one narrated in the novel *Malone Dies* offer what Alvarez refers to as 'a Waste Land vision' of modernity,⁶¹ a fantastic and Modernist account of existence on the boundaries of life and death, bound by isolation and the incessant language that drives the imagination of the individual. It is here, at the point of hesitation between the 'real' (life) and the unreal, unimaginable (death), that the experience of the fantastic moves and subsequently finds expression. In this regard, Beckett's modernist prose may be seen to tie in tightly with definitions of what the fantastic may involve, reiterating the same dark mystical notions that were explored in Yeats and Joyce.

In conclusion, the visions of fantastic forms that permeate the work of Irish Modernist writers, demonstrated and discussed here, locate what can be considered as a national example of the literary tradition of the fantastic. This tradition of the fantastic in Irish Modernism can be readily contextualised in coetaneous social and political issues, whereby we can conclude that a dominant part of this fantasticism is a Gothic phantasmagoria of fairies, spectres and vampires which functions as a subversive outlet for critical accounts of Irish politics, religion and culture. As such, I would argue that the dark phantasmagoria of the fantastic are thus an important factor in the development of modern Irish literature and although a neglected topic in both studies of the fantastic, Modernism and early twentieth century Irish writing, it can offer insights into the stream of Gothic styles that runs through the literary contributions of Clarence Mangan via Yeats, Joyce, and Beckett, and quite possibly on to more contemporary authors, such as Pat McCabe and John Banville.

Notes and References

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