

GUESTS (GEISTS) OF A NATION: A HEIMLICH (UNHEIMLICH)

MANEUVER

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Abstract

This chapter examines Frank O’Connor’s story ‘Guests of a Nation’, and looks at how guests often become ghosts in Irish history. The essay then looks at the ghosts of Irish republican ideology, Pearse and Tone, and goes on to look at two other ghosts, those of Jerry McCabe and Robert McCartney, who came back to haunt the republican movement. It also examines how the notion of guest can easily become that of ghost when the guest is no longer welcome in the community

At dusk the big Englishman, Belcher, would shift his long legs out of the ashes and say, “well, chums, what about it?” and Noble or me would say, “All right chum” (for we had picked up some of their curious expressions) , and the little Englishman, Hawkins, would light the lamp and bring out the cards. Sometimes Jeremiah Donovan would come up and supervise the game and get excited over Hawkin’s cards, which he always played badly, and shout at him as if he was one of our own, “Ah, you divil you, why didn’t you play the tray?”¹

¹ Frank O’Connor, “Guests of the Nation”, in *Classic Irish Short Stories*, selected and introduced by Frank O’Connor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 172-187, p.172.

Thus begins Frank O'Connor's story, "Guests of the Nation". This story is about the war of independence and an imaginary action in which two English soldiers, Hawkins and Belcher, are being held in a genteel form of captivity by two members of the IRA, Bonaparte and Noble. From the outset, any form of racial, political or ideological enmity between the captors and their captives is dissolved: "I never in my short experience seen two men take to the country as they did".² The feelings towards the Englishmen would seem to set this story in the genre of honourable comradeship – the notion that war is a form of advanced game and when chaps are not fighting they can show each other mutual respect and treat each other decently: as chums – it all seems a far cry for Abu Grabe, and the horrific pictures of Iraqi prisoners being tortured by American soldiers, or of suicide bombers destroying themselves and innocent bystanders in the name of their cause, or of the horrific scenes of the execution of the horrific Sadaam Hussein.

This notion of a genteel conflict is further enhanced in the telling of how the previous captors of the Englishmen used to have dances with the local girls and 'seeing that they were such decent chaps, our fellows couldn't leave the two Englishmen out of them'.³ Hawkins, the more garrulous of the two, learned to dance "The Walls of Limerick", the siege of Ennis" and "The Waves of Tory" – clearly an embryonic Michael Flatley in the making! Even the vocabulary here is redolent of a form of British stiff upper lip, as these "decent chaps" seemed quite content to stay among their admiring captors and it is almost as if they have decided not to escape as it would be a form of bad taste. Thus far, we are in a world of romance, where war is a game for grown up boys, and where honour and humanity triumph over hatred and horror. The two soldiers are indeed guests of the nation; there is even the stock figure of the grumpy old woman in the house, who is charmed by the more taciturn Belcher, who had "made her his friend for life"⁴ by doing little jobs for her and generally being pleasant to her.

² O'Connor, "Guest of a Nation", p.173.

³ O'Connor, "Guest of a Nation", p. 173.

⁴ O'Connor, "Guest of a Nation", p. 174.

The first note of dark irony comes into the story with that phrase “friend for life” as we will shortly see how truncated will be that life, and how this rather jolly affair will end.

This is compounded by another proleptic phrase, a phrase that gave rise to the title of this paper. The first person narrator, Bonaparte, is speaking of how Belcher was able to move around the house anticipating the needs of the old woman:

As Noble said, he got into looking before she leapt, and got water, or any little thing she wanted, Belcher would have it ready for her. For such a huge man ... he had an uncommon shortness – or should I say lack? – of speech. It took us some time to get used to him, walking in and out, like a ghost, without a word.⁵

The irony here is telling as in a few pages, both Belcher and Hawkins will be transformed from “guests of the nation” to “ghosts of the nation”, as they are executed in reprisal for the killing of “four of our lads” [four IRA members],⁶ and Belcher will die silently in the end but before his death will say more than he had ever done while a captive. Both men are shot, Hawkins needing two bullets before he dies, and buried in a nameless grave in a bog. Hawkins argues and pleads for his life, offering to join the IRA, while Belcher seems to find death easier. The story, having begun with ceilidh dancing, and chums playing cards with decent chaps, in a very genteel form of captivity, ends in one of the starker paragraphs written by O’Connor on the effect of violence and death on the perpetrators:

It is so strange what you feel at times like that that you can’t describe it. Noble says he saw everything ten times the size, as though there were nothing in the whole world but that little patch of bog with the two Englishmen stiffening into it but with me it was as if the patch of bog where the Englishmen were was a million miles away, and even Noble and the old woman, mumbling behind me, and the birds and the bloody stars were all far

⁵ O’Connor, “Guest of a Nation”, p. 174.

⁶ O’Connor, “Guest of a Nation”, p.179.

away, and I was somehow very small and very lost and lonely like a child astray in the snow. And anything that happened me afterwards, I never felt the same about again.⁷

It is this movement from guests of a nation to ghosts of a nation that is the driving force of this paper. These two men clearly effected all of the rest of Bonaparte's life: they fulfilled a ghostly function, physically absent yet present and influential in his life, changing his perspective about everything and about his future. These 'stiffening' Englishmen became part of his sense of self, and this process of inhabitation by such memories and figures is part of the reason for the title of this paper, as these guests who are no longer welcome, who are dead become *Geists*, ghosts, and part of the spirit of Ireland which haunts the mind of Bonaparte.

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida discusses what he terms *hauntology*, seeing ghostly hauntings as traces of possible alternative meanings. Derrida's spectrality involves acknowledging the other that haunts the self; it involves acknowledging the possibility that the "h" in *hauntology* is a hovering presence over the certainties of ontology, and above all, it is predicated on the future. Speaking both of the ghost in *Hamlet*, and the ghost that haunts Marx's *Communist Manifesto* (where the first noun is 'specter'), he makes the point that, at bottom: "the specter is the future, it is always to come, it presents itself only as that which could come or come back".⁸ The ghost is that which can complicate the inheritance of the past, which can fracture the inheritance, which, far from issuing from a fixed centre, and from containing an unequivocal meaning, "is never gathered together, it is never one with itself".⁹ So guests and ghosts are the theme of this paper.

Firstly, I want to look at the ghosts that are central to the creation of a nation, and of notions of nationalism in particular. These ghosts take the form of myths, misrecognitions, identifications all of

⁷ O'Connor, "Guest of a Nation", p. 187.

⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning & the New International*. Translated from the French by Peggy Kamuf. Introduction by Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg (London: Routledge, 1994), p 39.

⁹ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 16.

which combine to give a motive force to the epistemology of nationalism as we know it; and they have a specific influence on concepts of how we treat others, either as guests or as enemies. There is also the point that the very notion of that “we” is defined by those who are “other”, as in this case. There are two types of spectral presence at work in both the short story and in this paper. The first is the state-sponsored, reified notions of the spirit of the nation, the ghosts of the past which are used to make us act in the presence: the glorious dead, saints, martyrs, people whose deaths are used as an engine of power to make people act. The idea of dying for one’s country, for ideas, for the dead generations as Pearse had it on the steps of the GPO, for those killed on Bloody Sunday (there were 3), Bloody Friday, etc. in Northern Ireland. But I also hope to gesture towards an other form of haunting which is more open and more emancipatory in terms of its views on the guests which a nation can have, of notions of hospitality as opposed to hostility, and to ground this in the story itself, as O’Connor offers a glimpse of this different type of alignment of host and guest.

I will also examine the inter-relationship between the idea of a nation’s guests, those that are welcomed into a nation warmly and for whom space is made and habits are changed, and the nation’s ghosts, those otherworldly beings who are seen as spectral and as haunting the outskirts of the nation’s home. In this context, I will look at the attitude of the nation to our more recent guests, the immigrants who have come to Ireland in increasing numbers. I will also look at different interactions of communities with their “guests”, tracing how the fictive deaths of Hawkins and Belcher are paralleled in grim reality in the real Ireland, and I will also examine some hauntological figures of recent Irish history, politically rendered ghosts, in both Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland, who have also changed, or to be more accurate, should make us, as they did Bonaparte “never feel the same again”.

I will be using some of the work of Jacques Derrida to help articulate this. Now I realize that any adequation of the work of Frank O’Connor and that of Derrida is going to raise eyebrows, and the

close connections that I will posit may well cause those eyebrows to keep on being raised until they reach the hairline. Generally Irish Studies is an example of Paul de Man's dictum of the resistance to theory; with the exceptions of postcolonialism and feminism, Irish Studies is relatively undertheorized in terms of its methodology, and can be quite resistant to any other paradigms.¹⁰ To see Ireland's literary and political experience in terms of the postcolonial paradigm is valuable, and serves to ground the literary in the political and to probe the ideological effects and consequences of Irish literature more fully.

However, there are other areas of theoretical critique which allow for a more nuanced, complex, re-reading of past and contemporary Irish works in terms of constructions of identity, the force of the unconscious and desire, the whole notion of self and other, the influence of race and gender on readings and also the more complicated relationship between Ireland and the postcolonial. Yes we were colonized, yes we are part of that ongoing dialogue between centre and margin, yes the language issue has resonances with the postcolonial world but it is important to remember that the Irish experience of this, as so much else, is, to use David Lloyd's phrase – anomalous.¹¹ Ireland is a first world country, racially similar to its colonizer. It is one of the very few, possibly the only, colony to have representation at Westminster from 1800 to 1921, many Irish, both at the level of military participation, and administrative or political leadership, have been participant in the colonial enterprise so theoretical readings that ignore, or attenuate these nuances are guilty of taking what Declan Kiberd has termed a narrow-gauge approach to nationalism.¹² Thus I would argue that theoretical readings are, *de facto*, political readings, and in a world which is increasingly stressing the knowledge economy, and the economic value of knowledge transfer, a theorized reading of Irish texts will allow for cultural self-understanding, and a better grasp of aspects of our past by looking at the

¹⁰ Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory. Theory and History of Literature, Volume 33*. Forward by Wlad Godzich. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

¹¹ David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993).

¹² Declan Kiberd *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), p. 114.

underlying literary, linguistic, structural and psychoanalytic structures through which that past has been articulated, both factually and imaginatively.

So, this paper is an exemplary text of this type of reading – by examining the guest/ghost/*Geist* interaction, I hope to demonstrate a different reading of a canonical Irish text, as well as showing how the text can be seen as criticizing and complicating some of our cultural and historical givens. I also hope to trace the political implications of this and other texts as I feel that a literary critique which is not grounded in the realities of our times is a large scale waste of time – I am far from the ivory tower school of theory – when I see an ivory tower, my attention is drawn to the corpses of elephants which are the unvoiced other of that metaphor. This complication is clear from the different reactions of the various Irish volunteers to the two English men. While Bonaparte and Noble had extreme difficulty in turning their guests into ghosts, the other two men, O'Donovan and Feeney, “the local intelligence officer” of the IRA, had far less of a problem. They see it as their duty. This sense of “duty” is interesting as one might ask duty to what, or to what cause? As Bonaparte wryly puts it: “I never noticed that people who talk a lot about duty find it much of a trouble to them”.¹³ In this story, different Irish people have very different attitudes to their guests, attitudes which can be seen to oscillate, in a Freudian sense between the *Heimlich* and the *Unheimlich*. Interestingly, O'Connor had some acquaintance with Freud's work as any reader of “My Oedipus Complex” will know.

In an essay published in 1919,¹⁴ Freud probed the intersections of signification that took place in the play of the words *Heimlich* and *Unheimlich*. He attempted to explore, and ultimately break down the opposition between the *Heimlich*, the “intimate” or “domestic”, and the *Unheimlich*, the strange or “uncanny”. He begins by stating the seemingly obvious binary opposition that exists in language between the two terms:

¹³ O'Connor, “Guest of a Nation”, p. 181.

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. . Edited and translated by Strachey, James (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), volume XVII, p. 218.

The German word “*Unheimlich*” is obviously the opposite of “*Heimlich*” [“homely”], “*Heimisch*” [“native”] – the opposite of what is familiar; and we are tempted to conclude that what is “uncanny” is frightening precisely because it is *not* known and familiar.¹⁵

“Guests of a Nation” could be read as oscillating between these two poles as a sort of *Heimlich* manoeuvre. It begins with the homely imagery of the decent English chaps dancing with Irish girls while watched benignly by their captors, who have been transformed into “chums”, as they dance with ‘some of the girls of the neighborhood’.¹⁶ It ends with the two dead Englishmen stiffening in a bog. The word ‘stiffening’ has an implied sexual connotation, and the movement from the possibility of sexual attraction between the British soldiers and Irish women at the ceilidhs is cruelly undercut by the final use of the verb ‘stiffening’: to invoke Freud again, the story moves from the poles of *Eros* (love) to *Thanatos* (death). Clearly there is a polysemic notion of what it means to be a guest here and the strength of the story is like the *Heimlich* maneuver in that the inherent violence in the idea of the nation is forced to the surface, just as the air in the lungs is forced to the surface, except that in this movement from guests to ghosts it is more of an *Unheimlich* maneuver, and I would suggest that such a sense of the *Unheimlich* is at the dark core of certain aspects of nationhood.

Another *Unheimlich* aspect of this story is the use of the term “guest”. Normally, a guest is a person who is welcomed. Indeed the whole notion of hospitality is one of the ways in which societies measure their civilized status. However, Derrida makes the telling connection between the guest and the ghost, observing that there is:

no politics without an organization of the time and space of mourning, without a topolology of the sepulchre, without an anamnestic and thematic relation to the spirit as ghost [revenant], without an open hospitality to the guest as ghost ... whom one holds, just as he holds us, hostage.¹⁷

¹⁵ Freud, *Complete Works*, volume XVII, p. 220

¹⁶ O’Connor, “Guest of a Nation”, p. 173.

¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Aporias: Dying - awaiting (one another at) the limits of truth*, translated by Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 61-62.

For Derrida, the idea of the guest is forever connected with that of the host and the notion of hospitality. In a series of readings of the Oedipus myth (a further Freudian connection), he traces connections between hospitality as an unconditional human law, a law that is above all laws as it allows for a connection between the native and foreigner, host and guest and, ultimately, self and other, and the more practical implications of hospitality in the real world. Tracing the etymology of the word in a series of typical readings, Derrida forms the connection between the “foreigner (*hostis*) welcomed as guest or as enemy. Hospitality, hostility, hospitality”.¹⁸ He moves on to distinguish between the law of hospitality as a Kantian categorical imperative, and the socio-political enactments of that law, two codes which he sees as doomed to pervert each other. At the core of the idea of hospitality is that of the home, and of a sense of mastery of one’s home to the extent that one has the power to choose who to welcome, or not, into one’s home, be that familial, communal or socio-political. As he puts it:

Whenever the “home” is violated, wherever at any rate a violation is felt as such, one can foresee a privatizing and even familialist reaction by widening the ethnocentric and nationalist, and thus xenophobic circle The perversion and pervertibility of this law (which is also a law of hospitality) is that one can become virtually xenophobic in order to protect, or claim to protect, one’s own hospitality, the own home that makes possible one’s own hospitality. I want to be master at home ... to be able to receive whomever I like there. Anyone who encroaches on my “at home”, on my ipseity, on my power of hospitality, on my sovereignty as host, I start to regard as an undesirable foreigner and virtually as an enemy. The other becomes a hostile subject and I run the risk of becoming their hostage.¹⁹

This connection between guests, ghosts and hostages in Derrida’s work sheds obvious light on the O’Connor short story, a story which in its ironic use of the term “guests”, offers a window onto the role of communities and how they create themselves through the interaction with outsiders: how the Homely (*Heimlich*) is created by the unhomely (*Unheimlich*). How hospitality, through its enactment

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*. Anne Dufourmantelle invites Jacques Derrida to Respond. (California: Stanford University Press, 2000), p.45.

¹⁹ Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, pp. 53-55.

of a discourse of mastery, can rapidly become hostility, and how those who are these community's guests can risk becoming ghosts so that the home of the community can be validated and reinforced.

To take, for example, Derrida's discussion of identity, which arises on his being asked about the notion of community, as suggested by the American motto *E pluribus unum*. Derrida's answer sets out to define his attitude to the broadest sense of community, international law, which while *de jure* is a valuable structure, *de facto* is in the hands of "a number of powerful, rich states," a situation which he feels "has to change." It is in the name of such a necessary change that he offers a "new concept of citizenship, of hospitality, a new concept of the state, of democracy".²⁰ Pursuing this trend, and referring again to the epistemology of deconstruction, Derrida argues that he has always focused on "the heterogeneity, the difference, the dissociation, which is absolutely necessary for the relation to the other," and here again we see the strong ethical drive that powers so much of his later work. Taking Heidegger's notion of *Versammlung* (gathering) as a starting point, Derrida proceeds to tease out the status of the limit points of such totalizing drives in terms of identity. He suggests that the identity of a culture is "a way of being different from itself" and when this is taken into account:

...you pay attention to the other and you understand that fighting for your own identity is not exclusive of another identity, is open to another identity. And this prevents totalitarianism, nationalism, egocentrism and so on....in the case of culture, person, nation, language, identity is a self-differentiating identity, an identity different from itself, having an opening or gap within itself.²¹

Just as he problematizes the notion of hospitality by tracing a connection to hostility, so too Derrida looks on images of the transcendent, or ghosts, in a number of different ways. In contrast to the Hegelian notion of the *Geist*, or of some sort of organic energising force which shapes nations and individuals, he posits a more nuanced type of spectral presence, which he terms hauntology. But Derrida makes one important distinction, in that he sees spectrality and time as closely connected. He

²⁰ Derrida Jacques and John D Caputo *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, edited with a commentary by John D. Caputo (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), p. 12.

²¹ Derrida, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, pp. 13-14.

makes the point, speaking both of the ghost in *Hamlet*, and the ghost that haunts Marx's *Communist Manifesto* (where the first noun is 'specter'), that: "[a]t bottom, the specter is the future, it is always to come, it presents itself only as that which could come or come back".²² The two dead Englishmen do not operate hauntologically at a national level, but on the narrator, their impact is lifelong – they will be guests of his memories, his thoughts, his notions – guests of his notions – from that point on. And we will examine those different enunciations of the ghost, the *Geist*, the spirit.

Guests of the Nation as a story title is, of course, reflexive. There can be no nation without a definition of sameness, of gathering, and by extrapolation, of exclusion. As Derrida has said: "there can be no foreigner outside the pact or exchange with a group".²³ The execution of prisoners in reprisal is as old as war itself. There is nothing new or startling in this – in all conflicts, the taking of life is a structural necessity. In a struggle of incipient nationhood, however, the taking of life has a double force. The power to take the life of those who threaten a nation is part of the process of legitimation that a nation or state necessarily undergoes. One sees in the Middle East, groups like Hammass and Islamic Jihad invoking the status of nationhood to validate their attacks on Israel. Generally, these groups are seen as terrorists, whereas the Israeli attacks on Palestinian territories are justified as the protection of the Jewish nation. The right to take life is a central factor in the creation of a nation, and in this story, the "guests" in question are doomed, despite the gradual relationship that dawns between both sets of very similar young men, to become transformed into ghosts by the end of the story. The second aspect of this force is the right to take life, not just in a conflict situation, but in the sense of the planned, societally-approved taking of the life of those whose behaviour is aberrant to the nation, or, as in this case, who are seen as enemies of the nation but who are not in a position to do it any harm. The sense of communal authority to punish those who are not of the nation is a concrete aspect of becoming a nation.

²² Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 39.

²³ Derrida, *Aporias*, p. 29.

Ghosts, I would argue, have a similar binding force in the development of nationhood. Almost every nation on earth is built on the mixture of ghostly past and ghostly future, and it is here that the German parenthesis in the title of this paper becomes important. The term “*Geist*”, forever associated with German philosophical idealism, and in particular the work of Hegel, means spirit, and in terms of the connections already seen at the level of the signifier between “guests” and “ghosts”, this term adds a further dimension. For Hegel, the notion of spirit is important because it is the animating factor in a nation or a people. Indeed, the whole idea of the nation, that is the Irish nation, is created through a period of struggle with the British government, the very struggle that is the focus of this story. Nations, by definition, are created through a sense of spirit, what Hegel terms the “*Geist*”. Indeed the title of this conference adverts to the idea that there is a somehow an animating spirit that binds the people of a nation together. Ghosts are central to this sense of spirit – the memory of the dead, tributes to their graves, a sense of communal bonding in ceremonies of remembrance are common tropes of national practice throughout the world. From the ongoing commemorations of 9/11 to the monuments to war dead, both known and unknown, a bond with the dead, and more specifically with their recalled presence in the present, is part of what makes us a nation.

In an Irish contest, Patrick Pearse made use of the grave of Theobald Wolfe Tone to summon up the spirit of Ireland. In an oration given at the grave of Tone, in Bodenstown, County Kildare, in 1913, Pearse enfolded Tone in the following narrative structure: “we have come to one of the holiest places in Ireland; holier even than the place where Patrick sleeps in Down. Patrick brought us life, but this man died for us. He was the greatest of Irish Nationalists.²⁴ Here there is no attempt to commemorate the historical Wolfe Tone, the “child of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment” whose hope was that

²⁴ Patrick Pearse, *Collected Works of Padraic H. Pearse: Political Writings and Speeches*, 5 volumes (Dublin: Phoenix, 1917-1922), volume II, p. 58.

Enlightenment rationality would supplant what he regarded as ‘superstitious beliefs’.²⁵ Instead, Tone is suavisly captated into Pearse’s own vision of Irish history. It is not accidental that Anderson has noted a ‘strong affinity’ between nationalist and religious imaginings.²⁶ Indeed, he has made the valid point that the dawn of the age of nationalism coincides with the dusk of religious thought.²⁷ In one of his most famous pieces of rhetoric, Pearse again makes use of a grave, this time the funeral oration at the death of the Irish Fenian Jeremiah O’Donovan-Rossa. In lines that have been oft-quoted, Pearse invokes the ghostly legacy of the fenain dead as a way of connecting their struggle with that of the IRA, the Irish Volunteers and the IRB in the mid 1900s. He is invoking and summoning, the spirit of the nation as he sees it:

The Defenders of this Realm have worked well in secret and in the open. They think that they have pacified Ireland. They think that they have pacified half of us and intimidated the other half. They think that they have foreseen everything, think that they have provided against everything; but the fools, the fools, the fools! – they have left us our Fenian dead, and while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace.²⁸

It is, of course, no accident that the name of one of the IRA men, the leader of the group in “Guests of the Nation” is Jeremiah Donovan. In a case of *nomen est omen*, he is the one who from an early stage in the story evinces a dislike of Belcher and Hawkins. As Bonaparte notes “it suddenly struck me that he had no great love for the two Englishmen”.²⁹ It is he who is the instigator of the executions, killing Hawkins himself. The irony of the two unmarked graves being decided by a character named after one of the most famous corpses in Irish nationalist history suggests that this is a deliberate ploy of O’Connor’s in order to demonstrate the difference between attitudes to war dead. In the structural pattern of nation-building, graves, as well as being the receptacles of the glorious dead, are also launching sites for the spirit of the nation, as the *Geist* of the dead hero is summoned to encourage

²⁵ Conor Cruise O’Brien, *Ancestral Voices: Religion and Nationalism in Ireland* (Dublin: Poolbeg Press, 1994), p. 100.

²⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 10.

²⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 11.

²⁸ Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Patrick Pearse. The Triumph of Failure* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1977), p. 236.

²⁹ O’Connor, “Guest of a Nation”, p. 176.

and enthuse the living. During the torturous route to the current peace process, one of the questions most asked at rallies staged by those opposed to any form of truce or cessation was: “did Bobby Sands die for a renamed police force or for delimited power sharing”? Clearly the power of the ghost is strong in this discourse.

The ghost of O’Donovan Rossa, the dead Fenian, haunts the consciousness of Irish nationalism through the rhetoric of Pearse’s oration; the stiffening bodies of the two dead Englishmen have no such macro-significance, but they too are ghosts, haunting the imaginations of Noble, Bonaparte and the old woman who fell on her knees praying for the two Englishmen. Their effect on Bonaparte is *hauntological* in that they will shape his views of the future: they are not in anyway the spectral tramlines, used to shoehorn the infinite future into very strict direction, as we have seen in the invocations of the ghosts of Tone, O’Donovan Rossa and Sands. They will bring the other to bear on the self, they will be the motive force behind that gap in identity that we saw Derrida mention; they will speak of an identity to come.

In a sense, Pearse’s ghosts expunge the voice of the other; their message is essentialist, and imperative. Derridean *hauntology* is predicated on the future, on the other of ontology, so that it can be seen as an expression of Adorno’s negativity which always inhabits dialectical thought. Indeed, Adorno, in discussing dialectics, refers to the process in spectral terms, telling us that negative dialectical logic is one of “disintegration”,³⁰ and his negative dialectics would seem to be a mode of resistance to a positivism similar to that of Pearse’s notions of identity. So, when Pearse speaks of the injunction put on him by the “ghosts of a nation”, he seems to see this injunction as a monological inheritance, an irruption of a fixed and unified past in the present, as a guideline to a teleological future.

³⁰ Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*. Translated by E. B. Ashton. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 145.

However, Derrida has discussed this very notion of spectral inheritance and has made the point that, far from issuing from a fixed centre, and from containing an unequivocal meaning, an inheritance “is never gathered together, it is never one with itself”.³¹ By moving away from the central preoccupations of Pearse, Derrida’s perspective allows for the influence of the present, and the future, in interpreting the past, a present that must be shaped by factors that were never available in the past. In other words, he takes cognizance of the fact that messages need to be interpreted, that ideologies are subject to change and that it is through the act of reading, an act which, by definition, takes place in the present that the past is given voice. Hence Derrida’s point that, in interpreting the past, one must “filter, sift, criticize, one must sort out several different possibles that inhabit the same injunction”.³² It also leaves room for some kind of dialogue with alterity, in that if even our ghosts are monological and monocultural, there will be no room for any other voices in the creation and presentation of Irish identity.

This is contrary to the Hegelian Geist that is the animating force of the engine of nation-building, namely nationalism. Benedict Anderson, in his *Imagined Communities*, defines the nation, and by extrapolation, nationalism, as an “imagined political community.” This definition has achieved widespread currency, and the spirit of the nation is part of this process of imagining:

Nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent. Nationalism as a sentiment, or as a movement, can best be defined in terms of this principle. Nationalist *sentiment* is the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of this principle, or the feeling of satisfaction aroused by its fulfillment. A nationalist *movement* is one actuated by a sentiment of this kind.³³

Interestingly, Gellner utilises affective criteria in his definition, adverting to Nationalist ‘*sentiment*’ as involving the “feeling of anger” or the “feeling of satisfaction” aroused by the thwarting or

³¹ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 16.

³² Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 16.

³³ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p. 1.

fulfilment of its aims. Both Bonaparte and Noble were participant in this type of sentiment in that while they liked Hawkins and Belcher as people, they were willing, albeit reluctantly, to participate in their execution – they are willing to be part of the nation-building force of an imagined community that abrogates to itself the right to take life. The issue of taking life is, of course what transforms a guest into a ghost, and it is to another such life-taking, but not a fictional one, that our attention now turns:

On Monday 21 January 2002, Zhao Liu Tao, a 29-year old Chinese man was attacked, along with two friends, by a group of Irish youths on his way home in Drumcondra, Dublin. The youths hurled racial abuse at the Chinese students before a scuffle broke out. Zhao Liu Tao was hit repeatedly on the head with an iron bar and was admitted to hospital where he died on Thursday 24 January. Zhao Liu Tiu's death was widely reported as Ireland's "first racially-motivated murder".³⁴

Here we see the death of someone who is not of the people, someone who is a latter-day guest of the nation, not a member of this nation but a guest soon to be turned ghost. Interestingly Lentin and McVeigh note the murder was hardly mentioned in the press after initial reports, and also that the Garda enquiry has been low key.³⁵ This is in very stark contrast to the violent killing of a young Dublin man outside Annabel's disco in August 2002. In this killing, a young man Brian Murphy was involved in a fracas and subsequently was killed through a series of kicks and blows on the head. The press furor that followed this killing and the subsequent trial of the middle-class young men accused of the killing filled to thousands of lines of newsprint, editorial and comment.

Clearly for middle Ireland, the specter of a young, middle class white man being killed by other young middle-class men was the kind of appalling vista that shook it to its core, and various opinions were offered as to why and how this happened. The contrast with the killing and subsequent reportage of the death of Zhao Liu Tao could not be starker. As a nation, we are reluctant to

³⁴ Ronit Lentin and Robbie McVeigh (eds) *Racism and Anti-Racism in Ireland*. (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 2002), p.1

³⁵ Lentin and McVeigh, *Racism and Anti-racism in Ireland*, p. 2.

comment on this aspect of death. Just as Hawkins and Belcher were buried in a bog, so this young student was buried in an unreported bog – his death was not the cause for public outcry – his *Geist*, or spirit did not call from the grave to the nation of which he was a guest.

But that of Brian Murphy does. Debates have gone on in Ireland since his murder, as parents of middle and middle-class Ireland asked themselves how safe their own children were in the drink-sodden and drugged up culture of contemporary social scene. This young man's spirit also spoke to people who were the parents of the four accused – and they asked where they had gone wrong. Another aspect of this story, seldom commented on, is that over three hundred people were on the vicinity of Annabel's that night, but the evidence given has been fractured, contradictory and it is highly possible that the person or persons who delivered the fatal kicks have actually not been charged. Here, in microcosm, we have the imperative of the power of the nation to impose its will. There was a metaphorical circling of wagons at work here: just as the killers of Belcher and Hawkins felt they had the right to take these lives, and the killers of Zhao Liu Tao felt that they too had the right to take life under the auspices of keeping Ireland free from foreign contamination, so the killers of Brian Murphy, and more importantly, the onlookers, also felt complicit in the taking of this life.

The problem here is that so few people actually know of this murder and also that so many Irish regard themselves as racist. Robert McVeigh makes the point that Irish racism is on the rise in proportion to the influx, from a very low base, of minority ethnic people. He notes that in a recent European Commission poll, some 55 per cent of Irish people saw themselves as racist.³⁶ The killing of the Chinese student speaks to this racism; the killing of Brian Murphy speaks to something different. In sociological terms there is a differentiation between the notion of *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society), and I would argue that in the concept of the nation, the community becomes the society – the people, the *Volk*, become the polis, and the ability to treat

³⁶ Lentin and Mcveigh, *Racism and Anti-Racism in Ireland*, p. 211.

guests as one wishes is part of this process. Thus, while the killing of Zhou Liu Tao is validated by a racist *Gemeinschaft*, one could make the same point about the killing of Brian Murphy – he too has been killed within a community, albeit a postmodern, shifting, one of post night-club revelers who are quite used to seeing fights, rows and physical violence in the small hours of the morning. The sense that this just happened, that there was nothing that could be done to avoid it, and that blame is somehow not an issue, recalls the feelings of Bonaparte in “Guests of the Nation” as he goes through the killings in almost dreamlike state and clearly wishes the whole thing was over. The effect of his ghost is probably equally as strong on the people who were there on that fateful night.

And if we are being logical, the people who killed Hawkins and Belcher are also part of a *Gemeinschaft* as opposed to a *Gesellschaft*, they are a community on the way to becoming a society and it is to this end that they kill the two Englishmen. Indeed, it is in terms of the taking of such power on behalf of their sense of home, of the *Heimlich*, that such an *Unheimlich* maneuver is sanctioned. For the *Volk* to be the *Volk*, the guest, the foreigner, must be brought under control, what Derrida terms “the collusion between the violence of power and the force of law and hospitality”.³⁷ We return to this ability to take life as a sanctioning of some form of community, when we look at an event nearer to us in time – namely the death in Belfast of Robert McCartney. On January 30th, 2005, Robert McCartney was murdered outside Magennis’s pub in the Short Strand area of Belfast. Reputedly, the murderers were members of Sinn Fein and the Provisional IRA and, in the aftermath of the murder, the pub was cleaned of fingerprints, CCTV evidence was removed and threats were issued to the witnesses of the act as to the consequences of reporting any of this to the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

The sisters of Robert McCartney – Catherine, Paula, Claire, Donna and Gemma – and his partner Bridgeen, have spoken out in a campaign to see justice done to their brother in death. It is a

³⁷ Derrida, *Aporias*, p. 55.

campaign which has had a deconstructive effect on Sinn Fein and the IRA who have always used the dead's potent symbols of oppression, and who have made commemoration of their own dead key staging points for political and military rebirths. Even more ironically, the members of Sinn Fein and the IRA who killed him were returning from a commemoration of the bloody Sunday, an event when members of the British Paratroop regiment killed thirteen protest marchers in Derry in 1972. They were commemorating the ghosts of their own past struggle even as they created another one. Here, the epistemological waters of communal sanction for violence become more muddied. Had these members of Sinn Fein the right to kill Robert McCartney, and has they the subsequent right to demand silence from those in their own *Gemeinschaft*? The ghost of Robert McCartney haunts the political process to this day, as his killers have still not been rendered up to the PSNI.

But the ghosts don't stop there. Ten years ago next year will be the anniversary of an event which made the little village of Adare, ironically almost a transplanted English village in terms of the Manor house and the cottages that comprise it, world famous. This was the site of an abortive post-office robbery by the Provisional IRA, a robbery which resulted in the serious wounding of Garda Ben O'Sullivan, and the murder of his colleague, Garda Jerry McCabe. McCabe's death was a catalyst in the peace process as it forced a lot of people to ask some hard questions of the IRA and also of the Sinn Fein leadership. His ghost has haunted that organization, as the Irish people have steadfastly expressed their ongoing revulsion at the deed, and his wife Ann, like the sisters of Robert McCartney, will not let his memory die.

It is also another case of the community being complicit in a crime – witnesses to the murder suffered serious intimidation, threats were issued, people withdrew evidence and the charge was changed from murder to manslaughter. This in itself is a misnomer, as manslaughter suggests an involuntary death as a result of non-premeditated actions. I would question whether the sticking of a Kalashnikov semi-automatic rifle through a window of a car and spraying the occupants (neither of whom had a

weapon drawn) can be seen as in any way accidental. A further aspect of this was that the Provos were on ceasefire and initially denied all responsibility, a point made by the then minister for justice Michael Noonan who uttered the ill-fated words that “when they do something they normally admit it” – another interesting case of the hospitality issue which we have been discussing – as the state provides hospitality to an organization whose express aims are the destruction of that state.

It is doubly ironic that a movement which has had such a strong association with the ghosts of the past, and with the construction of a particular nationalist vision of the Spirit of Ireland, a strategy which as Bennington and Gellner have noted, is seminal to nationalist discourse, should itself fall victim to ghosts of its own creation. The specters of McCabe and McCartney have haunted the Sinn Fein leadership, two Irishmen stiffening in their graves but whose spirits, in a *Heimlich* maneuver, have caused people never to feel the same again about that movement. To amend Gerry Adams’ famous phrase about the Provos on ceasefire: “They haven’t gone away you know!”

Are we looking at a similar case to that of the other ghostly victims of communal violence here? Is this how the spirit of the nation is enacted, through a violent purging of the other? And who makes the decision as to who the other is or draws up the criteria of otherness? In terms of such spiritual hauntings, Derrida has coined a difference between what he calls messianism and messianicity. As he put it, the “messianic” attitude is one which constitutes:

The historical opening to the future, therefore to experience itself and to its language, expectation, promise, commitment to the event of what is coming, imminence, urgency demand for salvation and for justice beyond law, pledge given to the other inasmuch as he or she is not present, presently present or living.³⁸

For Derrida, the messianic structure is “a universal structure”,³⁹ which is defined by waiting for the future, by addressing the other as other, and hence, by refusing to base notions of the present and

³⁸ *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, p. 22.

³⁹ *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, p. 22.

future on a lineal descent from a particular version of the past. He goes on to note that the messianic structure is predicated on a promise, on an expectation that whatever is coming in the future “has to do with justice”.⁴⁰ What he terms messianism, on the other hand is culturally and temporally limited and constrained to the “determinate figures” of “Jewish, Christian, or Islamic messianism.” He goes on:

As soon as you reduce the messianic structure to messianism then you are reducing the universality and this has important political consequences. Then you are accrediting one tradition among others, and a notion of an elected people, of a given literal language, a given fundamentalism.⁴¹

This has been seen in the reactions of those who have killed in the name of community, but possibly more importantly, in the reactions of those who don’t initiate the violence but who abet it, like Bonaparte, like those who watched the deaths of Murphy, Zhao Liu Tao, McCartney and McCabe, all revenants, all specters who haunt our imagination and should ask us the question about the nature of our community.

We began this paper looking at Derrida’s ideas of the ghost, and in *Specters of Marx*, he offers a spectral reading of the ghost who appeared to Hamlet, the ghost of a murdered father. This ghost offered Hamlet an obligation and an invitation: he offered Hamlet a chance to both avenge the past and to alter the future. I would argue that, at its best, “Guests of a Nation” offers us the same challenge. The ghosts of Hawkins and Belcher, those Englishmen stiffening in an unmarked grave, are signified not as ideologues but as people, human beings to whom justice was not done. Their ghosts haunt our own ideas about war, and its justification. In the real world, the ghosts of the other dead men can pose us the same question – if the work that we all do as writers, critics, theorists is to have a socially ameliorative role, then it should, I think, be this. To use texts and theory as a vehicle of critique, to use text and theory as a way of understanding the power dynamics of our culture, our

⁴⁰ *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, p. 23.

⁴¹ *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, p. 23.

politics and our ideology, to use text and theory as ways of looking, not at the sweeping narratives of ideologically-suasive discourses of history but to look at the individuals in this story, to connect them with other individuals in real narratives, and to make sure that the memory of these ghosts makes us “never feel he same again” because whatever is given can always be reimagined – that’s where the subtitle comes in and perhaps that is the socio-cultural value of literature, critique and theory – to speed this process of reimagining, to bring to the surface that which was hidden and to look clearly at the uncanny aspects of what we deem familiar, to look at the ghosts of memory and desire, and above all, to focus on the future. We should, and must, remember the ghosts of Zhao Liu Tao, Brian Murphy, Robert McCartney and Jerry McCabe. In memory they join with the fictive specters of Hawkins and belcher. In our work, they should help is reimagine the inheritance of the past in such a way as to ensure that the future will, to an extent, be better.