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Communities under Erasure in Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark*

Abstract: This paper examines Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark* (1996), showing that the lingering presence of ghosts on the brink between death and life signals that the work of mourning for history's victims is incomplete and that the immunity of communities erected on sacrificial violence is provisional, at most. The plethora of ghosts besieging the narrator's conscience, with their constant threat of erasing the boundaries that keep the entities of family, community and nation intact, appears to encapsulate the foreignness that needs extrication in order to preserve the purity of these communal structures. However, as the spectral reinstantiations of former members of these communities, these ghosts betray a disquieting familiarity that insistently reveals the fragility and volatility of communal bonds.
Keywords: Seamus Deane; Unavowable Community; Spectre; Mourning.

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The afterlife of the Gothic in the works of Irish writers like Seamus Deane, John Banville, Neil Jordan or Patrick McCabe provides a particularly prolific ground for exploring the making and unmaking of communities against the violent background of Hibernian history, by making recourse to the liminal trope of ghosts, border figures that generically transgress not only the frontiers between the dead and the living, but also confound and invalidate, as the ultimate tropes of strangeness, precariously erected communitarian frontiers. This paper examines Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark*, showing that the lingering presence of ghosts on the brink between death and life signals that the work of mourning for history's victims is incomplete and that the immunity of communities erected on sacrificial violence is provisional, at most. The plethora of ghosts besieging the narrator's conscience, with their constant threat of erasing the boundaries that keep the entities of family, community and nation intact, appears to encapsulate the foreignness that needs extrication in order to preserve the purity of these communal structures. However, as the spectral reinstantiations of former members of these communities, these

ghosts betray a disquieting familiarity that insistently reveals the elusiveness, fragility and volatility of communal bonds.

Amending Raymond Williams's positively inflected notions of *effective communities*, predicated on the ethics of service or solidarity,[1] Zygmunt Bauman shows that communities are necessarily *elusive*, not only on account of the fractured, stunted or difficult growth of communitarian self-awareness or because, as Williams would say, a community is always in the making, hearkening back to the passé ideal of a golden-age sense of togetherness,[2] but because communities may also be imagined in a time yet to come,[3] ostensibly eliminating the threat of precariousness that otherness poses for the inner communal enclave and ensuring the comfort of sameness, the warmth of familiarity: "The vision of community […] is that of an island of homely and cosy tranquillity in a sea of turbulence and inhospitality. It tempts and seduces, prompting the admirers to refrain from looking too closely, since the eventuality of ruling the waves and taming the sea has already been deleted from the agenda as a proposition both suspect and unrealistic."[4] Weary of spontaneous communal fusionism and suspicious of the possibility that the self may "vibrate in unison" with others, Derrida also undercuts the legitimacy of the concept of community as a totalisable unity based on harmony, "consensus, and fundamental agreement beneath the phenomena of discord and war," that is, on inclusionary markers of identity that are simultaneously exclusionary of difference.[5] The sense that as communities become articulated, they also come under erasure is also confirmed by philosophers like Maurice Blanchot, who proposes the concept of

the *unavowable* community, a community that is premised on the violent exclusion of others as a boundary-drawing device and betrays the porousness and fragility of its fraying frontiers, failing to insulate its inside from outside and to legitimise the bonds of unity coalescing its members.[6]

Seamus Deane's 1996 fictional autobiography can be read as a Blanchotian interrogation of the possibility of a community whose very core, as the narrating self reveals, dissolves in "death, disaster, absence."[7] In Blanchot's view, a community is *unavowable* because while sanctioning the self-sameness of its putative constituents, it disavows the unknowable singularity of each of the beings within its folds. In other words, it elides the alterity underscoring the ipseity of each separate individual. However, the "incompleteness" or "insufficiency" of these singularities cannot be counteracted by way of their communal association "to make up a substance of integrity": in other words, the existence of every individual demands not the recognition of its sameness, but the contestation of its difference, to which end it "summons the other or a plurality of others," in other words, a "community."[8]

Reading in the Dark is one of many Irish Gothic narratives that address modernity's hauntological rapport with personal or collective loss,[9] interrogating the mechanisms that sanction violence and ritualistic sacrifice as the Girardian foundational gesture underlying the birth and perpetuation of communities, a violence whose meanings have not yet been discerned, leaving survivors captive in ceaseless loops of reiteration. The liminal imaginary of Deane's narrative evinces a commitment to a perspectival redress, to a recalibration of

the lenses through which trauma and loss can be re-envisioned in the interstitial passageway between death and life. Meditative, ruminative, wistfully reminiscing the past of his family and nation, the unnamed story-teller in Seamus Deane's novel embarks on interrogations of the possibility to conceive the self's singularity within the framework of the community that makes and unmakes itself through gestures of violent erection/erasure of boundaries.

Communities are not necessarily premised on the positive logic of shared togetherness, of fusion and communion, but on the negative mechanism of shattering the "always prior exteriority" of each single individual, "composing itself only as it decomposes itself constantly, violently and in silence."[10] Moreover, as Blanchot states, a community is founded neither on aggregation (a "simple putting in common," "a shared will to be several") nor on congregation (the fusional dispersal of singularities within a supra-individual entity), but on segregation: the foundational event of the community, which calls into question the limits of the self, is the death of another:

> What, then, calls me into question most radically? Not my relation to myself as finite or as the consciousness of being before death or for death, but my presence for another who absents himself by dying. To remain present in the proximity of another who by dying removes himself definitively, to take upon myself another's death as the only death that concerns me, this is what puts me beside myself, this is the only separation that can open me, in its very impossibility, to the Openness of a community.[11]

Deane's *Reading in the Dark* explores the *unworking* of a community that strives to seal off its leaky boundaries and patch its fraying fabric by ousting a sacrificial victim from its ranks, not by transfiguring this death and granting it immortal significance, but by *disavowing* itself in this process.[12] The novel is conceived as a sum of sepulchral narratives, of stories about the difficulty of consigning history's victims to the grave, in such a way as to make possible the avowal of forgiveness and forgetting. As a quick look at the structure of the book may reveal, despite the apparent linearity of the narrative and the quasi-precise dating of the entries in the memoirist's text,[13] there are still unexplored moments, gaps, fractures and faultlines of meaning that slip into silence and bar understanding, as the narratives of others – dead family relations and deceased community members – encroach and engulf this fallible first-person account.

Set against the background of more than half a century of troubled Northern Irish history, from the bloody events surrounding the partitioning of Ireland to the resurgence of hostilities during the Troubles of the early 1970s, this narrative of Hibernian history is filtered through the narrow scope of a family's cross-generational trajectory, seen from the lateral viewpoint of an uncomfortably positioned raconteur, a man who grows up and learns to live in the proximity of death, of the spectral revenants of numerous victims who return among the living to collect a "symbolic debt."[14] Very schematically put, the wound that breeches and broaches the history of the narrator's family to that of his nation is the execution of his paternal uncle Eddie, following accusations that he

had betrayed the community of his fellow Irish insurgents and informed the Ulster police forces about a terrorist attack at a distillery during the Derry troubles of 1922:

> My father called in my uncles, my mother's brothers, to help him fix it. Three came – Dan, Tom, John. […] They had stories of gamblers, drinkers, hard men, con men, champion bricklayers, boxing matchers, footballers, policemen, priests, hauntings, exorcisms, political killings. There were great events they returned to over and over, like the night of the big shoot-out at the distillery between the IRA and the police, when Uncle Eddie disappeared. That was in April, 1922. Eddie was my father's brother.[15]

As a result of this, the narrator's father lives his entire life under the burden of shame created by his brother's betrayal, while his mother learns in time the truth about Eddie's innocence and the decisive role played by her own father in his assassination. Rather than revealing the truth to her husband and offering proper restitution to the memory of the scapegoated victim, she cloisters herself within the bounds of secrecy and spends her life in the company of Eddie's ghost. Across generations, what the narrator attempts yet fails to accomplish is releasing the mother from the grip of this burdensome guilt, by taking upon himself the task of mourning for his dead ancestor through a proper symbolisation, via a truth-telling narrative, of history's unassuaged victim.

The ritualistic annihilation of the surrogate victim – the narrator's paternal uncle – was intended as a means of reinforcing communal solidarity at a moment of crisis (purported betrayal) that would have amounted to an invalidation of the distinctions between inside and outside, friend and foe, Catholic and Protestant, imperialist and nationalist for the small Derry community during the bloody events that exacerbated the sense of communal precariousness and imperilment in Northern Ireland during the early 1920s. As René Girard shows in *Violence and the Sacred,* ritual impurity, such as inherent in the transmission of secret information between enemy camps during periods of hostility, would have rendered communal distinctions liable to the prospect of dissolution, to the "peril of nondifferentiation," threatening to contaminate and engulf the entire cultural order.[16] Hence, the need to stave off communal collapse and to re-enact the strict demarcations that hold the solid fixity of boundaries in place by unleashing *generative violence* against a scapegoat figure who, by being pushed towards death, would soak up and vacate all impurities, preventing the collapse of borders and the entropic dissipation of the community.[17] And yet, as Blanchot suggests, commenting on the absence or dissolution of community during the violent, convulsive moment of sacrifice, this death operates as a disruptive event, as an occlusive sign that precludes signification, as a secret that remains shrouded in inexpressible silence:

> The sacrifice that founds the community by undoing it, by handing it over to time the dispenser, time that does not allow the community nor those who give themselves to it, any form of presence, thereby sending them back to a solitude which, far from

protecting them, disperses them or dissipates itself without their finding themselves again or together.[18]

This unfathomable secret, surrounding the exclusion of difference from the order of the same, blocks the articulation of the community, which is unavowable for it cannot objectivise through language the "ungraspable singularity"[19] of its constituents. In Deane's story, the community to which the narrator seeks admission by vowing to construe its unspeakable secret retrospectively is caught in spiralling repetitions of sacrificial gestures, not only to reinforce an elusive community solidarity, but because the disavowed others, the spectral revenants of its sacrificed victims, insistently return to claim their due recognition as the singularities whose exclusion provisionally maintained the illusion of communal unity and integrity. These ghosts that flood the gates of the community in Deane's narrative caution survivors about improperly negotiated boundaries between life and death, offering little succour to the unalleviated conscience of the living – either those who participated directly in such sacrificial rites or their similarly disaffected descendants – and ultimately revealing the impossibility of drawing clear separating lines between the inside and the outside of the community. The haunting of these ghosts is "transgenerational," for as many Irish Gothic narratives attest, "the voices of one generation" will reverberate in the "unconscious of another."[20] Yet the insistent return of these ghosts to destabilise the communal frontiers may also be seen, as Derrida would say,[21] to serve as prosthetic incentives for the community to carry through the "work of mourning."

The reason for the onslaught of ghosts haunting modernity's individual and collective memory is, as Slavoj Žižek contends, that the dead "were not properly, buried, i.e., because something went wrong with their obsequies. The return of the dead is a sign of a disturbance in the symbolic rite, in the process of symbolisation; the dead return as collectors of some unpaid symbolic debt."[22] The ghosts also return as the improperly symbolised legacy of previous generations, with their debt-collecting pretences in Deane's "collective autobiography," a text that foregrounds the dynamic articulation of generational memory beyond the confines of an individual consciousness, at the intersection of multiple mindsets, breaking in and out of the communitarian enclave. The book is, in fact, replete with stories of disappearances, both metaphorical and literal, ranging from tales about children snatched away by the fairies or about magicians' vanishing acts at the circus, to the painful demises of numerous members of the narrator's family and of the Derry community, on both sides of the colonial barricade. To give an example, the very first death that comes to the awareness of the narrator is that of his five-year old sister Una, who died from meningitis and whose spectre returns to offer him solace in the heterotopian space of the cemetery. Consumed with guilt at having failed to prevent her demise, the narrator summons her spirit, which, indeed, presentifies itself within the flickering contours of a Hibernian Eurydice, impelling his grieving self to overcome circuitous blockages in the past. When the narrator reaches maturity and proceeds to narrativise the memory of his family and nation, Una's hauntological return will become one of the many instances of returning ghosts that

perform a prosthetic role in setting right the memories of the living.

In *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida shows that haunting defines modernity's rapport with history. In the rift gaping wide between the past and the present, there emerge manifold sites of haunting and boundary crossing. Such an interstitial demesne of ghosts is the liminal space of the staircase, which serves as the setting of the opening and closing scenes in Deane's novel. Thus, in the first chapter, the small community of mother and son is symbolically interrupted by the hostile irruption of a ghost that blocks their reunion in the interval of the stairs: "'Don't move, my mother said from the landing. [...] There's something there between us. A shadow. Don't move. [...] We were haunted! We had *a ghost*, even in the middle of the afternoon.'"[23] In the concluding section, the absented ghost – whose definitive passage outside the confines of life has revealed that the sole shared ground of the community is the horizon of death itself[24] – is no longer visible on the landing in the hallway:

> I went down the stairs to make tea. In the hallway, I heard a sigh and looked back to the lobby window. There was no shadow there. It must be my mother in her sleep. Sighing, perhaps, for my father. It was her last sleep of the old world. By nine o'clock, curfew would be over. That evening we would take my father to the cathedral that hung in the stair window and she would climb to her bedroom in silence, pausing at the turn of the stairs, to stare out at the spire under which, for that night, before the darkened altar, he so innocently lay.[25]

Whereas the ghost of Eddie has been granted solace through the restitutive acknowledgment of its obliterated difference for the sake of enforcing communal sameness, the originary unity of the narrator's family is irretrievable, as in the very gesture of reintegrating the memory of Eddie within the conscience of the survivors, the community must face its "impossible communion," since it further disassembles itself through the disappearance or death of other of its members, notably the father figure in this case. As Blanchot would say, the finitude of mortality is the shifting boundary that polices the inside of a community which "takes upon itself and inscribes in itself the impossibility of the community."[26] And yet, aspiring to reconcile his community with loss, the narrator takes upon himself the task of filling the gaps of negativity and steering the communitarian work of mourning, hoping that he will enable this refashioning of connectivity at the inter-subjective level. However, as both the mother's individual destiny (her estrangement from her husband and children) and the endless recurrence of resurgent violence at the larger, historical scale attest, the work of mourning demands "being-with spectres" rather than ousting or suppressing their presence, for sharing in the ontological indeterminacy of ghosts may jolt the mourner to negotiate the boundaries of his own selfhood, as well as, at the communitarian scale, to catalyse "a politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations."[27] As Derrida suggests, it is only in the company of ghosts[28] that the mourner can learn how to live again and surpass confinement in the discomfort of loss, how to recognise and give due respect to the unavowable community of "those

others who are no longer or for those others who are not yet there, presently living, whether they are already dead or not yet born."[29]

As the first step towards acknowledging that unfinished or incomplete (haunting) nature of the community, Deane's narrator dedicates himself to performing the work of mourning that requires him to "ontologise remains, to make them present, in the first place by identifying the bodily remains and by localising the dead."[30] Sacrificed in the Fort of Grianan, the great stone ring dating from medieval times, where the sleeping warriors of the Fianna are envisaged to eventually rouse from their thousand-year sleep and wage their final war against the English, driving them away from the Irish shores forever, Eddie will have had his remains scattered across the legendary Field of the Disappeared, a heterotopian site that accommodates the unappeased spirits of Ireland's victims who were not granted proper funeral rites and who were, thus, not allotted just grievance in the conscience of their survivors:

> That, he said, is the Field of the Disappeared. The birds that came toward it would pass from view and then come back on either side; but if they flew across it, they disappeared. [...] There was a belief that it was here that the souls of all those from the area who had disappeared, or had never had a Christian burial, like fishermen who had drowned and whose bodies had never been recovered, collected three or four times a year – on St. Brigid's Day, on the festival of Samhain, on Christmas Day – to cry like birds and look down on the field where they

had been born. Any human who entered the field would suffer the same fate; and any who heard their cries on those days should cross themselves and pray out loud to drown out the sound. You weren't supposed to hear pain like that; just pray you would never suffer it.[31]

The reason why Deane's narrator assumes the responsibility of completing the work of mourning for Eddie, a labour inaccessible to his parents, whose memory blocks the uncomfortable truth surrounding his death, is because he realises that the process of ontologisation needs to be accompanied by a process of semanticisation. Since Eddie's spectre becomes a place-holder of liminal straddling in the rift of time, the narrator strives to grant meaning to the evental past: his uncle's sacrifice and rejection from the "proper" communitarian territory onto a non-place that suspends all categories. However, the ghost's return as a *revenant* impels, as Derrida reveals, its validation as an *arrivant*. In other words, "within the horizon of loss (of the dead other), the effect of the ghost should not be merely melancholic, that is past-oriented, but messianic, future-oriented, as it presages the possibility of a dialogical healing of the past incision."[32]

The narrator enlists the entwined processes of memory and oblivion in an ethical reconstruction of the past through listening to the others' stories and through catalysing signification, despite the resistance of these narratives to interpretation, in his reading and writing practices. The meaning of literary texts is spectral, for, as Derrida would say, the spectre has "the visibility of a body which is not present in

flesh and blood."[33] In Maurice Blanchot's vision, literature hovers on the confines "between living and dying," insofar as both at the pole of creation and at that of reception, the singularity of the individual dissolves under the "tyrannical prehension" of a neutral, anonymous, impersonal language, turning meaning into an elusive and endlessly deferred object. In the process of writing, which Blanchot describes by reference to Orpheus and his descent into the underworld to bring Eurydice back to life, the author faces annihilation ("effacement") and spectralisation (a "slipping ghostlike toward"), a dissolution of self under the demand to write, as a surrogate attempt at maintaining the "inspired and forbidden" backward glance at his dead wife, who nonetheless absconds herself forever into the netherworld:

> Through Orpheus we are reminded that speaking poetically and disappearing belong to the profundity of a single movement, that he who sings must jeopardise himself entirely and, in the end, perish, for he speaks only when the anticipated approach toward death, the premature separation, the adieu given in advance obliterate in him the false certitude of being, dissipate protective safeguards, deliver him to a limitless insecurity.[34]

While seeking to presentify absence and retrieve Eurydice from the folds of death, writing merely intensifies the anguish of loss because the poet cannot forbear the urge to catch a glimpse of death itself. Meaning keeps flickering on the brink between revelation and occultation just like Orpheus's gaze spectralises, in perpetuity,

the image of the beloved disappearing into "that other death which is death without end."[35] At the receptive end, the text resists conceptualisation attempts, confronting the reader with spectral traces of meaning, charted as the flickering (non)presence of a corpse within the obscure space of the book/tomb. The text contrives its own autonomous language, which propels while jamming, at the same time, attempts at comprehension. Once again, a resurrectionary analogy is made, this time with the biblical narrative of Lazarus risen from the dead. Before the sepulchral text, the reader assumes a Christic stance, issuing the command that Lazarus/the meaning should come forth from its murky abode. At the same time, it consigns the "cadaverous void" – the opaque secret that eschews the reader's grasp – back into the dimmed space of the tomb/book.[36] As Blanchot contends, it is only through reading (as well as through the inevitable failure of the interpretative effort), that the text's irreducible "singularity" may be revealed, trapped all the same in uncanny indeterminacy at the border between meaning and the lack thereof.

Foregrounding the tense rapport between disclosure and obliteration (*saying, never was said*), the lines of the traditional Irish song "She Moved through the Fair," appended as a motto, attempt to lift the opaque ledge that blocks access to the truths of faction and nation and announce the autobiografictional frame of the narrator's confession: "The people were saying no two were e'er wed/But one had a sorrow that never was said." The sorrowful secret that divides the unnamed narrator's parents is but one case of many families whose unity is shattered by unresolved conflicts, silenced traumas, all of these

being pictured as unavoidable against the backdrop of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland. In Seamus Deane's novel, which, as Edna Longley shows, "conflates … personal history with a narrative of Ireland,"[37] the unnamed narrator's favourite aria, from Gluck's opera *Orpheus and Eurydice*, captures the conversion of loss into song:

> My favourite was an aria sung by Bjorling, Orpheus having turned round too soon and lost Eurydice – Che faro senza Euridice? It would out from the black disc in long sorceries of sound. I would sit beside the machine sometimes, facing her, and it was then as though the music was winding out of me, a lamentation for the loss of her.[38]

Just like the music winding out of the Greek poet's grief for his irretrievably vanished lover, the narrating self's lamentation for the loss of a genuine familial bond gains shape on the brink of an ever widening abyss separating the son from the maternal presence. Over the span of nearly three decades, from the mid-1940s, when, as a child, he could still feel an organic connection with the mother, to the early 1970s, by which time the secret she harboured had insulated her from her offspring, the distance between the two grows exponentially as she turns into a self-deceitful melancholic, while the narrator takes upon himself the project of grieving for the victim around whom the sorrowful parental secret is wound.

> "My mother," Deane's narrator observes, was increasingly distant from everyone; slowly slipping out of our grasp, slick with hostility" […] She

took to the lobby window again. But she disliked anyone standing with her there to talk, most especially me. There she was with her ghosts. Now the haunting meant something new to me – now I had become the shadow. Everything bore down on her. She got smaller, more intense, her features sealed into no more than two or three expressions. In addition, she fell silent."[39]

By refusing to disclose to her husband the truth about Eddie's murder at the command of her father, out of the desire to cleanse the impure community from the ostensibly treacherous *pharmakon*, the narrator's mother appropriates the dead man's ghostly presence, remaining imprisoned in patterns of guilt and remorse. What the son attempts to do is activate the mother's own work of mourning. He therefore proceeds to write a collective confession of the horrendous rite of sacrifice to which Eddie's own community subjected him, not in an easily accessible English language, but in the mother's impenetrable idiom:

> I decided to write it all out in an exercise book, partly to get it clear, partly to rehearse it and decide which details to include or leave out. But then the fear that someone would find it and read it overcame me. So, with the help of a dictionary, I translated it all into Irish, taking more than a week to do it. Then I destroyed the English version, burning it in front of my mother's eyes. […] I read it all outright in Irish to [my father]. It was an essay we had been assigned in school, I told him, on local history. He just nodded and

smiled and said it sounded wonderful. My mother had listened carefully. I knew she knew what I was doing. […] I could feel her looking at me, though my back was turned to her. She was quiet for a long time. […] Then she said something very brief, maybe something angry, that I couldn't hear because I was crying.[40]

In writing down his testimony in Irish, rather than orally confessing to his mother that he knows her secret, he wishes to foster her critical labour of liberation from the unprocessed mnemic effluvia or amnesiac blockages that confound her prospects of achieving a peaceful memory of loss. The question may be why the confession is written in Irish, since the only traces of this ancestral language the mother is familiar with are "dismembered bits and pieces of poems and songs."[41] In effect, the narrator chooses Irish as that Blanchotian impersonal language that makes possible the achievement of the text's autonomy and distance from both the reader and the writer. The fact that the confession is delivered in Irish ensures the anonymity of the writer and the universality of its meaning. It also protects the addressee from direct liability. Translated from English into Irish, the narrative about Uncle Eddie's sacrifice is read aloud to both parents. What the narrator realises is that it makes little impact on the father, as the impenetrable linguistic medium obviously does not facilitate his access to the truth about his brother's innocence and betrayal in a scapegoating process. Moreover, even though the mother grasps, despite the opaque language, the narrator's gesture of setting the record straight around the figure of Eddie, the fact that she responds to

it by retreating onto the stairs, where she can hold on to his shadow, suggests the futility of this attempt at narrativising the past. The ethical backward glance, through which the narrator sought to reconnect with his lost Eurydice, is reciprocated with a glare, which merely intensifies his anguish at failing to impart to his mother the Derridean heterodidactics of learning to live authentically on the brink of death and in the appeasing, rather than vengeful company of ghosts. Unlike in Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, in which the Oedipal bond with a suffocating mother and carceral country must be broken before artistic freedom of expression can be reached, in Deane's account it is the mother that expels the child ("Why don't you go away?"),[42] refusing to heal the estrangement between them.

At the other end of the spectrum, the narrator's ethical stance is translated into gestures of active remembrance also insofar as the act of reading is concerned. Deane's novel is entitled *Reading in the Dark* not only by reference to the protagonist's habit, as a child, to shield himself from the dismissive comments of his siblings and peruse the contents of a historical novel entitled *The Shan Van Vocht*, eulogising Ireland's heroic past during the Great Rebellion of 1798: "I'd switch off the light, get back in bed, and lie there, the book still open, re-imagining all I had read, the various ways the plot might unravel, the novel opening into endless possibilities in the dark."[43] For him, reading in the dark also entails laying to rest the spectres of history's atrocious events and learning to live by summoning forth what Tzvetan Todorov calls the community's exemplary memory. Unlike literal

memory, which rehashes the past for the sake of re-experiencing the intensity of the original trauma, suspending the present in indeterminacy, exemplary memory may release the present from the inhibitive grasp of the past.[44] In this episode, Deane addresses the spectrality of literature and the imperative of preserving the undecidability of meaning. The idea is not to append value to the past and, having done so, to escape lithely out of a blighted present into an amnesic future, but to perpetuate the process of signification, which can work and unwork the community into and out of existence. The lesson that the Eurydician figure of mother and nation may have failed to learn is that the spectral return of the past, through the figure of the ghost, performs the ethical work of fostering signification, in a Blanchotian gesture of opening the community to "those who have no community"[45] and giving (second) life to the residual meanings entombed in this story.

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NOTES

1. Raymond Williams, *Culture & Society: 1780-1950,* New York: Anchor Books, 1960, p. 348.
2. Williams, *Culture & Society*, p. 354. Williams suggests that communities have always already been, retrospectively pertaining, in other words, to an idealised past, as communal projects generally seek to overcome the "disturbance and disorder of the present" and replicate "an ordered and happier past," in *The Country and the City,* New York: Oxford University Press, 1973, p. 45.

3. Zygmunt Bauman, *Community. Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001, p. 3.

4. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000, p. 182.

5. Jacques Derrida, *Points… Interviews, 1974-1994,* trans. Peggy Kamuf et al., Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995, p. 355.

6. Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, trans. Pierre Joris, New York: Station Hill Press, 1988. See Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, pp. 195-196.

7. Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, p. xiii.

8. *Ibidem*, pp. 5-6.

9. See the analysis of several works by John Banville, Patrick McCabe and Neil Jordan through the lens of spectra criticism in Carmen-Veronica Borbely, *Mapping the (Post)Gothic: Essays on Irish Contemporary Fiction and Film*, Cluj: Presa Universitara Clujeana, 2014.

10. Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, p. 6.

11. *Ibidem*, p. 7.

12. Quoting Bataille, Blanchot claims that "Enjoined *[ordonné]* to death, the community […] does not *'effect'* the transfiguration of its dead in any kind of substance or subject — fatherland, native soil, nation'," but shows that "death is itself the true community of mortal beings: their impossible communion," pp. 10-11.

13. To take the example of the first chapter, there is a verbal excessiveness – subchapters are both labelled and dated – betraying the endeavour to spin a surfeit of meanings around past events that are charted as incomprehensible gaps in the collective memory: "Stairs – *February 1945*," "Disappearances – *September 1945*," "Eddie – *November 1947*," "Accident – *June 1948*," "Feet – *September 1948*," "Reading in the Dark – *October 1948*," "Grandfather – *December 1948*," "Pistol – *January 1949*, Seamus Deane, *Reading in the Dark*, New York: Vintage International, 1998.

14. See Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1991, p. 22.

15. Deane, *Reading in the Dark*, pp. 7-8.

16. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (1972), trans. Patrick Gregory, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979, p. 49.

17. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 57-58.

18. Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, p. 15.

19. *Ibidem*, p. 47.

20. Jodey Castricano, *Cryptomimesis: The Gothic and Jacques Derrida's Ghost Writing*, Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001, p. 16.

21. Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, New York and London: Routledge, 1994, p. 9.

22. Žižek, *Looking Awry*, p. 23.

23. Deane, *Reading in the Dark*, p. 3.

24. "Death is itself the true community of mortal beings," Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, p. 11.

25. Deane, *Reading in the Dark*, pp. 245-246.

26. Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, p. 11.

27. Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, p. xiii.

28. "Only from the other and by death. In any case from the other at the edge of life. At the internal border or the external border," Derrida, *ibidem*, p. xvii.

29. Derrida, *ibidem*, p. xviii.

30. Derrida, *ibidem*, p. 9.

31. Deane, *Reading in the Dark*, pp. 53-55.

32. Borbely, *Mapping*, 39.

33. Jacques Derrida, "Spectographies," in *Ecographies of Television. Filmed Interviews*, trans. Jennifer Basjorek, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002, p. 115.

34. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, p. 156.

35. *Ibidem*, p. 171.

36. *Ibidem*, p. 194.

37. Edna Longley, "Autobiography as History," *Fortnight*, No. 355 (Nov., 1996), p. 34.

38. Deane, *Reading in the Dark,* p. 231.

39. *Ibidem,* pp. 227-228.

40. *Ibidem,* pp. 202-203.

41. *Ibidem,* p. 202.

42. *Ibidem,* p. 235.

43. *Ibidem,* p. 20.

44. Tzvetan Todorov, "The Uses and Abuses of Memory," in *What Happens to History. The Renewal of Ethics in Contemporary Thought,* edited by Howard Marchitello, New York: Routledge, 2001, pp. 11-22.

45. Blanchot citing Bataille, *The Unavowable Community*, p. 25.