"Yer Both Talkin' History. It Ends at Midnight": The Opened Wound of Trauma in Christina Reid's *Clowns*

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In *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory* (2003), Clare Carroll and Patricia King ask: "What does it in practice mean to project what Gerry Adams[1] has called a non-sexist, non-sectarian, and democratic Republic?" (49). They then go on to explain how the South of Ireland[2] exemplifies Frantz Fanon's prognosis in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) that the future of a postcolonial country ruled by a bourgeois nationalist elite is "to become the conduit of neo-colonial capital" (ibid) as the hegemonic discourse of the political elite of the newly independent state erased subaltern voices such as the working class and women. The same mechanism could be observed in the North of Ireland in the second half of the twentieth century, and arguably since then, as political discourses regarding the conflict between Republican and Unionist paramilitaries mainly focused on the armed groups and the issue of partition but rarely on the impact of the conflict on the subalterns of society. The sectarian conflict in the North is itself a result of the colonial situation of the territory, because, as Fanon wrote in *The Wretched of the Earth*, "colonialism does not simply state the existence of tribes; it also reinforces it and separates them" (94). So, this article focuses on the female subaltern and how she responds to the hegemonic discourse not only of the state, but also of other power structures under which she lives – in this case, paramilitary groups. It also analyzes the discourse of the female subaltern in Christina Reid's 1996 play *Clowns*, set on the eve of the 1994 IRA ceasefire,[3] when hope for a united Ireland was still predominant in Republican political speeches, much in the same way as it had been 73 years prior in the South of Ireland. As the South had adhered to Fanon's predictions following independence and consequently relegated women to the role of mothers in its 1937 Constitution, this article argues that Christina Reid's focus on the female subaltern constitutes a refusal to erase subaltern voices and, therefore, a means of avoiding a repetition of the South's mistakes in the formation of the North's hegemonic discourse. In that way, she projects the possibility of "what Gerry Adams has called a non-sexist, non-sectarian, and democratic Republic" by bringing on stage characters (Tommy, Arthur and Sandra) who have been indirect victims of the conflict, having witnessed one of their friends (Maureen) being accidentally shot by the British army eight years earlier.

This article considers female voices in the (post)colonial context of Northern Ireland to be subaltern, as the dominant discourse—shaped by paramilitary leaders and representatives—focuses primarily on male heroes

and concerns, while marginalizing or erasing female heroes and their concerns.[4] Thus, in Gayatri Spivak's terms, the focus of this article is on the possibility of the subaltern-as-female speaking to power, but also, because the object of analysis is a theater play, speaking to an audience of citizens. This approach aims to contribute to an ongoing discussion in Irish studies that began with the #WakingTheFeminists movement in Irish theatre, which sparked a renewed interest in women playwrights who had been erased from the national canon. This discussion focuses, among other things, on their contributions to Irish national identity and their feminist messages.[5]
Christina Reid (1942-2015) was a playwright from Northern Ireland who primarily told stories about working-class characters, focusing on issues of class, gender, and race. In 1986, she wrote *Joyriders*, which follows a group of teenagers from the underprivileged Catholic community of Belfast as they participate in a Youth Training Program at a former linen mill, while the violent sectarian conflict surrounding them profoundly impacts their daily lives. At the end of the play, one of them, Maureen, runs out of the building to save her brother, who had been joyriding and is now being arrested by the Army. In the shootout that follows, she is accidentally killed. Another teenager, Sandra, then moves Maureen's wounded and dead body from the street into the mill, refusing to hide it from view. *Clowns* is the sequel to this play and premiered at the Orange Tree, Richmond, England, in 1994. In it, Sandra comes back to Belfast after having run away to London for eight years and meets her old friends Arthur and Tommy, all the while being literally haunted by Maureen. The three teenagers recount their memories of Maureen in particular, and the conflict in general, in the course of the play while getting ready to celebrate the IRA ceasefire and the possible end of the conflict.

Rachel Tracie, in *Christina Reid's Theatre of Memory and Identity: Within and Beyond the Troubles* (2018), highlights the lack of attention given to the playwright in the canon of the North of Ireland and focuses especially on the importance of setting and space in *Clowns* to represent the trauma of the war. She does not, however, focus especially on the gendered aspect of the violence and trauma shown in *Clowns* while this article argues that it is essential to understanding the play as a discourse of contestation from subaltern voices, aiming to impact the audience. Sandra's trauma is also studied in Rebecca Wyss' book *Troubling Northern Irish Herstories: the Drama of Anne Devlin & Christina Reid* (2015), which informs the analysis of trauma on the stage in the second part of the article that stresses the new importance of subalternity. Finally, in *The Girls in the Big Picture: Gender in Contemporary Ulster Theatre* (2003), Imelda Foley mentions both *Joyriders* and *Clowns* when discussing Reid's plays, but her focus is more on a general overview of Reid's themes and strategies than on the particular case of representing violence and trauma through a female subaltern voice.

Thus, this article will highlight how portraying the trauma of a young female character on stage enables the audience to reflect on the violence of colonialism as well as the importance of subaltern and feminine voices that are

erased in the hegemonic discourse of the state. To achieve this, the article examines how Christina Reid's decision to portray these specific characters influences the representation of the conflict, given that they are typically excluded from the hegemonic discourses surrounding it. This then leads to a focus on Sandra in particular and on Maureen's haunting—a physical embodiment on stage of the trauma the conflict left behind in Sandra's mind, linked through both trauma theory and theatrical strategies to the importance of remembering past events in order to move on. Finally, this article examines Christina Reid's secondary subaltern messages disseminated in the plays, as she herself writes from a subaltern point of view, being a female playwright at a time when the canon was dominated by male writers. It argues that Reid feared Fanon's predictions would come true for the North as they had for the South, and wrote *Clowns* as a means of presenting to English and Irish audiences a vision of healing the past in a way that does not lead to an unequal future for the population.

A Play to Highlight Subaltern Voices

Christian Mailhes writes in his article titled "The Victims of The Conflict in Northern Ireland: The Inexpressible at The Heart of The Personal" [6] that "close to 75% of [those who died because of the conflict] were less than 40 years old, and 53% were civilians who had never engaged in paramilitary activities" (57).[7] He highlights the fact that the victims of the conflict were largely overlooked in political and social discourse until the onset of peace negotiations, indicating that *Clowns* is set just prior to the emergence of civilian casualties as a prominent topic in public discussions surrounding the conflict. In *Clowns*, as in *Joyriders* before, there are no paramilitaries present on the stage, even though they lurk in the background and in the stories shared by the characters. In *Joyriders*, Tommy's hands are broken by the IRA because he has stolen from his people, and a raid by the Army quickly follows in the flats where they all live. Sandra, the most cynical character in both plays, explains it on stage to their adult supervisor and adds, "If the rats an' the bugs don't get ye, the asbestos will . . . or the police, or the Army, or the IRA . . . who cares?" (*Joyriders*, II:2, 154). For the four teenagers, all of the armed forces—be they the State's or the paramilitaries'—are dangerous and can potentially harm them, and, in fact, already have for most of them: Arthur was accidentally shot by the Army and is now badly scarred and limps; Maureen is shot while trying to help her brother; and her mother has gone mad after having been hurt by the Army. The teenagers are cast as indirect victims of the conflict, as they have to live in a world where nothing feels secure, despite having no direct involvement in the armed struggle itself. Choosing civilians as the main characters of the play is Reid's way of drawing her audience's attention to the fact that the victims of the conflict they heard about—mainly

paramilitary prisoners or nameless civilian victims such as those of Bloody Sunday—were not the only ones, and that there exists in Belfast an entire category of citizens impacted daily by the sectarian struggle.

In *Clowns*, the clash between the official focus of political and social discussions (paramilitaries and unnamed victims) and the reality of civilian victims is visible through the romanticization of subaltern suffering, represented by the statue of the mill worker and child in the middle of the shopping center. In the instructions for the play, Reid writes "*There is a romantic statue of a 1930s female mill worker and child. (Ragged, starving, noble.)*" The romanticization of the female worker—"noble" despite being poor—is an idealization of an imagined past in which those who lacked power in society—women, the working class, children—suffered in silence and with dignity. When discussing the statue, however, Tommy says: "It's an arty-farty fuckin' nonsense. When this was a mill, the women an' children didn't work in fresh-water fountains. They stood in water polluted with lead …" (*Clowns*, I, 289).[8] The representation of the past, as well as the representation of the working class and the subalterns of society, has been manipulated by the state in order to erase the harsh conditions and idealize the suffering of an entire class of the population.

This can be seen in the statue as much as in the shopping center itself, which was once a linen mill that housed the Youth Training Programme in which the teenagers of *Joyriders* were stuck. The place has thus housed several unhappy working-class people but has now been transformed into a modern commercial complex, in which the only trace left of the past is a romantic statue. For those in the audience who had seen *Joyriders*, the statue is also placed in the exact spot where, at the end of the first play, Maureen's bleeding and dead body was staged in full view of the audience. The parallels between the mill worker and Maureen are made obvious from the start, as the ghost of the dead girl appears "*dressed like a romantic servant girl (a village-green version of the statue)*" (I, 285). Thus, because the audience may be familiar with both *Joyriders* and *Clowns*, they can see in the romanticized images of the working class, as well as of civilian casualties in general, how the State manipulates the past to erase everything that might cast a dark shadow on the present.

Another important result of having access to these four friends ten years after *Joyriders* is that the audience can observe how the conflict has impacted their entire psyche. Indeed, in *Joyriders*, the four characters are teenagers, aged between 16 and 17, and the world around them—full of raids and street violence—seems normal to them at a stage of life in which everything can shape their identity (Tracie, 70). Thus, even though Arthur in particular is presented as having "moved up" in life with the money he won, we can observe in all four characters how their formative years left them psychologically wounded. In Act I, Arthur shows signs of being haunted by his ten-year-old injury:

Arthur touches his head.
Arthur I got caught . . . for somethin' I didn't do . . .
Maureen clenches her fists across her abdomen in a protective movement.
Maureen Tell me about it . . . (I, 299)

The physical injuries the teenagers suffered when they were young may no longer hurt and may even be invisible, as Arthur's scars have faded and Maureen is a ghost, but they cannot forget them—just as they cannot forget the reality of their vulnerability. When a car screeches to a halt, followed by gunfire—the exact same sounds heard when Maureen was shot at the end of *Joyriders*—the four of them react as if the scene were happening again. Through their particular suffering and the parallels between the two plays, the audience can thus see how the teenagers grew up and how much their experiences in *Joyriders* shaped the young adults presented in *Clowns*.

The mix of these dichotomies—the fact that we never see paramilitaries or the Army outside, yet the threat is still felt inside, and that the characters may no longer be physically hurt but are still suffering—renders the entire ceasefire theme of the setting hollow. The opening of the shopping center is supposed to coincide with the official IRA ceasefire, the day after the play is set, but what the audience is confronted with on stage is the suffering of the characters, not their hope for the future. The peace in the streets might be close at hand, but peace of mind is still far from reach. This is nowhere more visible than in Sandra's case: at the beginning of the play, the stage direction reads, "*Maureen's voice is heard, disembodied at first (in Sandra's head), then for real as she appears*" (I, 285). The distancing device of the disembodied voice is gradually erased, letting the audience know that what they are witnessing occurs in Sandra's mind—that they are fully immersed in her wounded psyche. Through her trauma, the audience gains access to Maureen, but she is not the girl who died in *Joyriders*; she is a product of Sandra's imagination, a presence that hurts and traps her. Several times in the play, Sandra expresses out loud her desire for the haunting to cease and the fact that she cannot forget what happened to her friend, and so, is not able to move on: "Give my head peace, you stupid cow" (I, 286); "I find it hard to . . . nobody is ever gonna hurt me the way Maureen got hurt" (I, 316). This last line is spoken after Sandra is asked if she is in a relationship, highlighting the fact that she cannot envision a life for herself in this way because Maureen was a romantic, and, in a sense, it led to her death. Because the ghost we see on stage has, in terms of personality, nothing to do with the romantic teenager we met in *Joyriders*, Sandra and Maureen are two sides of the same coin: the real woman and the trauma that haunts her. In Act II, when they are faced with Johnnie—Maureen's brother, whom she saved when she died—Sandra's anger towards him impacts Maureen's ghost, but it turns against her:

Maureen moves towards Sandra. Johnnie leans against the wall. Watches Sandra as she tries to block/escape from Maureen's onslaught. Molly

reacts to Sandra's distress. Maureen launches a very fast, vicious, ugly joke routine at Sandra. […]
Sandra *(screams at Johnnie)* […]
Molly grabs hold of Sandra as she lunges at Johnnie. (II:1, 325)

Because Maureen is the product of Sandra's imagination, her attack is an attack of Sandra's trauma against herself, and the result is that her anger in the real world intensifies to the point where she attacks the one she deems responsible for her friend's death and, consequently, for her own trauma. Because the audience has direct access to her mind on stage, they gain deeper insight into the extent of Sandra's trauma—something not afforded to the other characters—and thus Reid draws our attention to the reality of the war that lingers in the minds of survivors of the conflict.

Trauma and Haunting on the Stage

In Wyss's words, "Sandra's symptoms of mental illness speak for thousands of secondary victims of the Troubles whose narratives are left out of official histories" (59). By focusing on Sandra's trauma—especially through the audience's access to her mind—Reid puts the spotlight on all those who were forgotten in the hegemonic history of the conflict on the eve of the ceasefire. In Act II, Scene 1, Molly—Arthur's mother—tells Sandra, during a mental breakdown: "You're not crazy. You were caught in a war. There's a fancy name these days for what happened to you. In my day, it was called shellshock. You carried your best friend in from a battlefield" (337). By framing the problem in the lexical field of war, Molly draws a parallel between the widely accepted PTSD diagnosis—often associated with war veterans and paramilitary soldiers—and the similar aftereffects experienced by citizens who were not active participants in the conflict. Neither Sandra nor Maureen were soldiers in this war, yet Sandra still had to carry her "best friend in from a battlefield," during which she was shot multiple times by the army. Until Molly's diagnosis, Sandra had indeed exhibited symptoms of PTSD, which the DSM-IV defines as: "recurrent and intrusive distressful recollections of the event … recurrent distressful dreams of the event … acting or feeling as if the traumatic event were recurring … illusions, hallucinations … intense psychological distress at exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event." Recollections are the symptom most visible on stage: Maureen's accident is mentioned by the characters seven times throughout the play, her ghost re-creates the shooting through miming twice, and Sandra does so once. Part I ends with Maureen's second re-enactment, during which Sandra's self-control collapses. Upon seeing Johnnie for the first time since the funeral, she mimics shooting him with a toy gun—an act she had vowed to carry out at the time of Maureen's

death. Immediately afterward, a car screeches in the street, followed by gunfire, bringing back memories of the accident:

> *Sound (off) of a car screeching to a halt and gunfire in the street outside. Maureen reacts as if she has been shot. (Crosses her fists across her abdomen as before.) [...] Maureen has removed her hands from her abdomen. They are covered in blood. She looks surprised. She holds out her hands to Sandra, mouths the word 'No . . .'*
> *Sandra screams.*
> **Sandra** No!!! (I, 319)

Because Sandra has recalled a past event—Maureen's funeral—it becomes even easier for the other characters to recall other past events. Sandra's act of bringing past actions to the stage makes the past happen again externally, for everyone this time. She also displays the symptom of "recurrent distressful dreams of the event" when she explains how her haunting began:

> **Sandra** It started with dreams. Awful dreams. I left Belfast to make them stop. And they did, for a while . . . a long while . . . out of sight, out of mind . . . I was doing all right. Never gave that day a second thought. Over and done with . . . all in the past . . . out of sight, out of mind . . . Only the dreams came back. Not when I was sleeping . . . when I was awake. In broad daylight when I was on a bus or in a shop and suddenly I could see it . . . Maureen running out towards the car . . . (I, 336)

Even though she originally ran away from Belfast and managed to stay in a state of denial, dreams began to invade her sleeping life and eventually her waking life in the form of "illusions, hallucinations." Sandra might have left the war in the streets by fleeing to London, but the war remained in her mind—the repetition of "out of sight, out of mind" becomes a clear instance of dramatic irony, as the audience is aware of Maureen's ghost right behind Sandra while the other characters cannot see her. Finally, as the act ends with the realistic recollection of the event in Sandra's mind, the young woman descends into a state of shock. At the beginning of Act II, she is "*sitting, Molly's coat wrapped round her[,] perhaps a glass of brandy in her hand*" (II:1, 320) – in other words, in a visible "intense psychological distress."

If Sandra exhibits most of the well-known symptoms of PTSD to the audience, theater particularly highlights the importance of ghosts and haunting as a visual embodiment of her trauma on stage. According to the stage directions, Maureen's presence is made both obvious to the audience and distinct from the other characters through lighting. Indeed, the ghost remains in a "shadowy area" and "appears and disappears" (stage directions)—one corner of the stage is hers, and only Sandra crosses into it once, towards the end, when she begins to accept that the ghost is merely a projection of her mind and not Maureen herself. The haunting, therefore, allows the audience not only to see into Sandra's mind but also to witness how she gradually heals and frees the ghost in the second act. This act stages her recovery following

the shock of the previously mentioned re-enactment, with Maureen's presence slowly fading throughout until her final disappearance:

> *Lights rise on the stage, but this time Maureen is left in a slight shadow (which very gradually deepens as the play continues). […] The shadows around Maureen have deepened a little more. Sandra walks towards her. Stops. Shows signs of distress. Molly goes to her, brings her back.*
> **Molly** The livin' is this way, love. (II:1, 334-5)

> *Sandra looks at Maureen. The shadows are lengthening around her. A look/gesture of farewell between them. Maureen walks away into the darkness.* (II:1, 338)

Thanks to theater and its ability to stage ghosts, the audience can visibly witness the ghost being laid to rest, as she moves from light to darkness, her presence shifting from the realm of the living to that of the dead.

In theater studies, the figure of the ghost has been analyzed as a device to reflect the importance of the past haunting the present—memories repressed or erased that keep returning, much like recollections of traumatic events, a symptom of PTSD. As Kunz writes, "the ghost becomes a metaphor for memory; it is also a metaphor for things hidden and buried, for memories that haunt Irish life and culture" (107). Theater, as Marvin Carlson argues in *The Haunted Stage*, is inherently connected to the past, continually restaging it through various "ghosting" devices, making theater "in the minds of many the art most closely related to memory and the theatre building itself a kind of memory machine" (142). Staging Maureen as a ghost, therefore, is not only a way to give the audience a glimpse into Sandra's traumatized mind, but also a means of imagining all the hauntings of the past present on stage—hauntings that must be acknowledged and addressed in order to heal and move toward the future, a point often referenced in the hegemonic discourse surrounding the peace process.

Talking about a traumatic event has been, at least in the West, seen as the best solution to be able to move on from it – Sandra's healing process in *Clowns* is no exception. Because the play follows a linear narrative structure, we can observe Sandra moving through the five stages of grief—sometimes recognized as the stages of trauma—one after the other throughout the play. She begins by leaving Belfast and denying that the accident occurred, a state of denial she remains in, to some extent, at the play's outset. The only way she has found to cope with Maureen's ghost is to pretend to be her and become a comedian, a clown who makes "the English laugh" (I, 317); humour has thus become her defence mechanism. As soon as something troubles her, the spotlight goes to Maureen in front of her microphone and the ghost "*talks directly to the theatre audience as if they are the audience in the London pub/club*" (I, 306). Jokes thus serve to make light of the tragedies of the past, as all of her comedian's routines are political and mock both the Loyalists and the Republicans, but they never mention the personal story of losing Maureen. They are devices of "dissociation and survival" which nonetheless can become

dangerous "weapons" when Sandra is under stress, such as when she sees Johnnie (Tracie, 161). There is also a metatheatrical aspect in Reid's choice to make stand-up comedy the device through which Sandra maintains her denial of Maureen's death. The audience gains direct access to her routine when Maureen takes the microphone and speaks to us, and when we laugh at her jokes, we are complicit in overlooking the tragedy. This reliance on comedy in a tragic play also allows the audience to laugh together, reminding us that theater is a communal experience, or, in Fitzpatrick's words, it unites "the spectators into one cohesive group as events that were in their time traumatic and divisive are enacted or recalled on stage" (178). In the end, however, laughter is always tied to denial, and when the scene of Maureen's death is fully reenacted on stage at the end of Act I, Sandra rapidly moves through the other stages of grieving trauma.

Anger was mentioned before in relation to Sandra's anger towards Johnnie, but it is worth quoting at length Maureen's aggressive attack on Sandra:

> **Maureen** What you wanted. What you wished for . . .
> **Sandra** I didn't want . . .
> **Maureen** You wanted. You wanted revenge so much, it done your head in. Can I rest in peace now? Or do they all have to die – the soldier who aimed at Johnnie and killed me, the officer who gave the order, Tommy for organizing the peaceful protest that turned into a riot, Arthur for bein' so engrossed in his runnin' buffet that he didn't stop me from runnin' out into the street? Every mother's son who happened to be there that day? Does it end this day? Or does it go on and on and on forever? (II:1, 322)

According to Maureen, and so by extension to Sandra's subconscious itself, under the denial lurked the desire for revenge, a desire so overwhelming that it could never have been satisfied. The anger stage of the grieving process however comes at the same time as the bargaining stage, as Maureen gets angry and plans to leave Sandra for Johnnie, a threat that Sandra cannot accept as it would mean letting her go: "Maureen is my partner! Mine!" (II:1, 326). Then follow the last two stages: depression ("I don't want . . . no more . . . no more blood . . . not even his . . . no more . . ." II:1, 327) and acceptance ("No . . . no more leaving it . . . time to tell the truth . . ." II:1, 332). The play itself might be about tragic subjects, but at the end of Act II, Scene 1, Maureen has left the stage, and the audience in the next Scene has access to an objective reality, is not in Sandra's mind anymore as talking about the past and remembering her trauma has freed her from it, at least in some ways. Haunting might be a visible means of representing trauma, but ghosts, like trauma, are meant to leave our psyche at one point – they produce, in Gordon's words, a "something-to-be-done" (xvi), are here to point out solutions on how to destroy them. Fanon writes: "The colonized man who writes for his people ought to use the past with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope" (232) – this argument illustrates how Christina Reid uses the trope of haunting, because the ghost, which represents repressed

memories, can visibly disappear from the stage, allowing the audience to see the tools needed for its exorcism.

Subaltern Messages

Because Christina Reid has chosen to tell the story of four characters who were usually not represented in the hegemonic discourse about the conflict—Catholic working-class teenagers, later young adults, two of whom are women and one of whom (Tommy) is mixed-race—the play is not only a staging of trauma being healed but also a platform for subaltern voices. It is in the dialogues exchanged between two subaltern voices that the "something-to-be-done" lies—not only to heal oneself but also the rest of society: to create a subaltern community. This is most obviously visible in the need for community highlighted by the character of Molly, who is the first to see that Sandra is in distress and keeps bringing her back to reality. From the beginning, she tells Sandra how to get better: "It must be hard on you . . . Arthur and Tommy have always had each other to talk to. They mostly agree to disagree about what happened that day, but arguin' about it got them through it . . . talk's a way of getting' to grips . . . layin' a ghost" (I, 316). It is through this older female character that Sandra finds the strength to tell her story and the story of the ghost that haunts her, and Molly opposes the other characters, especially Arthur, who keeps trying to make Sandra stop thinking about the past, and the others, who try to push her to move on without talking about it. Consequently, when Sandra has told everything, "*Arthur moves as if to embrace her, but it's the comfort of Molly's embrace she chooses*" (II:1, 338).

Female solidarity seems to be presented as more effective than male solidarity in this particular case: Arthur and Tommy might have talked about their trauma between themselves, but they argued about what really happened instead of focusing on their own feelings about the situation. Thus, they still seem to be in a kind of denial, albeit one that is less self-destructive than Sandra's. When the three characters talk about Maureen for the first time at the beginning of the play, it is because of the flowers that remind them of their dead friend:

> **Tommy** There should be somethin' more permanent there to mark the spot where Maureen was shot. She worked here, an' she died here. This buildin' has a bad history.
> **Arthur** An' a great future.
> **Sandra** She died in the street. She was dead before I lifted her, and carried her in here. (I, 290)

Despite the fact that Sandra is already haunted by Maureen and that the audience sees how traumatized she is because we are inside her mind, she is also the only one who focuses on Maureen herself and on the reality of what

happened. Tommy's memories are inaccurate, as he imagines Maureen being shot inside, at the spot they imagine to be a memorial, even though he was the one describing to the audience what was happening in the street from the window in *Joyriders*. He might have seen Maureen get shot and Sandra bringing her inside, but his mind has muddled the details, and he is now focused on the past of the building, on the place where his trauma started, instead of on Maureen herself. Arthur is in an even more obvious state of denial, as he focuses only on the future and keeps trying to interrupt the retelling of the other characters' memories: "Remember the good times. An' the devil take the bad" (I, 290). Arthur's inability to move on from his trauma was already staged in *Joyriders*: he was the one character who thought about a greater future for himself—something he managed to achieve in *Clowns*, as he is now a middle-class restaurant owner—but who also refused to talk about the past of Northern Ireland in general, and of his own traumatic injury in particular. At the end of *Joyriders*, when the audience hears the sounds of gunfire in the streets while Maureen is being shot, the only thing we see on stage is Arthur shredding lettuce and in a state of emotional distress, as he seems to relive his own accident all over again. In the same way that he has never healed from the trauma of being shot at, he has also never come to terms with Maureen's death and stubbornly focuses on the future instead. Thus, through this small cast of characters, Christina Reid not only showcases the efficacy of female solidarity but also highlights the risks of refusing to deal properly with traumatic memories—we as an audience have access only to Sandra's mind and cannot know whether Arthur's and Tommy's minds are truly less haunted than hers. However, the fact that Arthur and Tommy are the one characters who did not entirely move on despite talking to each other might not be a clue from Reid that male solidarity does not work. Rather, it may reflect that they could not help each other, being both traumatized by the same event and too young to provide support; in contrast, Molly is not only a woman but also older than the other characters and possesses a more objective perspective on the situation.

The clash that occurs on stage whenever Arthur refuses to talk about the past, while Tommy and Sandra keep returning to it, is not always linked to Maureen; it is often connected to the broader historical context of Northern Ireland—a history that seems more significant than ever now that they are on the eve of the ceasefire. After explaining how Arthur became wealthy enough to own a restaurant—a story that included his previous shop being burned down by the IRA because he refused to pay for their protection—this dialogue takes place:

> **Tommy** The boys'll be lookin' for more when this caff opens. If it opens.
> **Arthur** You know somethin' I don't know?
> **Tommy** Everybody knows this place is a prime target. English investment. English offices. English shops. Why cross the Water when they can bomb Debenhams right here in Belfast? […]

> **Sandra** Over there, they don't give a damn about what happens here, so long as it's kept this side of the Irish Sea, and doesn't slow down the traffic in the London rush hour.
> **Tommy** And you used to laugh at me when I talked politics.
> **Sandra** You talked shite.
> **Arthur** Yer both talkin' history. It ends at midnight.

Arthur's optimism about the future is clearly not shared by Tommy and Sandra, the two most politically conscious characters in the play. Through their voices, Christina Reid highlights the consequences of their colonial situation—in this case, a pervasive lack of hope for the future, or the "history" that never ends, as "the boys" will always view English institutions as "a prime target."

However, the English people, who "don't give a damn about what happens" in Belfast, are as much at fault as "the boys," who do not intend to stop fighting. It is therefore worth noting that *Clowns,* and *Joyriders* before it, may have been written by a Belfast-born playwright but were first staged in England. When Maureen addresses the audience as if they were in a London pub, the original viewers were indeed Londoners attending a theatrical performance, albeit in a theater rather than a pub. When Maureen addresses her audience with "you," she might be speaking to an imagined English audience, but she could just as well be addressing the real audience in the theater, as the actress playing her is doing. At the end of one of her comedy routines, Maureen says: "That's the real joke. You forbade us to speak our own language. You forced us to speak yours and we took it and turned it into poetry" (I, 306). The marked distinction between "you" and "us" directly engages the English audience, confronting them with their role in a colonial history that has left lasting trauma on the teenagers they had encountered ten years earlier.

However, the audience and English people in general are not meant to be ostracized by the play – Maureen's previously quoted line is the only line that could be considered as an attack. When England is mentioned elsewhere, Sandra is the one who actually underlines the similarity of English and Irish people, albeit of only some of them:

> **Tommy** They know nuthin' about us, an' they care even less.
> **Sandra** Do you know about them? Do you care about them? Do you lie awake at night worrying about the shite conditions in places like Moss Side and Toxteh? About the thousands of homeless sleeping rough on London's streets?
> **Tommy** There's no armed soldiers on their streets.
> **Sandra** Not yet. Not yet. (I, 309)

Sandra shifts the focus from the differences between English and Irish people to the similarities among the poorest sections of their societies. While Tommy has advocated for the working class since the beginning of *Joyriders,* his perspective is limited to the territory he knows—Belfast. Sandra, having

traveled to London and lived in struggling neighborhoods there, returns with new socialist ideas of class solidarity that transcend national boundaries. Staging poor working-class characters to give a voice to the subaltern is not only effective for improving Irish society but also for any society in which the working class is marginalized in the hegemonic discourse—including England. The original audience of the Orange Tree Theatre might not have related directly to the colonial situation and trauma experienced by Maureen, Sandra, Tommy, and Arthur. They could nonetheless relate to the way the characters' history is presented on stage as a subaltern history—one in which their voices exist more prominently in the theater than in the political discourses of the ruling classes. Cathy Caruth, in *Unclaimed Experience*, explains how witnessing the trauma of another can actually help create a bond between oneself and the other, a new solidarity: "we can also read the address of the voice here, not as the story of the individual in relation to the events of his own past, but as the story of the way in which one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound" (8). Thus, staging the characters' trauma in front of a London audience allows Christina Reid to foster empathy—if not for the political situation in Northern Ireland, then at least for its human impact on people who are, after all, very similar to the audience. The need for community, therefore, is not national but human. In *Clowns*, a community of subalterns is created both on stage and in the audience: those who are excluded from discussions—whether about the peace process or other national matters—support one another and build connections, generating a counter-hegemonic discourse that has the potential to foster a fairer society.

To conclude, by placing a female subaltern voice at center stage, Christina Reid allows the audience direct access to the perspective of a character who, if she were a real person, would have been unable to make her voice heard within the hegemonic discourse of her society. As an audience in the theater, we can witness how hard the events of *Joyriders* have hurt not only Sandra but also her friends, and we are also made aware that the story of the four teenagers is just one of the hundreds stories that could be told on traumas left behind by the conflict. Because of that, following the narrative of Sandra's breakdown and healing process is both cathartic and thought-provoking. The play might have some sort of happy ending, as Arthur and Sandra dance together, but it was still played two years after the 1994 IRA ceasefire, which takes place outside of the walls of the shopping center at the same time as the characters' dance, and so the audience is aware that this ceasefire did not mark the end of the conflict. Tommy and Sandra were not wrong to believe that tragedies were still going to happen, but the play nonetheless leaves the audience with one hope: community and solidarity between subaltern voices can and do help to imagine a better future by learning from the past and by recognizing similarities instead of stressing differences between one another. The possibility of creating "what Gerry Adams has called a non-sexist, non-

sectarian, and democratic Republic" rests on the counter-hegemonic discourse that can be generated by the subalterns of all societies, who, if they are not erased, can help a new society avoid following Fanon's predictions.

Notes

1. Gerry Adams is a Republican nationalist who was the President of the Sinn Féin (nationalist) party of the North of Ireland from 1983 to 2018 and was an important figure of the peace process to end the conflict.

2. Because I define the Republic of Ireland as a postcolonial country in my work, I will refer to the two states of the island as the South of Ireland and the North of Ireland, as using the official name of the northern state, Northern Ireland, implies accepting that the partition of the island was not an act of colonial rule. As a result, the armed and political conflict between Republicans – those who aimed for the unification of both Irish states – and Unionists – those who wished to stay a part of the United Kingdom – in the North of Ireland, which started towards the end of the sixties and officially ended with the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, will be referred to as "the conflict in the North (of Ireland)."

3. On 31 August 1994, the Provisional IRA (PIRA) called the first official cessation of military activities in the media. It was one of the first steps of the peace process which led to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, the official end of the conflict.

4. This is visible for instance in the ways in which the dirty protests enacted by Republican male prisoners in the Long Kesh/Maze Prison were mediatized and talked about in political speeches while the Republican female prisoners of Armagh Gaol who took part in the same dirty protests were mainly ignored because of the taboo aspect of menstrual blood on the walls of their cells. (Neti, 81)

5. In 2016, a celebration of the centenary of the Easter Rising with an Abbey Theatre programme called Waking the Nation sparked a new debate in Irish society as there was only one play from a female playwright and two women producers on the programme. A new grassroots movement called Waking the Feminists was born as a protest and undertook to examine the gender imbalance in the Irish theater industry.

6. My translation of the title of Christian Mailhes' article, originally entitled "Les victimes du conflit en Irlande du Nord : l'indicible au cœur de l'intime"

7. My translation, the original reads: "Près de 75 % des morts avaient moins de 40 ans et 53 % étaient des civils qui n'avaient jamais eu d'activités paramilitaires."

8. For the rest of the article, if the quote comes from *Joyriders*, the title will be written in the parentheses. If nothing is written, the quote comes from the main play under study, *Clowns*.

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