

**Gender and National Identity, the Arts, and the Troubles:
The “Queer” Figure**

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December 2013

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1. Introduction

In a small town just outside Belfast, a man has just saved a woman and her daughter from a vicious Doberman attack by wrestling it to the ground and chocking it to death. 3 news reporters run to the scene.

1st reporter. "Please, I need this story: Brave Republican saves a family from a brutal canine attack."

"Sounds good but I'm not from the Republic," the man says.

2nd reporter. "Please, let me have it. Amazing Fenian risks all for mother and child."

"I'm not Republican and I sure as hell ain't no Fenian. I'm a Loyalist," he says proudly.

3rd reporter. "Orange bastard kills family pet."¹

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, one of the meanings of the word 'community' is the following: "A body of people who live in the same place, usually sharing a common cultural or ethnic identity". When one keeps this in mind while reading the above joke, it is obvious that to be a 'Fenian' is commendable, but if you identify yourself as a Loyalist, you are classified as an 'Orange Bastard'. The joke, one of many, calls attention to the divided communities that for centuries have lived alongside each other in Northern Ireland. The clear distinction between the Republicans, Nationalists, or Catholics, on the one side, and the Loyalists, Unionists, or Protestants, on the other, is a recognisable part of Northern Irish culture². The segregation is perhaps less present nowadays, but it was an essential element of daily life during the Troubles, the civil war that afflicted the Northern Irish people during the second half of the twentieth century. This conflict, which started at the end of the 1960s and lasted for a good twenty-five years, was a clash between the Nationalists/Republicans, who want Northern Ireland to be reunited with the Republic of Ireland, and the Unionists/Loyalists, who want Northern Ireland to remain a part of the United Kingdom. The foundation for the Troubles lies in the history of Northern Ireland, which is and has been very important for its people, as each of the two opposing sides has its own specific historical

¹ www.boards.ie/vbulletin/showthread.php?p=84971431

² Throughout this thesis, the choice has been made to refer to the two communities as Catholics and Protestants. The conflict, though dominated by paramilitary groups and their political aspirations of unifying Northern Ireland either with the Republic of Ireland or the United Kingdom, also for a large part rested on the inequality experienced by the Catholic community in comparison to the Protestant populace, which was based on their (perceived) notion of national identity. Where in this thesis the distinction between the groups has a clear political touch to it, the groups will be referred to as Nationalists/Republicans and Unionists/Loyalists.

memory that has formed its communal identity. This shared identity is closely linked to religion, ethnicity, and politics. To be born into either one group meant that most people identified themselves as Catholic/Irish-nationalist or as Protestant/British-loyalist. Class, though often a component in the formation of one's identity and so possibly another barrier between the communities, was found to be less of a division marker. In the chapter on national identity from *Social Attitudes in Northern Ireland: The First Report* (1991), it is disclosed that the subjects questioned indicated that they had more in common with people from the same class but from a different religion, than with those people from the same religion but from a different category of class (Moxon-Browne). The opposition between these particular groups, present since the start of the plantation of Ulster by the British in the sixteenth century, was especially important during the Troubles, when one's communal identity could mean the difference between life and death.

As historical memory and identity are so closely related in Northern Ireland, it has proven difficult to reconcile the two communities with one another. One way in which it has been attempted to bring the two groups closer together is through the use of the arts. Experiments in the arts can be utilised to cross boundaries, as art tends to be a reflection on and of society. Due to its divided communities, Northern Ireland provides a good working ground for such experiments. Assuming that it is possible to use the arts as a laboratory in which societies and their norms can be turned upside-down by analysing them from the point of view of the 'other', in this thesis I will investigate what efforts have been undertaken by various Northern Irish artists to try to reconcile the two groups. I will do this by looking at their incorporation of 'queer' characters in their works: characters that do not adhere to the standard of normality. The identities of these characters are not 'fixed' as a result of social constraints, as are those of the people of Northern Ireland, but rather, they are malleable. A good example is Dil, one of the main characters from Neil Jordan's film *The Crying Game* (1992), to be discussed below. In short, the questions that are put forward in this thesis are the following: how are queer figures and their ability to unsettle employed in the Northern Irish arts to look at Northern Irish society during the Troubles and its aftermath, and how are its norms questioned through the application of a queer viewpoint?

1.2 Justification of Chosen Texts

Out of those works that feature queer characters which are produced in Northern Ireland, a selection has been made that shows the varying ways in which the artists have appropriated their queer characters from the onset of the Troubles up to the end. They are the following:

the play *Carthaginians* (1988) by Frank McGuinness; the film *The Crying Game* (1992) by Neil Jordan; and the novel *The International* (1999) by Glenn Patterson. *Carthaginians* was chosen because of its character Dido, a gay character who subverts gender identity through drag performance. An examination of *The Crying Game* will look into issues of gender, race and national identity. Finally, Patterson's *The International* was elected because it provides an insight into life in Northern Ireland before the Troubles through the eyes of the homosexual Danny. The selected works were all created during a different period of the Troubles, which allows for an investigation of whether the progress of time has had a potential influence on the representation of the queer characters. Also, attention will be paid to the depiction of social categories such as race and class.

2. Historical Background to the Troubles

Narratives are better understood in their historical context (Parker, *Vol. I* xv-xvi). This is especially true for Northern Ireland and the Troubles, since, as Michael Hughes puts it, “[o]bession with history plays a major role in the formation of each group’s image of itself” (1). The following passage therefore provides a short overview of the historical processes that led to the conflict in Northern Ireland.

The start of the Troubles in the late 1960s hinged on the tensions that existed between the Catholics and the Protestants, which had been present since the plantation of Ulster commenced in the late sixteenth century (though the colonization of the island started well before this time). Plantation attempts, “the clearing of the native Irish population from areas of land, which would then be resettled with reliable immigrants” (Hughes 7), initially failed under Edward VI and Mary Tudor, but the method was somewhat successful during the reign of Elizabeth I. Later attempts under James I thrived, when “[i]n January 1609 the first comprehensive plantation scheme began” (Hughes 7). The English and Scottish settlers who crossed the sea and confiscated land from the native Irish brought with them “a different religion and culture” (Kennedy-Pipe 8). These settlers, who were planted to keep the rebellious Irish under control, were in the peculiar position of being a minority in a country, while being expected to be the dominant party. Among them were many Scots Presbyterians, who themselves were a minority in their homeland, as most of the Island of Britain was part of the Lutheran inspired Anglican church. These religious and cultural differences, along with the bouts of violence caused by the usurpation of land, led to the rise of “two nationalisms” (Kennedy-Pipe 8) who lived alongside each other in a constant state of apprehension for the next two hundred years. During this time, the tensions between the two nationalisms did not wither, as the two sides stood opposite each other during, for example, the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 and the Rebellion of 1798, when an attempt was made to overthrow English power (Kennedy-Pipe 9). Following the unsuccessful rebellion, the Act of Union was passed in 1800 and was effective as of 1 January 1801, joining the Kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland into the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Even though this meant that the influence of the British in Ireland, and hence the Protestants/Unionists in the North, was even greater, that did not hinder Nationalists (especially in the South) to campaign against the Union of Great Britain and Ireland, which “culminated in the Home Rule Campaign of the 1880s” (Kennedy-Pipe 10). Due to the sentiments of the Nationalists, the Unionists, who were largely concentrated in Ulster, started grouping together, as they feared their tie to the

mainland would be severed should Home Rule come into force. While the first two Home Rule Bills were rejected (Hughes 20-21), the Third Bill was passed in 1914 but was never ratified due to the outbreak of the First World War and the subsequent Easter Rising of April 1916. The Fourth Bill, named the Government of Ireland Act, was implemented in 1920 (Hughes 51). The idea was to create Home Rule for both Northern and Southern Ireland. The latter, however, became the Irish Free State during the Partition of 1922 (it would later come to be the Republic of Ireland) after the Irish War of Independence. The Partition meant that the southern twenty-six counties belonged to the South, whereas six of the northern counties constituted Northern Ireland (Hughes 70). The birth of Northern Ireland was rather problematic, as it was “the state no one wanted; the Unionist, who wanted the Union to be maintained intact, had a large measure of Home Rule forced on them against their will ... The Nationalists in the North rejected the whole thing from the outset” (Hughes 69-70). Terrorist attacks were not uncommon, since “[d]iscrimination in all forms provided ammunition for extremists on both sides” (Hughes 72). The next four decades were ones of tension between the Catholics and Protestants (though this abated somewhat during and after World War II (Duggan 12)). This was to a large extent due to the inequality the Catholic populace experienced, as they were systematically marginalised and disadvantaged when it came to housing, employment and politics. The British-affiliated Protestants had the British Government on their side, which granted them more power (Hughes 74). The fact that they were a majority, which provided them with a superior position, was conveniently helped along when it was decided that the North should encompass six counties, rather than the nine that originally constituted Ulster, as the Protestant-Catholic ratio was far more convenient in the new situation (Kennedy-Pipe 21). Another measure taken to ensure the upper hand for the Protestants was the practice of gerrymandering, meaning that constituent boundaries were drawn in such a way that they would ensure maximal winning for the Protestants, leaving the Catholics underrepresented in the government (Kennedy-Pipe 21-22). The Protestants were adamant to keep their dominant position, as the apprehensive state they had lived in for the last two hundred years had by no means lessened (Kennedy-Pipe 35).

The start of the Troubles is usually placed in the late 1960s. The “apparent and immediate catalyst” (Kennedy-Pipe 31) for the conflict was the formation of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, or NICRA, in January 1967 in Belfast (earlier initiatives date to the early 1960s), which advocated equality for the Catholic population. After World War II, the housing and educational situation of the Catholics had improved, but even so, their marginalised position was such that the Civil Rights Association demanded better working

and living conditions, and especially a fairer voting system (Kennedy-Pipe 41). The peacefully intended protest marches in 1968 and 1969 often met with resistance from the Protestants, and the situation became grimmer. It was therefore decided that the British Army should be dispatched to the North, in order to maintain the peace and “to protect the Catholic areas against the onslaught of the Unionists” (Kennedy-Pipe 49). While this was the intention, and the tensions indeed abated for a while, the situation quickly escalated in 1970, when the Provisional IRA started to launch attacks on the Army. This continued into 1972, when one of the monumental moments of the Troubles took place: on Sunday 30 January 1972, the British Army opened fire on Catholics who were walking in a Civil Rights March. Thirteen men were killed on the spot; a fourteenth died later (Kennedy-Pipe 60). This event enraged the Catholics and worsened the already strenuous relationship with the British Army, leading to more attacks and terrorist deeds. These actions, in turn, provoked the paramilitary forces on the Protestant/Unionist side, which turned on the PIRA (Hughes 83). In this way, what had been a civil rights movement for more equality in Northern Ireland, transformed into a triangular military conflict between the British Army and paramilitary groups from both sides that saw thousands dead and many more wounded. After twenty-five years, the peace process in the 1990s led to a cessation of most of the violence and the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 laid the foundation for the current peace in Northern Ireland.

3. Theoretical Background

3.1 Memory in Northern Ireland

As has become apparent in the above section, the division between the two sides in Northern Ireland was forged centuries ago. This enmity between the Irish/British, Catholics/Protestants, Nationalists/Unionists, and Republicans/Loyalists has been in the collective memory of (Northern) Ireland for generations (Dawson 3). Ian McBride points out: “In Ireland ... the interpretation of the past has always been at the heart of the national conflict ... [P]erhaps more than in other cultures, collective groups have expressed their values and assumptions through their representations of the past” (qtd. in Dawson 7). While McBride’s argument is focused on the whole of Ireland, the same can very well be said for Northern Ireland in particular. Examples of his argument would be the commemoration of the 1916 Easter Rising by the Catholic Republicans and the Orange Parades in remembrance of the 1690 Battle of the Boyne by the Protestant Orangemen. For these groups, these historical events are a part of their identity, enshrined as they are in either Protestant or Catholic mythology (Kennedy-Pipe 9): their memory is a source of pride. These (annual) commemorations indicate that for these groups the past is still a matter of ‘us’ versus ‘them’. Through their celebration of their ‘own’ history, each group makes that history exclusively about themselves, rather than incorporating all the people living in Northern Ireland. This divided past, even after the Troubles, still proves to be a source of tension, as the riots of the summer of 2012 between Catholics and Orangemen illustrate (McHugh). It is the tenacity with which the people in Northern Ireland cling (and cling) to their past that has prevented them from becoming a truly united nation. According to Ernest Renan, in order for a society to function as a nation, the people should be able to both remember a past they share, as well as move beyond conflicts that occurred between different parties (in Rigney 251). The people in Northern Ireland, rather than dealing with their past and putting it behind them, thus being able to observe it from a healthy distance, are still haunted by it, because they are unable or unwilling to let go of their particular version of the country’s distant and more recent history. Not only do they keep commemorating events such as the Easter Rising and the Boyne, but, importantly, also intervening struggles and conflicts, such as Bloody Sunday and the Hunger Strikes. One can liken this unwillingness to let go to an “excess of memory [which] resembles repetition compulsion” (Ricoeur 477). This repetition compulsion, as the term already indicates, makes people repeat memories compulsively, rather than process them. It causes people to “[act] out instead of ... remembering” (Ricoeur 477). Graham Dawson explains this problem as follows:

The currency, centrality and weight of the problematic past have indeed been perceived as a 'burden', excessive and inescapable, exercising a determining influence over the present and promoting an inappropriate backward-looking mentality or fixation. To be fixated on or obsessed by the past also carries the further connotation of being embroiled in irresolvable violent conflict, sometimes envisaged as a centuries-old feud, or ethnic war. (8)

Such repetition, though certainly not applicable to all people or present in all works, indeed is a recurring theme in the Northern Irish arts, as for example Emilie Pine points out in her engaging work *The Politics of Irish Memory: Performing Remembrance in Contemporary Irish Culture* (2010). Pine examines the culture of remembrance in (Northern) Ireland. She argues that people have an obligation to remember, because "memory can ... function as an ethical act" and "cultural remembrance can act as a catalyst for social openness" (13). With this, she means that from the memory of the past, lessons can be drawn for the future. This is not necessarily the memory that has been circulating in society, since, as the winner writes history, the victims are often forgotten. The ethics in the ethical act, then, is the responsibility to remember all of the past and not just snippets (14). This process, however, is hampered in (Northern) Ireland because the people tend to focus on the traumas of the past, and the consequences it has had for their community. Pine asserts that "from 1980 to 2010 Irish culture has undergone a major shift in terms of the representation of the past. That shift ... has resulted in traumatic memory becoming the dominant way of seeing, of understanding, and of communicating, the Irish past. We are obsessed with the past, and we are haunted by trauma" (5). According to her, what the people of (Northern) Ireland need to do in order to achieve a healthy way of remembering is to "learn to reconcile the past with the future, and to find ways to exorcise the ghost of the past" (17).

Instead of adhering to a remembrance culture in which the arts keep reciting the traumas of the past, with the possible consequence of being stuck, as we have seen in Pine, there have also been writers, directors and poets who have tried to deal with their history in a more thoughtful manner. Michael Parker, in his two-volume work *Northern Irish Literature, 1956-1975* and *Northern Irish Literature, 1975-2006* (2007), discusses the works of multiple artists. Some of these artists have exhibited a backward-looking tendency, but Parker indicates that while "[t]he literary texts discussed [in these volumes] do often reflect particular historical moments, [they] also offer what Declan Kiberd has termed 'anticipatory illumination', possibilities of alternative futures and states of being" (*Vol. 2* xvi). In other

words, these artists, while aware of and responding to their country's past, try to deal with it in such a way that it might prove beneficial for present and future generations.

In this thesis I have opted, following Parker's example, to look at texts that do not engage in what Ricoeur calls 'repetition memory', but that deal with the past in their own way, even though they have all been created during the three decades described by Pine as shifting to a remembrance culture of trauma (5). Such attempts are facilitated by the reflective nature of the arts on societies. The idea that the arts function as a mirror for society, that is, that they reflect on ideas people have about themselves and their surroundings, is, as Milton Albrecht puts it, "at least as old as Plato's concept of imitation" (425). The arts can be said to work as a laboratory where one can experiment with fictive societies in which norms are questioned and established ideas are overthrown by giving 'others' a place to voice their opinions and by paying attention to their 'otherness'. It is possible to create new stories, ideas, and viewpoints through the laboratory of arts. In order to achieve that, sometimes characters who do not answer to the common idea of normalcy are used. In their works, the artists discussed have included 'queer' characters: these characters can be queer in the more literal sense (i.e. gay), but also queer in the derivative sense of not-standard (e.g. racial or ethnic minorities).

As said in the introduction to this thesis, I want to investigate how certain Northern Irish artists have tried to bridge the gap between the two groups in an attempt to allow them to come to terms with their past through their incorporation of queer characters and the unsettling and, as a result, mediating role they (possibly) play in their works. In order to analyse the function of these characters, I will make use of Queer Theory. While this theory is mainly concerned with gender issues, the aspects of it that will be applied in this thesis are also suitable for other deviant characters.

3.2 Queer Theory

The term 'queer' is often linked to homosexuality. Throughout most of its usage, the word has been employed in a derogatory and offensive manner. An example of the latter is found in the book *The Arrival of Fergal Flynn* (2004) by Brian Kennedy. Fergal, a homosexual boy living in 1980s Northern Ireland, is constantly taunted by his father and brothers because he is gay. In one scene, Fergal's brother John attacks him because Fergal supposedly wore a jacket belonging to John: "Get up, you queer fucking cunt, before I really do some damage. And if you think I'm ever going to wear that jacket after it's been near your queer body then you're dead fucking wrong" (201-202). While it is still meant by some people as an offence, "from

the late 1980s it [also] began to be used as a neutral or positive term (originally of self-reference), by some homosexuals” (OED (adj.)). It is for instance used by the activist group Queer Nation, who chant “We’re here, we’re queer, get used to it”. The more positive meaning has also been adopted by queer theorists. Queer Theory, which has developed out of the field of gender studies, can be positioned in the field of post-structuralist critical theory which gained prominence in the 1990s. The aim of Queer Theory and its scholars, such as Michael Warner, Lauren Berlant, Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Nikki Sullivan, is “to queer ... to make strange, to frustrate, to counteract, to delegitimise, to camp up ... heteronormative knowledges and institutions, and the subjectivities and socialities that are (in)formed by them and that (in)form them” (Sullivan vi).

The adjective heteronormative means “of, designating, or based on a world view which regards gender roles as fixed to biological sex and heterosexuality as the normal and preferred sexual orientation” (OED) and the noun heteronormativity carries the meaning: “the property or quality of being heteronormative; the privileging of biologically determined gender roles and heterosexuality” (OED). The idea is that one is either a male or a female, due to one’s sex. This in turn means that, gender-wise, one is automatically a man or a woman and they are expected to fulfil certain fixed roles in life that are supposed to be a natural given. The terms heteronormative/-ity were, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, first used by Michael Warner in his article “Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet” (1991). However, the practice of heteronormativity, the equation of gender (roles) with biological sex, has been around in (Western) society for centuries. While heteronormativity, unconsciously or not, still often persists in the minds of people, the idea has been attacked during the twentieth century by scholars working in fields like psychoanalysis, sociology, and feminism (Sullivan 81). These scholars, for example Freud, argue against the idea that homosexuality, and consequently heterosexuality, are “naturally preordained” (Sullivan 14). During the 1970s, the fields of feminism and lesbian and gay studies, along with influences from psychoanalysis, sociology, psychology and post-structuralism merged into the field of gender studies, out of which Queer Theory originated. Several gender study scholars follow post-structuralist theorists (like Michael Foucault) who argue that “there are no objective and universal truths, but that particular forms of knowledge, and the ways of being that they engender, become ‘naturalised’, in culturally and historically specific ways” (Sullivan 39). What this entails, is that scholars of gender studies oppose the notion of a fixed gender binary on the ground that gender identity/sexuality is not a natural given, “but rather, is discursively constructed” (Sullivan 1). That is, identity is not something passive, but rather, something active: identity is

performative³. While this line of reasoning is part of the gender study inventory, it became famous through the writings of Judith Butler, a scholar whose work is seen as foundational for Queer Theory. Butler has written extensively on the performativity and discursive construction of identity in her seminal work *Gender Trouble* (1990). According to her, “[g]ender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (Butler 33). What Butler means to say, is that there is no innate gender identity based on a sex/gender binary. Rather, certain strict ideas persist in society about what constitutes specific types of gender, based on a package of discourses and actions/gestures. Through the repeated performance of these acts/discourses, the illusion of an identity is created. Identity is not something stable from which certain acts flow, but identity is created through these acts (Butler 136). In order, then, to shake the foundations of heteronormativity, and indeed the notion of any fixed gender, “queer theory decouples sexual identification from sexual roles and sex acts, thus denaturalising sexual orientation and acknowledging that there are a multiplicity of sexualities that are fluid and contextual” (Jagose paraphrased in Kitchin and Lysaght 490).

Initially, gender theorists who thought about identity as being performative were still thinking along the man/woman divide. In other words, while they did question the sex/gender binary, their research focused mostly on men versus women. This was/is true for feminist theorists among others, whose tendency to try to construct a fixed notion of “women” is criticised by Butler (5-6). Queer theorists later elevated the performativity of identity to the next level by stating that not only were sex and gender to be regarded as social constructs, but also that one should start thinking along the man/man or woman/woman divide. The final step was to argue that, if indeed sex and gender are socially constructed through performative actions,

then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction [...] Genders can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, neither original nor derived. (Butler 141)⁴

³ According to Butler, performative “means that it produces a series of effects. We act and walk and speak and talk in ways that consolidate an impression of being a man or being a woman”. (bigthink.com/videos/your-behavior-creates-your-gender)

⁴ Rob Kitchin and Karen Lysaght provide some nuance in the sense that even though it is argued that gender identity is not fixed, that does not mean that one cannot associate with a certain identity category:

Like the fluidity of identities, so Queer Theory is far more extensive and intricate than the above overview. In order not to drown in a further lengthy and complicated description, I have decided to use the above mentioned goal of Queer Theory, i.e. delegitimising and denaturalising heteronormative aspects of identity, as my workable tool in this thesis.

As the analyses will reveal, the artists that are discussed have attempted to both acknowledge and undermine heteronormativity in Northern Irish society. Northern Ireland, like many other countries, has been prone to adhering to heteronormative beliefs, but whereas others began to revise their opinion on queer characters during the latter half of the twentieth century, the people in Northern Ireland remained unyielding in their opinions. As multiple studies show (Duggan; Ferriter; Livingston), the people in Northern Ireland were rather homophobic during the Troubles. The rigid belief system that persisted in the Catholic and Protestant communities regarding religion and national identity also ensured that their opinions on homosexuality/transgenderism/etc. were equally set (it is interesting to note that for all their (perceived) differences, both communities had the same opinion on deviant gender/sexual behaviour). The scene from *The Arrival of Fergal Flynn* (2004) which started this section on Queer Theory is a good example of the Northern Irish attitude. Caroline Magennis indicates that the homophobic atmosphere during the Troubles explains why there are so few homosexual literary characters (“Dissidents” 179). The opinion on homosexuality/transgenderism/etc. in Northern Ireland has improved during the last two decades, but recent reports are not decided on the current situation. In 2006, an Ipsos-MORI survey was conducted, which showed that “three-quarters of the population in the North say they are tolerant of gay men, lesbians and bisexuals and 88 per cent believe there should be no discrimination against them” (McDonald). At the same time, while the personal opinion of those questioned belies the outcome, “59 per cent said they considered the North ‘either not very or not at all accepting’ of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals”. This latter statement seems congruent with a research conducted by Vani K. Borooah and John Mangan in 2007. The scholars, in their article “Love Thy Neighbour: How Much Bigotry Is There in Western Countries?”, indicate that the percentage of bigotry towards homosexuality in Northern Ireland was the highest of the twenty-three countries researched. As these studies point out,

It is important to note here that queer theory does not, however, deny that an individual can self-identify with a category such as ‘heterosexual’, ‘gay’, or ‘lesbian’, or that this category is in itself meaningless for that individual, but it does recognise that this category is notional, contingent, and internally (by members) and externally (by nonmembers) contested. As such, it does recognise that the category is ‘real’ in the sense that people subscribe to its label, and thus it has significance, but also that the meaning of this category varies between these people and over time and space. (491)

the old homophobic feelings in Northern Ireland have not yet died away. The same goes for the old Catholic and Protestant sentiments, as recurring bouts of riots show.

As just pointed out, people living in Northern Ireland had (and have) a strong opinion on queer characters, which emerged from their mind-set regarding their national identity. It would seem that questioning their heteronormative beliefs might also be a way to question their national identity. It is possible to argue that the artists, by using queer characters, provide their audience with what Alexander Doty calls a “queer moment”. Doty has worked in the field of mass culture studies and has looked extensively into the way mass culture can be queered. In his essay “There’s Something Queer Here” (1995), he “propose[s] *queerness* as a mass culture reception practice that is shared by all sorts of people in varying degrees of consistency and intensity” (original emphasis; 72). Part of Doty’s argument is his belief that “basically heterocentrist texts can contain queer elements, and basically heterosexual, straight-identifying people can experience queer moments” (72). In other words, in those moments when heteronormativity is disrupted, those people who identify themselves as heterosexual and straight can have queer feelings and/or identify with characters who are gay, lesbian, transgender, etc. In the coming chapters, I will analyse how the artists have appropriated their queer characters to create queer moments that could unsettle the beliefs of the people in Northern Ireland.

On a final note, the term queer has so far been discussed in relation to gender. While this is useful for most of the upcoming analyses, I will also discuss some issues that can be perceived as queer in a non-gender sense. In order to make this possible, I have chosen to broaden the concept by adhering to the meaning of the verb queer, namely “to ask, inquire; to question” (OED (verb)). and to the description put forward by David Halperin in his book on Foucault (1995): “As the very word implies, ‘queer’ does not name some natural kind or refer to some determinate object; it acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm. Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant” (original emphasis; 62). By expanding the meaning of queer further than pertaining solely to gender issues, it is possible to say something about characters that are queer in, for example, a racial sense (as we shall see in *The Crying Game*), as well as to investigate a queering of classical history in *Carthaginians* and of time and space in *The International*. In a way, these are queer moments like Doty’s, but the ‘queer’ here can encompass more than issues of gender and sexuality alone.

4. “It’s my bit for the cause”

The first work up for investigation is the play *Carthaginians* (1988) by the Irish playwright Frank McGuinness. McGuinness was born in 1953 in Buncrana, County Donegal, a town on the Inishowen Peninsula, which, although situated in the North of the island, is part of the Republic of Ireland. The proximity of his hometown to the Northern Irish border and to Derry has had a profound influence on McGuinness, as he, according to Eamonn Jordan, “regards himself as both a Northern Irish and a Catholic writer in the very broadest sense of both words” (367). The playwright moved to Dublin in 1971 to attend University College. While residing there he learned of Bloody Sunday, which left its marks on him, as “it was on that particular day he lost his ‘innocence’” (Jordan 366). That this drama has had a thorough impact is most clear from his play *Carthaginians*, which deals with the aftermath of the Derry shooting.

McGuinness has been a very prolific writer during his still ongoing career. He has written many plays and has adapted existing plays, as well as attended to writing screenplays, poetry and a novel. In his work, “the dramatic focus has been on the Troubles in Northern Ireland, the sectarian conflict between Catholics and Protestants, nationalists and loyalists” (Jordan 369). This, however, does not mean that the Troubles are always prominently present. Rather, and

[d]istinctively, his drama has focused on the microcosmic inheritance of the Troubles, the individual disturbances that result. For example, *Carthaginians* ... is representative of his approach in that it did not deal the question of what happened on that terrible day, but looked at the aftermath, and the individual and collective trauma that resulted. (Nally 3)

Of his Irish plays, *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985), a popular and critical success, is perhaps best known. This play tells of eight Protestant/Loyalist soldiers from Ulster who have signed up to fight in the British Army in Ulster’s 36th Division, many of which died during the infamous Battle of the Somme in World War I. One statement often made about this piece is that it was remarkable (and highly praised) that McGuinness should “write about the rival tradition with such decisiveness and integrity” (Jordan 371), seeing as he, being a Catholic, would be deemed to have more of a connection with the Republican side. One of the themes in *Observe the Sons* is homosexuality, something that is a recurring motif in McGuinness’ oeuvre, *Carthaginians* being a case in point. As David Cregan puts it: “none [of the other Irish playwrights] have dealt with issues of gender

diversity and sexual ‘deviance’ as consistently as McGuinness” (Cregan 671). *Carthaginians* is, next to the theme of homosexuality, also connected to *Observe the Sons* in that it is often considered to be a companion piece: *Observe the Sons* is the Protestant/Loyalist play and *Carthaginians* is the Catholic/Nationalist play (Jordan 374). While *Observe the Sons*, though set in the past, bears connections to the recent Troubles (the Battle of the Somme is enshrined in Protestant mythology) and the employment of the gay character Piper allows for a critical analysis of both gender and national identity, I have opted to focus on *Carthaginians*. The decision is affected by the more obvious link to the Troubles, the staging of a gay/drag character, and the incorporation of a play-within-the-play that “assesses the role of the arts in confronting the Troubles” (Lojek 338).

Carthaginians tells the story of seven Catholic-identified characters: three women, Maela, Greta, and Sarah and four men: Seph, Harkin, Paul, and Dido. This enumeration already points to a heteronormative classification system, since Dido is homosexual and a drag character, and might vehemently disagree with being classified as male (as might the other characters for that matter). However, for argument’s sake, the characters are presented as such. The story is set in a graveyard in Derry, years after Bloody Sunday has taken place. The characters reside here, because they are waiting for the dead to rise. As the play continues, the story of each character unfolds, and their ties to Bloody Sunday are slowly revealed. Even though the play was first staged a mere sixteen years after Bloody Sunday, unlike the first staging of *Observe the Sons* with regards to the First World War, Eamonn Jordan argues that “*Carthaginians* still should be characterised as a history/memory play” (375). As mentioned, the play deals with “the individual and collective trauma” (Nally 3) as a result of the shooting. In that sense, the play falls in line with the remembrance culture that Emilie Pine writes about, which, from the 1980s onwards tends to focus on trauma (5). The characters are haunted by the events and the ghosts of Bloody Sunday, which is obvious from the play’s setting. The fact that they (still) reside at the graveyard indicates a tendency to repeat memories. This “repetition compulsion” (Ricoeur 477) leaves them unable to be a functioning part of society, which has led to their self-chosen exile in a liminal place. Riana O’Dwyer has written about the characters in McGuinness’ plays, noting that many of them exist “‘outside the domestic sphere’ in a public area she identifies as a ‘borderland’” (qtd. in Dean 99). *Carthaginians* as a whole can be regarded as a borderland: the graveyard setting, with people both dead and alive; the timeframe (it is never specified what year it is); and the larger setting of Derry and Northern Ireland, as they are torn between two communities. Even though the play seems to carry many aspects of trauma that might impede any attempt at

processing the past, *Carthaginians* would also fit in with the works that have been examined by Michael Parker, since the play suggests that there is a way to deal with the past and simultaneously move forward. This is accomplished through the combined force of Dido and his playlet, *The Burning Balaclava*.

Dido can very well be described as a borderland character, since he is in every sense of the word the outsider in this play: not only is he the youngest of the seven characters and has not experienced Bloody Sunday as consciously as they have, but also, his non-conformist sexuality clashes with that of those living in a city/country that is built on dichotomies. This, however, is his strength, as his marginal position “provid[es] perspective and a possible way forward ... *Carthaginians* use[s] examination of the past as a way to confront current Troubles, [as well as] ... gay sexuality to achieve perspective” (Lojek 338). Whereas the other characters are trying to come to terms with their past, Dido flits through the play, providing the others with food and reading material, which, in an exposition of camp that foreshadows his upcoming drag performance, he wheels around in a pram. He also offers a listening ear and unsettling conversation, for example when he is questioned by Maela about the army checkpoints he has to cross to get to the graveyard:

Maela What did they threaten to do to you, Dido?

Dido It was more what I threatened to do to them. No luck though. No score. I think they were on to me as a health hazard. One of them was nice. Blond. From Newcastle. Interested in football. Fancied him.

Greta How can you chat up Brits?

Dido Greta, you know my ambition in life is to corrupt every member of Her Majesty’s forces serving in Northern Ireland.

Greta Jesus, that should be difficult.

Dido Mock on. It’s my bit for the cause of Ireland’s freedom. When the happy day of withdrawal comes, I’ll be venerated as a national hero. They’ll build a statue to me. I’m going to insist it’s in the nude with a blue plaque in front of my balls. (*holds an imaginary plaque before himself*) This has been erected to the war effort of Dido Martin, patriot and poof.

Greta You dirty wee pervert, you –

Dido You’re right, Greta. Give us a hug, Sarah. Prove my manhood. (McGuinness 301-302; scene 1)

A first reaction of an audience to this scene is probably laughter. Nevertheless, this banter, while quite comical, also bears witness to the tensions in Northern Irish society concerning

both gender identity and politics. When Dido makes his dramatic, slightly camp statement about his bit for the cause, Greta calls him a pervert, whereupon Dido urges Sarah to hug him, because hugging a woman will prove that he is a man, in the most heteronormative sense of the word. The political tensions seem to surpass the gender issues, however, because Greta's first remark, 'How can you chat up Brits?', seems to suggest that flirting with British soldiers is even worse than Dido's gay activism. At the same time, the political tensions are ridiculed as Dido makes it seem as if a way to 'chase away' the British is to let him have his way with them.

Another moment in the play where Dido uses his position as a sexual outsider is when he confronts Hark, who tells (implicitly) about the time when he was questioned by the British Army to give up information. Hark proceeds to harass Dido, by asking him "Is there anything between your legs? Is there one between your legs? (*Hark grabs Dido's groin.*) Is the united Ireland between your legs? What happens when cocks unite? Disease, boy, disease. The united Ireland's your disease" (314; scene two). Hark here equates the pairing of two men with disease, much like a united Ireland is to him. Later in the play we learn that Hark blames himself for being a coward when he refused to participate in the Hunger Strike and when he was not able to kill for the sake of Ireland (371; scene six). It seems that his inability to fight for his beliefs has left him feeling repulsed by the idea of one Ireland, much the same as the idea of cocks uniting harbours the possibility of repulsive diseases. Judith Butler mentions the works of Mary Douglas and Simon Watney on polluting persons/AIDS in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990). It is befitting that Hark should mention disease, as AIDS was a subject of public scrutiny and hysteria during the 1980s. Indeed, as Butler points out,

[n]ot only is the illness figured as the 'gay disease,' but throughout the media's hysterical and homophobic response to the illness there is a tactical construction of a continuity between the polluted status of the homosexual by virtue of the boundary-trespass that *is* homosexuality and the disease as a specific modality of homosexual pollution ... any kind of unregulated permeability constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment. Since anal and oral sex among men clearly establishes certain kinds of bodily permeabilities unsanctioned by the hegemonic order, male homosexuality would, within such a hegemonic point of view, constitute a site of danger and pollution... (original emphasis; 132)

Hark's statement on disease linked to homosexuality and Ireland stands in sharp contrast to the conversation above, where Dido declares that his contribution to the freedom of Ireland will be through sex with the British soldiers (i.e. a unification of cocks). Hark's belief seems

firmly grounded in heteronormativity, which is emphasised when he tells Dido: “Now you know. Will you leave me alone now? Do you know my kind now?” (315; scene two). To this, Dido responds:

Dido I know my kind, Hark. Do you want me to name them? Well, there’s me. That’s all. That’s enough. I know how to use what’s between my legs because it’s mine. Can you say the same? Some people here fuck with a bullet and the rest fuck with a Bible, but I belong to neither, so I’m off to where I belong. My bed. On my own. My sweet own. (315; scene two)

Dido’s answer is interesting in that he refers to his penis as mine, and then continues to question whether Hark’s penis is his own. It seems that Dido refers here to the social constraints that determine identity for the majority in Northern Ireland. Dido is one of a kind: he knows who he is because he has embraced his fluid, non-standard identity. All the others are living either according to the bullet or the Bible, their identity formed by the rigid system of rules that determines on whose side they stand and who they oppose. Scenes like these provide McGuinness with a way to make his characters and his audience question the very notions that determine their gender and national identity.

The most explicit reversal of gender roles is found in the fourth scene of the play, with the showcasing of Dido’s playlet *The Burning Balaclava*. For the play, Dido dresses in a full-on drag outfit as Fionnuala McGonigle, a supposed French playwright, who has come to Derry, seen the suffering, and has therefore decided to write “a small piece as part of your resistance” (331; scene four). Fionnuala’s initials are not incidentally the same as those of McGuinness (F McG), which can be regarded as both a wink to McGuinness’ double status as a writer and a personified character, as well as his own homosexuality. That Dido-in-drag is quite the sight in Derry is clear, both from Greta’s remark to Maela (“Come over here and have a good gawk” (330; scene four)), as well as Dido’s commentary on the people in the streets: “Aye, I got three wolf-whistles too. All from women. Really, this town has gone to the dogs” (331; scene four). This behaviour is rather unexpected and queer for Northern Ireland, since the whistles come from women who praise a woman who is a man who is gay and in drag. Dido, after having introduced his alter-ego, proceeds to hand out the scripts and props to the others, while assigning the women men’s roles and vice versa (except for Seph). Staying true to his own digressing sexuality, Dido plays both the role of a British soldier and that of Doreen O’Doherty. The subversion of gender roles is another move by McGuinness to denaturalise any heteronormative convictions in the play. *The Burning Balaclava*, as Susan Cannon Harris points out, is

an especially blatant example of what Butler calls ‘gender parody’ ... This version of drag performance is calculated to impress on its audience that ‘true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies;’ it is not an attempt to either imitate or caricature an originary gender identity but to parody ‘the very notion of an original.’ (Harris; Butler qtd. in Harris)

What Harris, and by extension Butler, means to convey is that, as mentioned in my discussion of Queer Theory, it is possible to argue that there is no true gender; that is, there are only those repeated acts that have come to form a socially acceptable illusion of a gender identity (Butler 33). A parody, then, is an imitation of an imitation. According to Butler,

[t]his perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities. Although the gender meanings taken up in these parodic styles are clearly part of hegemonic ... culture, they are nevertheless denaturalized and mobilized through their parodic recontextualization. (138)

In other words, the audience, whose ideas about heteronormativity have been fundamentally undermined, are forced not only to reconsider their ideas about gender, but are consequently also challenged to assess their ideas about national identity. As Helen Lojek puts it: “Rejecting binary categories of sexuality, McGuinness also rejects binary sectarian categories” (338). The sectarian categories are further challenged through the names of the characters. The different personages have all been given a name that is a variation of that of the Clann ÓDhochartaigh⁵, an Irish clan that has lived in County Donegal (McGuinness’ home county) for centuries. Hark emphasises this by saying: “Surprise, surprise. Everybody in Derry’s called Doherty. It’s a known fact” (332; scene four). The characters, then, are a Catholic Mrs Doherty (Hark) and her patriot son Padraig O’Dochartaigh (Maela); a Protestant girl Mercy Dogherty (Paul); her RUC father (Greta); Father Docherty (Seph); the Catholic Jimmy Doherty (Sarah); and then the Catholic Doreen O’Doherty (Dido). Paul insists that he cannot be a Protestant with a name like Docherty, to which Dido replies: “You spell Dogherty with a ‘g’” (332), which might be to make it seem somewhat more Scottish (as many of the ancestors of the Irish Protestants were Scots Presbyterians).

With *The Burning Balaclava*, McGuinness has effectively turned the entire Northern Irish society upside down: the staunch gender identity distinction has been queered by

⁵ www.odochartaigh.org

allowing the characters to adopt roles of the opposite sex, while the different versions of “Doherty” afford the possibility of including both Catholic and Protestant characters. McGuinness’ decision to specifically use drag and subversion of gender in this playlet to assess issues regarding gender and national identity appears logical when observing the timeframe in which the play was created. In 1988, homosexual acts had been decriminalised barely six years earlier in Northern Ireland through The Homosexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 1982. As such, it is conceivable that the audience are sufficiently shocked in their heteronormative convictions when they witness a performance in drag, men and women acting as the other gender, and conversations regarding sex between men. Also, the theatre setting allows for an atmosphere of exaggeration and alienation which can enhance the shock.

The end of the playlet sees all the characters dead as they have all murdered each other. Dido makes one last dramatic statement: “They’ve got me. I join the dying. What’s a Brit under the clay? What’s a Protestant in the ground? What’s a Catholic in the grave? All the same. Dead. All dead. We’re all dead” (344; scene four). This declaration cuts at the heart of what McGuinness tries to put across: if gender roles can be reversed and one name can have different versions and still be the same, how then are the Catholics and Protestants so different from one another?

Nearing the end of this analysis, I want to look at the implication of McGuinness’ choice to use ‘Carthage’ and ‘Dido’ for his play. The title *Carthaginians* refers to ancient Carthage, a city well-known through the *Aeneid* of Virgil and Henry Purcell’s opera *Dido and Aeneas*, two works which are alluded to throughout the play. The decision by McGuinness to use Carthage was probably influenced by the century-long use of Carthage and the Carthaginians by the Irish as a form of opposition against the British. While “[t]he myth of Carthaginian descent was originally invoked to counteract the degrading English insistence that Irish ethnic characteristics derived from the savage Scythians” (Cullingford 222), from the eighteenth century onwards, the invocation of a mythical link between Ireland and Carthage was used as a means of showing “imaginative Irish resistance to British colonial rule, [which] intensified when British troops came to the North in 1969” (Cullingford 222). The link between Ireland and Carthage as opposed to Britain goes back to foundational myths that connect Britain with ancient Troy and Aeneas, who visited Carthage. However, unlike in the works of Virgil and Purcell, in which queen Dido of Carthage dies of heartbreak after Aeneas’ departure, which would suggest an Ireland dying at the hands of the British, the Derry-Dido survives. The foundational myths also made a connection between Britain and the ancient Roman Empire, which was established to enhance the status of the British colonial

empire (Cullingford 223). According to history, ancient Carthage was ransacked by the Romans after the Punic Wars. McGuinness could have used the theme of destruction to show how the British Army ‘destroyed’ Derry on Bloody Sunday. However, at the end of the play, Dido confirms that no such fate will befall Derry: “While I walk the earth, I walk through you, the streets of Derry. If I meet one who knows you and they ask, how’s Dido? Surviving. How’s Derry? Surviving. Carthage has not been destroyed” (379; scene seven). By providing a queer moment of classic history⁶, as well as queering the relationship between Great Britain and Derry (bluntly put Protestant and Catholic), McGuinness gives his audience food for thought. If he can temporarily alter history (albeit mythical) and make a homosexual drag character the queen of Carthage (Queen Dido of Carthage becomes Queen Dido of Derry), why then should his audience not be able to alter their perception of their own history and their relationship with one another?

Anne F. Kelly-O’Reilly, in the chapter “*Carthaginians*: Narratives of Death and Resurrection in a Derry Graveyard” (2002), argues that McGuinness’ play “can be read as a contemporary Passion narrative” (93), in that the characters have to come to terms with their past and with each other, and only then will they proceed from death to life. Dido, as the outsider, has the heuristic function of leading the characters to their redemption. At the end of the play, Paul recites the names, ages and addresses of those who died during Bloody Sunday, after which the characters proceed to forgive “the dead ... the dying ... the living ... yourself” (378; scene seven). They then fall asleep while the sun shines down on the graveyard, essentially signifying their passage from the liminal place of the graveyard that has been their home towards their salvation. Susan Cannon Harris is less certain of the strength of Dido’s unsettling and heuristic abilities. She wonders if the audience will “rise to the challenge” after

Dido [has] expose[d] [his] [audiences], on stage and in the theater, to an understanding of individual and political identity that may avoid ‘foreclos[ing] ... possible articulations of the subject-position’ that might offer a way out of the lethal oppositions that characterize politics in Northern Ireland, a version of identity in which ‘performance ... preempt[s] narrative[s]’ that have become too rigid and restrictive to allow change or resolution. (Harris; Butler qtd. in Harris)

It is my belief that with *Carthaginians*, Frank McGuinness wanted to give an insightful message to both the Catholic and the Protestant community (as he also wanted with *Observe the Sons*). Through the use of Dido and his playlet, McGuinness acknowledges the pain of

⁶ Queer in the meaning of David Halperin, as discussed in the section on Queer Theory

members of the Catholic community, as well as letting the humour and destabilising of gender and national identity allow for an examination of the tensions between both sides. In terms of social categories, this work has focused on Catholics versus British/Protestants. The analysis in the next chapter will focus on these categories, as well as on matters of race.

5. “Kind of liked you as a girl”

In 1992, the film *The Crying Game*, directed by Neil Jordan, was released in theatres. The film was “a surprising commercial success in large measure because of Miramax’s campaign that urged reviewers and audience members not to spoil the film’s big reveal” (Zucker xv). This massive disclosure was of course the (to some shocking) sex scene between Fergus/Jimmy and Dil, when, just before initiating the actual act, Dil is revealed to be a transvestite.

In the analysis of *Carthaginians*, it is evident that Dido takes full advantage of his outsider position as a gay and a drag figure in an attempt to change the norms and standards of the characters around him, as well as those of the audience. The link between gender identity and the Troubles in *The Crying Game* is more subtle, prompting, for example, Kristin Handler to argue that “nationalism and racial difference become pretext and backdrop for a drama of sex, identity and desire”, after which she adds that “the film isn’t ultimately very interested in politics as such” (32). Keeping in line with Maria Pramaggiore, I want to argue that there is a case to be made that the film actually does have a lot to do with politics (86), if only because politics and national identity are inextricably linked in Northern Ireland. David Lugowski, in his article “Genre Conventions and Visual Style in *The Crying Game*” (1993), agrees with Handler by saying that “questions of what seem to be the ‘political’ are collapsed into the realm of the ‘personal’”. The most obvious casualty is the film’s treatment of the IRA; any sort of violent goings-on around the world would probably have sufficed equally well.” While Lugowski has a point in arguing that the IRA does not feature extensively in this film, it must be kept in mind that the film was not meant to provide significant insight into the machinery of the IRA. Rather, as Neil Jordan himself indicates, “[t]o me it had a lot to do with the IRA at the time, to see if they could change” (qtd. in Falsetto 19). The protagonist, Fergus, is a member of the IRA, and the film revolves around him, and his discovery of who he is as a person:

Could people’s narrow identifications of themselves change? This country has been blighted with a sense of exclusive identification of people who see themselves as Catholic, Protestant, Unionist, or Nationalist. It was an exploration of self. That’s what I wanted to do with it. If you strip away all these masks human beings wear, is anything left underneath? Is anything left of Fergus when all this stuff is stripped away from him? In fact, there is, and he turns out to be a human being. (Jordan qtd. in Falsetto 19)

I believe, contrary to what Lugowski says, that it is telling that Jordan would choose Northern Ireland as the setting for his film, especially when one takes into consideration Jordan's vision of wanting to see whether people can change once boundaries are crossed and identity (in whichever form) is questioned. The film is shot as a diptych, with the first part set in Northern Ireland during the Troubles, and the second part in London a short time later. While the first third of the film is mainly focused on matters of race and national identity, the episode in London attends to the subversion and transgression of gender identity boundaries, all the while within the boundaries of the political (Jordan in Falsetto 20). The examination of *The Crying Game*, then, will focus on the undermining of gender and national identity, while also taking the race of Jody and Dil into account.

The story starts at a carnival with the seduction of the black, British soldier Jody by a woman named Jude (the audience later learns that she is an IRA member). The seduction turns out to be a trap, as Jody is kidnapped by several IRA men, among whom is Fergus, a volunteer. After Jody has been brought to a hide-out and has been tied and hooded, Fergus is assigned the task of taking care of him. It is at this point in the film that the audience experiences a racially queer moment. Both Fergus and Jody are part of a minority: Fergus is a Catholic, while Jody is black, having emigrated from the former British colony of Antigua as a child. Eila Rantonen points out that "*The Crying Game* intertwines the problematics of race and colonialism because both the Irish and the blacks have been racialized in British colonial history. Celts have been classified as an inferior 'dark' and violent race ... [T]he Irish have been referred to as 'white niggers'" (193). While for centuries the British have fulfilled the role of colonizer in Ireland, Jody, though British, also belongs to a race that has been colonised. Fergus, in turn, even though, as an Irish Catholic, he has been colonised by the British and, to an extent, by the Irish Protestants, in this situation has got the upper hand. Neil Jordan lets his characters comment on "this strange thing of the victimized minority victimizing another minority" (qtd. in Falsetto 20). Jody highlights his racially inferior position in Northern Ireland:

JODY It was a job. So I get sent to the only place in the world they call you nigger to your face.

...

JODY (*He imitates a Belfast accent*) "Go back to your banana tree, nigger." No use telling them I came from Tottenham.⁷

⁷ www.dailyscript.com/scripts/cg.html

At the same time, Jody also refers to Fergus as Paddy, an extremely clichéd stereotype. Jordan forces his audience to question their own assumptions about national identity by creating friction between two minorities, between the historical colonizer and the colonised, between the white male and the ‘other’. That Jody’s ethnicity is a disadvantage in Great Britain as well is clear from his remark “It was a job”. The army was one of the few places where black men from a working class background could hope to secure an occupation.

Dil is the other black character in the film. It is somewhat noteworthy that in the interviews with Neil Jordan which Carole Zucker has edited in her book *Neil Jordan: Interviews* (2013), Jordan does not mention Dil’s race, but merely elaborates on her gender and its consequences for the film. Critics argue that the issues of race, mostly pertaining to Dil, are overlooked, both in the film (Michel “Racial”) and in the critical reception (Rantonen 193). Frann Michel points out that “the fact that the film’s two black or biracial characters are also sexual outlaws leaves unquestioned a conventional equation between racial and sexual otherness”. It is indeed striking that both the sexual outsiders in the film are also black. Then again, seeing as that the film was first screened a good twenty years ago when the attitudes towards homosexuality, transgenderism, and interracial relationships were less positive, it seems logical that Jody and Dil would seek each other out.

For the analysis of gender identity, I will firstly look into the actions of Jude. As mentioned, the IRA group manages to distract and isolate Jody through the seduction techniques of Jude. While she seems a regular girl then, it appears that she is just as fierce, zealous and ideological as the rest of the group, perhaps even more so. During a scene between Jude and Fergus, Jude talks crudely to Fergus and Jody and even hits the latter:

JUDE Put that thing back on him, Fergus.

FERGUS He's hot.

JUDE Doesn't matter if he's hot. Just cover the fucker up.

JODY Have you no feelings, woman?

JUDE You shut your face

(She pulls the hood down over him.)

JUDE You're heading for trouble, Fergus

JODY He's a good soldier, Jude.

(She whacks him with a pistol.)

JUDE I said shut the fuck up.

The gender identities of Fergus and Jude are compromised here. When one considers the gender roles that are supposed to be ‘womanly’ in a heteronormative society, one finds that

women should be soft, caring, and non-violent. Instead, Jude is, in Jordan's own words "a snarly, psychopathic killer" (qtd. in Falsetto 19). Several critics have criticised Jordan's depiction of Jude. Marina Burke, in her interview with Jordan, blames him for depicting Jude in a misogynist manner, to which Jordan angrily replies "she's the strongest person in the whole film" (qtd. in Burke 63). Likewise, Lance Pettitt describes *The Crying Game* as "cinematic misogyny" ("Construction"). It can very well be argued that Burke, Pettitt, and other critics who have problems with the portrayal of Jude, bypass the queering of gender identity that Jordan seems to have inserted in his film. Fergus softens, 'feminises' from a tough IRA guy who is "a Catholic and a nationalist ... a political animal ... wedded to violence" to a caring, compassionate man through his developing friendship with Jody (Jordan qtd. in Falsetto 19). Jude, on the other hand, moves into the realm of the masculine, as she swears, handles guns and is ready to use her sexuality for the cause when she seduces Jody (this is in fact much the same as Dido in *Carthaginians*). When she moves to London, in a scene between her and Fergus, Jude takes on the role of sexual predator by telling him "Fuck me, Fergus", while threatening him with a gun. Her actions can be regarded as an instance of "bending phallic patriarchy" (Boozier Jr. "Bending"), the consequence of which is the emasculation of Fergus. In a sense, she is more of a 'man' than Fergus, whose name "somewhat ironically signifies 'manly strength'" (Pramaggiore 87). To a certain extent, Burke is right when she speaks about Jude as if she is a caricature. However, due to her heteronormative beliefs, she sees Jude in a negative sense, rather than taking into account the queering, destabilising way in which this character can also be regarded.

In the second part of the film, Fergus finds himself in London, after the drama that took place in Northern Ireland (his inability to kill Jody; Jody's escape and subsequent death by an army vehicle; and the killing of several IRA members by British troops). Fergus managed to get away, and now finds himself in need of a new identity, so he adopts the name Jimmy. Once in London, Fergus/Jimmy goes looking for Dil, the girlfriend of Jody. In a subtle foreshadowing of the impending 'shock', Jody tells Fergus that Jude is not his type, adding, after making Fergus pull a picture of Dil out of his wallet: "Now she's my type". After Fergus gives his approval, Jody tells him: "She wouldn't suit you", which becomes painfully clear when Fergus/Jimmy and Dil start to have sex and Dil's revelation causes Fergus/Jimmy to get sick. The real shock for both Fergus/Jimmy and the audience might not even be the fact that Dil has a penis, but rather, the total and utter discontinuity between her gender performance and her biological sex. This queering of gender identity can be captured by the idea of performativity, whereby gender is not innate, but rather "an identity tenuously

constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*” (original emphasis; Butler 140). This pertains to Dil in that through the repeated acts of the female gender she ‘becomes’ a woman, even though her biological assets are masculine. On paper, it is relatively easy to argue that Dil’s gender and biological sex can be seen as separate. Dil herself assures Fergus/Jimmy that these matters are simply “details, baby, details”. However, in a heteronormative society where gender and biological sex are considered binary and exclusive, for many people it is hard to grasp the concept of an anatomical man who performs the gender of a woman so well that she fools Fergus/Jimmy, along with a great number of viewers. Many viewers leaving the theatres either claimed that Dil was in fact “‘really’ a woman wearing a prosthetic penis”, or that they knew from the start that Dil was actually “‘really’ a man” (Michel “Racial”). Whatever side one chooses, both arguments are grounded in heteronormative ideas, because Dil must ‘really’ be either one or the other, and there is no way that her anatomy can be disconnected from her gender performance. Frann Michel suggests that “[b]y avowing that gender is a stable and legible essence, such viewers disavow the film’s demonstration that gender is a performance, and they refuse the conceptual reframings that the film provides” (“Racial”). Jude, on the other hand, is a biological woman, and while she dresses so as well (especially in London), her acts give way to confusion, since she ‘does not act the part’. Rather, “Jude chooses to sacrifice herself for the IRA cause, placing Irish nationalism not only above her sexual orientation but above her humanity. ... Jude’s projection of her personal desires through militant forms of political activism fixes her in the symbolic as a phallic woman” (Boozer Jr. “Bending”). The gender uncertainty of both Dil and Jude rubs off on Fergus/Jimmy. Is he heterosexual, because of his involvement with Jude? Is he a budding homosexual, because, as many critics argue, there are certain homoerotic elements in his relationship with Jody? And what to think of his relationship with Dil? As there are as many answers as there are sides to argue, it seems that the film succeeds in its effort to destabilize the audience’s sense of gender identity.

Compared to *Carthaginians*, the depiction of gender queerness in *The Crying Game* is not as in your face. This could be attributed to the passing of time. The film was produced some years later than the play, which meant that the people in Northern Ireland had had more time to adjust to the fact that homosexual acts had been decriminalised. However, the queering of gender in the film and the subsequent subversion of national identity is, like in *Carthaginians*, still caused by a shock effect and a sense of alienation. The viewers literally see the gender queerness of Dil inscribed on her body, but they are not privy to her thoughts (or to those of the other characters for that matter), and so they are unable to truly empathise

with these queer characters. The next (and last) analysis will show how the passing of time has influenced the artist to create a work that includes the audience more.

The link that Jordan has spun between gender and national identity is aptly described by Judith Halberstam:

[T]he fact that Dil is anatomically male throws all other identities in the film into doubt ... [The film] is a scathing critique of identity politics: accordingly, its backdrop – IRA terrorism – must be read in light of this critique. If gender identities are uncertain, and if sexual instincts often lead us astray, then how much less reliable are concepts such as national identity? (qtd. in Pramaggiore 86)

While I do not agree with her argument that the Troubles and the IRA merely function as a backdrop to the story, Halberstam articulates my main point exactly. If the rigidity of heteronormativity can be undermined, how then can the audience be certain of other forms of identification, such as national identity? This is especially true for the people in Northern Ireland, who for centuries have identified themselves either with Great Britain or with Ireland, and, in so doing, have failed to recognize that over time, they have more in common with each other than with either the British or the Southern Irish. Robert McLiam Wilson, in his novel *Eureka Street* (1998), describes this paradox accurately:

The tragedy was that Northern Ireland (Scottish) Protestants thought themselves like the British. Northern Ireland (Irish) Catholics thought themselves like Eireans (proper Irish). The comedy was that any once-strong difference had long melted away and they resembled no one now as much as they resembled each other. The world saw this and mostly wondered, but round these parts folk were blind. (163)

Before moving on to the last analysis, I want to go over the parable of “The Scorpion and the Frog”, which features prominently in the film. The story is told twice, once by Jody to Fergus and once at the end of the film by Fergus to Dil. The parable has been received with mixed feelings by reviewers, who are not sure what to make of this tale (Berlando 93). Critics such as Kristin Handler argue that the parable displays “essential human identities (the scorpion can’t help being destructive, the frog can’t help being kind, because it’s in their natures)” (32). This seems true, since Jody basically tells Fergus the same thing when he equates the IRA with the scorpion:

JODY And even if he doesn't die -- you can't just let me loose.

FERGUS Why can't we?

JODY Not in your nature.

FERGUS What do you know about my nature?

JODY I'm talking about your people, not you.

FERGUS What the fuck do you know about my people?

JODY Only that you're all tough undeluded motherfuckers. And that it's not in your nature to let me go.

Jody later likens Fergus to the frog, because he is kind, which is in his nature. The question is what is the meaning of the parable? What is meant by “nature”? Why is there a parable that hinges on a binary system in a film that encompasses multiple queer characters and which sees the subversion of gender identity in a scene that, according to Traci B. Abbott, is “[p]erhaps the most famous genital scene in the trans film genre” (“Trans”)? I would suggest that it is meant to create confusion. The binary idea behind the parable fits Northern Irish society where everything, from nationality to religion to gender, is established in oppositions. When the parable is told for the first time, the viewers of the film might recognise the underlying dichotomy. However, after having witnessed Fergus, Jody, Jude, and Dil act their gender in a confusing manner, they are forced to reassess their ideas regarding nature, gender, race, and national identity once they see the second performance of the parable. Stephen Rea, the actor who portrays Fergus/Jimmy, points out that the film concerns itself with encompassing all kinds of characters, rather than excluding certain characters because of their queerness:

The emotional journey is that Fergus realizes that you can love anyone. He goes from being a man who's got a very rigid code about who you can offer love to, and it doesn't include British soldiers, it doesn't include black men, or black people. So by the end of the movie, he knows, and we all know and all feel it, you can love anyone — race, gender, nationality, are all meaningless. (Rea qtd. in Zucker 76)

6. “If I had known history was to be written that Sunday”

The last work to be analysed is Glenn Patterson’s novel *The International*, which was published shortly after the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. The main character is Daniel ‘Danny Boy’ Hamilton, an eighteen-year-old lad who works as a bartender in the Blue Bar of the International Hotel in Belfast’s city centre, across from City Hall. The story is set on Saturday 28 January 1967, the day before the inaugural meeting of the Northern Irish Civil Rights Association. This work differs from the two previous works on a number of points. Firstly, the book was published after the Troubles officially ended and is set before it started, whereas the other two stories were created and are set during the Troubles. This allows Patterson the advantage of more hindsight on the past three decades. Also, unlike the obvious homosexuality and drag performance in *Carthaginians*, and the shock effect of Dil’s anatomy/appearance discontinuity and the racial issues that are raised in *The Crying Game*, the queerness in *The International* is based on including readers, rather than alienating them. Through a first person narrator and a mode of storytelling that borders on stream of consciousness (many stories/storylines are started, abandoned and picked up later in the novel), Patterson draws the reader into the story. As such, he is able to create sympathy for a main character who, as Patterson points out, “is simply who he is” (qtd. in Magennis, “Interview” 117). The genre of the novel works well for this particular story, as “[t]he novel as a form would not exist if characters, human beings, could be summed up and dispensed with in a few words. It thrives on complexity and contradiction” (Patterson, “Writing” 255). This description fits the anti-heteronormativity beliefs that Patterson expresses in an interview with Caroline Magennis, stating that

none of us are anything, we are not aware of ourselves in terms of gender and sexuality, we are not aware of ourselves in race terms, in ethnic terms, religious terms. ... [T]here is this core of us that’s, that’s me, that’s you, without labels. I don’t feel like it’s fixed, I don’t feel our identities are fixed, and I think that most identities are limiting positions. (qtd. in Magennis, “Interview” 117)

Patterson’s belief in the fluidity of identities is that great that it has permeated every aspect of his novel. Not only is Danny ‘comfortably’ gay, but the spatial and temporal setting of the story can be regarded as queer as well. As will be argued in this analysis, through the combination of Danny’s queerness and a first person narrator perspective, heteronormative reality in the novel is replaced with a homosexual/queer reality, which allows for a queering of characters, space and time.

6.1 Danny

Danny, as mentioned above, is the perfect example of Patterson's firm belief that identities and labels are constricting, which is apparent from his deviant sexuality in a heteronormative society and his indifference to religion. Because of Danny's rather confident conviction of who he is, combined with his exclusive viewpoint during the story, the reader is forced to see pre-Troubles Belfast through queer glasses.

The first time the reader learns of Danny's attraction to boys is when he relates of the Unpleasantness, which is the kiss between Danny and a schoolmate during a school dance (Patterson 31). This action leaves him expelled from school, brought home by the police to his shocked parents, and it is the trigger event for him to land the job as a barman. On the one hand, the reaction of the people is consistent with the time Danny grew up. During the 1960s, homosexuality was certainly not acceptable as it is nowadays, especially considering that homosexual acts were not decriminalised in Northern Ireland until 1982. Also, while the Troubles had not yet started and the heteronormative rules that came to dictate society in pretty much every area were not as rigidly adhered to, Belfast was, as Danny puts it, "the most God-obsessed of cities" (Patterson 27), leaving not much room for the acceptance of a deviant sexuality. However, on the other hand, the reaction of Danny's parents is pretty subdued. While they are upset, they do not admonish him. Rather, they are more concerned for his "(now reduced) Future" (Patterson 32). This is a far cry from the verbal abuse and beatings Fergal receives in Brian Kennedy's *The Arrival of Fergal Flynn* (2004) as a result of his budding homosexuality while growing up in Belfast in the early 1980s. Patterson uses Danny's transgression to point out the triviality of his actions compared to what is to follow: "there are things in this world far more unpleasant than two boys kissing and by the beginning of the following week Belfast had lurched a step nearer to its unpleasant future (or perhaps I mean past)" (33). After the Unpleasantness, Danny is employed in the Blue Bar of the International. It is here that he fully comes to explore his sexuality, since, as he points out: "There had been women as well, the odd time. Why not? I was just eighteen, I was having fun, and once you switch on there is no telling what signals you will pick up" (Patterson 74). That Danny is not alone in enjoying the refuge of the hotel is clear when he remarks: "Hotels are places where people go hoping for sex. Newlyweds, of course, and second-honeymooners and dirty-weekenders; but they were far from alone" (70). The hotel does not provide the only source of sex for Danny. Through Frank, a guest at the Blue Bar, Danny learns that there are many more men in Belfast who seek each other's company. Though these men are forced to be wary concerning their desires, as the law did not permit it, clandestine sexual encounters

still take place, with Danny as a participant (73-74). It was rather different during the Troubles, when gay men not only had the law to fear, but also radicals from both sides who would attack such men and beat them senseless. Patterson foreshadows this change in attitude that would soon become reality in Belfast at the end of his novel. As Danny walks the street after his Saturday shift has ended, he is verbally harassed by some guys, who call him “fruit” and “bum boy” (234). This is the first time in the story that other people openly acknowledge Danny’s sexuality and take offence in a threatening manner. Judith Butler argues in *Gender Trouble* (1990) that

[b]ecause there is neither an ‘essence’ that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions — and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction ‘compels’ our belief in its necessity and naturalness. The historical possibilities materialized through various corporeal styles are nothing other than those punitively regulated cultural fictions alternately embodied and deflected under duress. (140)

In other words, because gender is not something innate, but rather a social construction, the rigid rules that exist in a heteronormative environment must be strictly adhered to, at the cost of punishment to prevent the transgressing of these rules. Danny, then, is being punished for circumventing those rules that would come to constitute part of Northern Irish identity, something that Patterson, with his ideas about fluid identities, vehemently protests against in this novel. Patterson’s description of Danny’s sexual actions, which, up until the end of the novel, seem possible despite being criminalized, shows that Belfast, and as an extension Northern Ireland and national identity, need not be seen as black and white as the Troubles had made them seem to be. As Caroline Magennis argues: “in employing a bisexual leading man [Patterson] queers Northern Irish identity” (“Dissidents” 187). Victoria Schmieder argues that the way Patterson portrays Belfast through Danny’s experience of sex, “establish[es] the urban society as a space in which experiments and new experiences are possible, despite appearances that suggest otherwise. Seemingly closed systems and gridlocked norms are opened up to offer alternative perspectives” (134). In other words, by replacing heteronormative reality by queer reality, the author queers time and space in the novel, as will be shown shortly.

Religion, or rather, the absence of it, is another indication of Danny's 'otherness'. Patterson himself is guarded when it comes to religion as a definition of one's identity (in Burgess "Interview"), and this is portrayed in Danny and his parents. His parents are from a Catholic and Protestant background, but "it was as though when they met their native faiths had somehow cancelled each other out" (27). Danny himself is only a Protestant because the local State primary was the closest to his home. Danny's parents did not actively renounce their faith, but rather, let it slip away naturally. According to Victoria Schmieder,

[b]y portraying this loss not so much as a conscious act but as a natural development, the text denies categorisation according to religion its legitimacy. Being Catholic or Protestant does not constitute an essential denomination everyone is credited with at birth, but they rather have a choice not to comply with the binarism. (127)

To bring the point home that religion is overrated, Danny's parents, in their time of need, rather than turning to a Bible, consult the *Reader's Digest* (69). Unlike his parents, Danny actively chooses to turn away from religion when he declares that, "[n]o church marked my arrival into the world and I have left instructions that none is to mark my leaving" (27).

Schmieder argues that "choosing a wholly secular lifestyle [, i]n Belfast this constitutes also an intention to remain outside the existing religious binarism and to remain neutral in the face of open hatred between the two groups" (127). However, as will be pointed out in the section on space, Danny is not completely free from religious prejudice near the end of the novel.

6.2 Time

Danny has been working as a barman at the International ever since the murder of the previous, Catholic, barman Peter Ward in 1966 by the UVF, which was, according to Patterson "the first definite signal that you were no longer free to move about Belfast" (qtd. in Magennis, "Interview" 118). The story is set, as mentioned, on the last Saturday of January 1967, at the "go-anywhere, [liminal] moment" (Patterson qtd. in Magennis, "Interview" 118) between the murder of Ward and the meeting of the NICRA, the moment when the Troubles have not yet started but the groundwork is laid down. By setting his novel at this exact time, Patterson allows for an insight in what the city felt like before it was terrorized for three decades, which to some, especially those growing up during the conflict, might feel foreign. For them, the timeframe of the novel provides a queer moment⁸ that might provide for a reappraisal of the Troubles.

⁸ Queer in the meaning of David Halperin, as discussed in the section on Queer Theory

The International starts with the sentence: “If I had known history was to be written that Sunday in the International Hotel I might have made an effort to get out of bed before teatime” (Patterson 1). With the advantage of hindsight, as the story is told (and recalled) by Danny a good thirty years after that Saturday during which the story is set, he is now able to see that what would transpire from that weekend would be one of the triggers for the Troubles. However, at the time, Danny knew not nor could he have known that history was about to be made. In fact, the fire at Brand’s Arcade that is described at the beginning of the story is deemed far more important, as “fires [are] after all looking much more like our idea of history in the making” (Patterson 2), which is somewhat ironic, seeing as fires were a daily occurrence during the Troubles. After the fire, on his way to the hotel, Danny and Barney, a co-worker, spot a couple arguing, which prompts Barney to say: “You’d think [...] people’d have something better to do with their Saturdays”, to which Danny responds: “You’d think” (Patterson 6). Once again it seems somewhat ironic that the many Saturdays to come in the next decades are filled with terror, which would make people wish for something as ordinary as a lovers’ tiff. It is these domestic scenes, coupled with such casual remarks, which could lead the reader to experience a queer moment, seeing as they have the knowledge of what is to come in a short time.

There are several scenes in the book that indicate that the city/country is slowly being set up to function as the stage of the conflict. Peter Ward’s murder, of course, is one hint. Others are remarks about the Evangelical Protestant Society, Ian Paisley, and the IRA. Even though the Evangelicals are described as “fruitcakes” and Paisley as a “joke” (Patterson 64), and the war that is declared by the UVF on the IRA and its splinter groups is rather baffling since “[i]t was news to most people that there was enough of an IRA to splinter” (65), it all “became less funny each time you heard it” (64). At the same time, the country and its people were mostly optimistic about the future. For example, the name of the hotel was changed from the Union to the International in 1960, signalling that the city was beginning to open up to the world (Patterson in Mills 128). Also, as Patterson points out, politicians seemed to be fairly confident, in that “the leader of the Nationalist parties at the time, Eddie MacAteer, was speaking down in Limerick, and he said: ‘Change is occurring in Northern Ireland, it is only discernible at the moment as a lightness in the air’” (Patterson in Mills 128). It is at this cross-section in time that the story of everyday life in a hotel takes place, where weddings and bar guests are more important than the budding conflict that would have such an impact.

6.3 Space

Like the temporal setting, the spatial setting can be argued to be liminal, somewhat like the graveyard setting of *Carthaginians*. A hotel, as Danny indicates is, “already a holiday from the everyday world” (Patterson 80), a place where people of whichever religion, class, race, nationality, and sexuality can mingle, drink, and just be, and this is exactly the crowd that is found at the Blue Bar and in the hotel. It can be argued that the liminality that pertains to the hotel can also be applied to Belfast. Patterson points out that “[c]ities seem to entail a mixture, whereas the nation state and the language of nationalism is about purity, exclusion” (qtd. in Patten). The confined setting of a hotel and a city allow for an examination of the country’s exclusionary tendencies within a mixed environment. The marginality of space in this novel queers the perception of the readers concerning the Troubles.

There are several weddings taking place at the hotel that particular Saturday, one of which binds two families from different classes together: the family of the bride brings the money into the marriage, which provides for a carriage that seems to be taken from a Grimm fairytale (59). The family of the groom is considerably poorer, seeing as the only tip a relative of the groom can offer Danny is some coppers (62). In the vacuum of the International, and of Belfast, class differences are not important, and neither are political differences. After a day of arguing with each other across the street in City Hall, politicians frequent the bar and are able to laugh together over a joke about the Union (the former name of the hotel) in relation to the union of Northern Ireland and the Republic, which is, as Danny tells us, the thing that the hotel stood for then: uniting all people (22-23). This uniting also applies to Protestants and Catholics. Both religions work and drink at the bar and during most of the novel, the neutrality of the bar is maintained. However, towards the end of the novel, Jamesie, a fellow barman, drops a hint that the future will not be so lenient when he unexpectedly refers to Danny as “you Prods” (196). This is met by unease from Danny: “The word caught me like a sharp stick under the ribs. No one in the International had ever made such direct mention of religion to me” (196). The sheer surprise of Danny at being identified on the basis of which school he attended could be a queer moment for readers to scrutinize their ideas and prejudices regarding religion. While the liminal space of the hotel still functions to examine society as it was before the Troubles, it is not wholly uncompromised. The murder of Peter Ward has brought politics into the International: “The International was no protection to its four barmen” (197).

As the name ‘the International’ indicates, the hotel allows for both a local point of view of the city as well as an international viewpoint. The latter is exemplified by the Vances.

They are a rich, older American couple on vacation in Ireland. What we gather from their reaction to Belfast is that it was an unobtrusive town until the Troubles began:

The Vances were surprised by Belfast. I would go so far as to say they were tickled to find a city of any size here at all. Dublin they knew plenty about – James Joyce and Molly Malone – but Belfast...? Folks back home didn't sing songs about it and the Vances couldn't remember ever having seen the city in the movies. Natalie in particular kept on about how *cute* everything was, as though Belfast was a doll-sized version of the real thing. ... [S]he and Bob regarded the inhabitants with the same mixture of affection and amusement. Nothing is too serious in a toy town. (original emphasis; 80)

Whereas for centuries the people of Northern Ireland were entangled in a conflict over nationhood and belonging, the attitude of the Vances puts this all into perspective by their notion of a 'toy town'. While not belittling the Troubles, through this other, international, viewpoint Patterson indicates the relative insignificance of it all. The other thing that the Vances introduce to the hotel is a different take on sexual freedom. In a city where homosexuality is not legal and heteronormativity is standard, though not as rigid as during the Troubles, the Vances engage Danny in a threesome, after having sought him out at the bar. Even though they do not acknowledge Danny the following morning, but rather try to get away from him as fast as possible (after all, arrest would have resulted in three decades in prison (Patterson 237)), the very act destabilises heteronormativity.

Another more international view on Belfast is given by Ted 'Bap' Connolly, a footballer from Belfast who plays for an English club. While at the bar, he expresses his distaste of the recent developments in Belfast:

"Take last summer. England has the World Cup. London's like... what am I saying, London? Even *Sunderland* – there's all these people, Chileans, Italians, *Koreans*, for God's sake – we were dropping fucking bombs on them when I was at school – and they're in and out of the bars, drinking with the locals, singing, swapping scarves. And what are they up to in bloody Belfast?"

Extinguishing streetlamps on the corner of Malvern Street and Arial Street. Waiting in the self-inflicted darkness on four guys strayed into a bar on the 'wrong' side of town.

...

"It's a joke," he mumbled. "We're a joke." (194)

Here, Patterson gives an account of what the world thought about what was going on in the city even before the Troubles started, providing the reader with a different perspective.

The liminal setting of *The International* with all the different individuals and social categories counters, according to Patterson, the damaging language and rhetoric of politics:

I think the rhetoric of politics is reductive. ... [T]he language of politics in Northern Ireland has tended to try and tell you what the reality is, and there are these competing realities that are just political opinions. And I think each book, or each work of art, says, 'The reality is also like this, and also like this, and also like this'. (Burgess "Interview")

Through his novel, Patterson opens up the conflict and exposes the people to different truths, because "[w]e have to allow that there are as many versions of the past as there are individuals who experienced the past. Simply saying that means that you can't come up with an absolute version of what that past was" (Patterson qtd. in Hicks 116).

As this analysis has tried to show, the queerness in this story has the ability to subvert gender, space, and time, while the style of writing allows for readers to be pulled into the novel. As such, they experience the story in a queer, rather than a heteronormative reality. As Anne Enright puts it: "*The International* insists that Belfast existed before the Troubles and that it was owned by the people who walked its streets before those streets were taken from them" (258). As said, for many people, especially those whose youth was spent during the conflict, this must come as a foreign notion. What the book does, then, is attempt to queer their current notion of the city, in order to help them see that things can be mended. In that light, it is rather poignant that the first day after the Good Friday Agreement was a Saturday, because, according to Danny: "I thank the god who gave it its name for Saturday. The people's day. It didn't matter what sort of a fuck-up you made of the rest of the week, Saturday was your chance to put it right or put it behind you. Saturday was a day, I always felt, when anything might happen" (13).

7. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to investigate how queer figures are used in Northern Irish arts to attempt to bridge the gap between the two opposing communities in Northern Ireland. In order to answer the questions that were put forward in the introduction, I have looked at three works from different genres, which have been created at different times during and after the Troubles. From the analyses, a couple of interesting points can be concluded. Regarding the progress of time, the analysis reveals that in *Carthaginians*, the choice of Frank McGuinness to use a character that is exuberantly gay and a drag queen might be due to the time the play was produced, namely shortly after homosexual acts were decriminalized. McGuinness uses alienation and exaggeration to stun his audience and destabilise their heteronormative ideas, while Dido's heuristic function helps the other characters to come to peace with their pasts. In Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game*, the subversion of gender is not immediately obvious to the audience, which is possible because the film was produced some years later than *Carthaginians*. However, the shock effect of Dil's revelation is just as pressing on the viewers, who clearly have trouble grasping the concept of transgenderism. This utter bewilderment can be beneficial for the subversion of national identity. Glenn Patterson's *The International* was published after the Troubles, and so has the advantage of more hindsight. This is clear from Patterson's characterization of Danny. His gayness is natural and, in combination with a first person narrator, it allows the audience to empathize with the character, which results in a queering of gender and national identity, space and time, proving that a different Belfast existed before the decades of sectarian violence.

Regarding the use of social categories in the works, a funnel effect can be discerned. The depiction of social categories starts small in *Carthaginians*, where McGuinness has focused on Catholics versus British (/Protestants). His play-within-the-play allows for his audience to experience, literally in front of their eyes, the mocking of community stereotypes. In *The Crying Game*, Jordan pays attention to the IRA and the British Army, but also to race and class in the case of Jody and Dil, thereby pointing out that national identity can be queered in more ways than just through gender subversion. When analyzing *The International*, an abundance of social categories can be discerned: religion, class, gender, and local/international. All these social categories function to subvert national identity within a queered spatial and temporal setting, which is made possible through the queer reality that has replaced heteronormative reality in the novel.

What these analyses show is that the artists discussed have all appropriated their queer characters (as well as social categories and the queering of history, space, and time) in a different way. The main commonality among the artists is the desire to show their audiences that identities, be it gender or national, racial or class identity, are not as constrained as the people in Northern Ireland believe them to be. Boundaries can indeed be 'queered', and so, if the communities of Northern Ireland can be convinced to accept that subversion of identity is possible, the reconciliation between these groups and between the groups and their past can start.

The questions of how the queer characters are presented in their mediating role and how the norms in Northern Irish society have been questioned have been answered in this thesis. Further research could build on this paper by looking into how the subject of queer characters is thematised in other works, both older and more recent than the body of works that is covered in this thesis. Also, the application of reception studies to the works discussed (and others) might provide an insight into the extent to which these works have actually aided in the reconciliation of the Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland.

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