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In *Broken Harbour* (2012), the fourth novel in her Dublin Murder Squad series, Tana French parallels Detective Mike Kennedy's childhood trauma of losing his mother to suicide with the emotional, physical, and economic violence caused by the phenomena and legacy of Irish ghost estates constructed in the early 2000s. Just as ghost estates were originally booming middle-class suburban homes built from the unsustainable economic success of Celtic Tiger Ireland, French suggests in *Broken Harbour* that the Irish family structures that preceded the rise of Ireland to global prominence were equally unsustainable and haunt the domestic spaces produced during and after the Tiger. Kennedy explains in the beginning of the novel that he has a history of family vacations to Broken Harbour, once a lazy seaside town that is now frozen in time as an unfinished housing development that provides the murder scene he and his crew must investigate. When Kennedy finally admits that he blames his childhood self for his mother's death, French returns to the private analogy she constructs early in the novel for the public pain of recession-era loss: 'Places are like people are like sharks: if they stop moving, they die. But everyone has one place that they like to think is never going to change'.[1] As readers of gothic fiction, accustomed to uncanny domestic spaces, we can assume, of course, that this place will undeniably change, transforming from an intimate setting imbued with nostalgia into an unfamiliar and threatening environment.

The tension between immobility and inevitable change surfaces throughout *Broken Harbour* as a dangerous element of Ireland's history with domestic and economic violence, both before and after the nation's participation in the millennial effects of late global capitalism. Indeed, *Broken Harbour* portrays a country caught in a stasis that is physical, economic, and cultural. French's diagnosis of such paralysis occurs through her invocation of

a gothic mystery, uncanny in its engagement with almost all traditional gothic themes, such as domestic space, haunted pasts, and the disempowerment of female sexuality. In *Broken Harbour*, the gothic serves as the foundational narrative strategy linking national and personal fears of entrapment with a political commentary about the lasting repercussions of unbridled development and excess.

In a recent article for the *Irish Times*, Jarlath Killeen argues that the early years of the twenty-first century all but eliminated Irish gothic as the country inexorably advanced into a modernity heralded by the Celtic Tiger. With the ensuing economic downturn, however, 'we re-entered Gothic Ireland (or, more credibly, we never really left it)'.[2] French's Dublin Murder Squad series marks that re-entrance vividly and suggests the wide popular appeal of Irish gothic forms in the broad success of the novels on both sides of the Atlantic as well as the adaptation of the first book in the series, *In the Woods* (2007), by Starz/RTÉ in 2019. Further, evidence of Killeen's claims might be found in myriad examples of recent Irish cultural production, which frequently demonstrates a decided penchant for the gothic. Take, for instance, novels such as Sophie White's *Where I End* (2022), Sarah Davis-Goff's *Last Ones Left Alive* (2019), and Joseph O'Connor's *Shadowplay* (2019), the evocative photography of ghost estates in Anthony Haughey's *Settlement* series (2011), and the domestic gothic explored in the works of visual artist Aideen Barry. Or, think of Morrisey's gothically-inflected albums of the early 2000s and the 2017 Irish Film Board-funded horror film *The Lodgers*.[3] In contemporary Ireland, it seems, a strong creative attraction to the gothic still exists, inspiring original literary and cultural production across multiple genres and modes.

Despite the resurgence of Irish gothic cultural production in recent years, the gothic still suffers from its reputation as derivative and consumer-focused, as suggested by the critical reception of French's fiction. Credited with a powerful new Irish gothic aesthetic,

French's works have nevertheless simultaneously been disparaged for operating within a low-brow, consumer-driven, paperback culture. The friction between the confines of genre and the claim to a legitimate critical approach to literature and culture continues to be one of the defining features of contemporary Irish gothic and the academic field of Irish studies. Of course, gothic literature has straddled the margins of canon and pulp since the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). David Punter, for instance, argues that 'Gothic in general is strewn with ruins, endlessly attentive to the 'other' stories that can be told about national and cultural monuments … the ways in which these alternative narratives are shaped will always be responsive to the specific conditions of power'.[4] Punter acknowledges that gothic remains a marginalized space for protest and preservation, offering ruins instead of monuments to a past of fragmentation and broken subjectivity. We would argue further that illustrating the history of violence in Ireland through crime fiction and a gothic memory of maternal death and failure, as French does in *Broken Harbour*, not only emphasizes the need for alternative narratives in our current moment of critical analysis, but also positions those narratives as unrivalled spaces for the recognition of a damaged history that should and could have helped us to better understand the rise and fall of wealth in the early 2000s. Irish gothic studies today must be preoccupied with genre fiction and other areas of gothic cultural production if it is to do its job of reflecting the fractures within the cultural majority.

We are not naïve to the provocation that a call to arms for the consumption and production of genre fiction and other alternatives to the traditional canon will most certainly engender in most of our reading audience. Lately, literary criticism has engaged in a much-needed push to redefine its approach to many periods and categories in literature, such as the 'new Irish studies,' the 'new modernist studies,' or the 'new global studies'. Much of this strategy has included carefully restricting what is allowed to hover under each categorical

umbrella. However, gothic studies today differs from such approaches in its presupposed alliance with, rather than opposition to, popular aesthetics that have never been part of the exclusivity of canonical inclusion—crime noir, erotica, teen romance, etc. While 'new' gothic studies might still seek to understand the contemporary parameters of the genre, the focus is instead on extending and discovering the space beyond those parameters; gothic studies encourages the expansion of the field rather than the definitional restriction of its literary and cultural status.

Gothic's current vitality in Ireland reflects, on the one hand, the mode's sheer ubiquity and continued currency in the twenty-first century; as Catherine Spooner evocatively puts it, '[i]n contemporary western culture, the gothic lurks in all sorts of unexpected corners'.[5] On the other hand, however, questions of Irish particularity remain and call to mind a long history of debate surrounding the contested category of Irish gothic literary production. Tellingly, just as Irish gothic seems to have entered into a new vogue, or a 'revival' as Killeen calls it,[6] so too has scholarship of Irish gothic cultural production experienced a steady uptick. From the publication of William McCormack's influential contribution on 'Irish Gothic and After' in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (1991), critics such as Siobhán Kilfeather, Julian Moynahan, Margot Gayle Backus, and Roy Foster, amongst many others, have grappled with the question of how best to define a body of literature that so frequently seems to defy formal or generic categorisation. Conventionally, the answer has been found in allegorical or psychoanalytic readings that view Irish gothic as the cultural expression of repressed desires and anxieties, particularly those associated with the Anglo-Irish population in the nineteenth century. If this tendency works to construct a wholly Protestant, largely male 'tradition', 'canon', or 'genre', more recent work follows the example set by Kilfeather in querying – sometimes quite heatedly – both the terms we use to refer to this body of work and our assumptions about its production.

In the past ten to fifteen years, in particular, there has been growing attention to Irish gothic's multiplicity and the need to re-think definitions that artificially limit a diverse corpus by way of gender and creed. For instance, Derek Gladwin's *Contentious Terrains: Boglands, Ireland, Postcolonial Gothic* and Joseph Valente and Margot Gayle Backus's *The Child Sex Scandal and Modern Irish Literature* both pursue non-traditional gothic readings of Irish culture beyond literary analysis, focusing respectively on the Irish landscape and the trauma of child sex scandal in national historical memory. In creative terms, contemporary novels by Claire Kilroy, Conor O'Callaghan, and Anna Burns, amongst others, push the boundaries of conventional delineations of Irish gothic, asking readers to update and nuance their understandings of that term and the body of literature it represents in a twenty-first century context. Meanwhile, film and TV treatments such as those mentioned above, as well as visual art from Sean Keating's *Irish Gothic* (1950) to the body gothic multimedia works of Alice Maher, adopt gothic themes and modes to explore social and personal trauma and to document everyday realities.

Through the cultural expansionism that is inherent to the gothic, Irish literary studies can learn from new waves of gothic cultural production and new texts that adopt gothic modes, particularly in terms of global diversity. Expansion to a global arena does not just mean exploring the diaspora of the field, but also learning how the gothic can mirror back those broken spaces and lost memories that define so much of contemporary Ireland, domestically and internationally. In terms of literary production, we see this vividly in the work of independent Irish publishers like the Tramp Press and the Swan River Press to recover and make more accessible key works of often overlooked gothic literature and ghosts stories of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These publishers have helped to bring works by Dorothy Macardle (1889-1958), Rosa Mulholland (1841-1921), and Charlotte Riddell (1832-1906) intro greater prominence. As a corollary, these new editions and the

increased cultural awareness of the diversity of Irish literary engagement with the gothic mode has gone a long way to counter conventional views of Irish gothic as dominated by the publications of a handful of male authors, namely Charles Maturin (1780-1824), Sheridan Le Fanu (1814-73), Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), and Bram Stoker (1847-1912).

Gothic also provides supplemental tools for contemporary Irish writers who seek to represent marginalized voices while, in many ways, resisting convention and genre, as is evident in Melatu Uche Okorie's *This Hostel Life* (2018) and Emma Dabiri's *Don't Touch My hair* (2019). Both texts are part memoir and part manifesto while pushing the boundaries on form and genre and utilizing various gothic motifs to make their points. *This Hostel Life,* for example, considers Okorie's experience with Direct Provision alongside her familial experiences with Nigerian custom and culture, even the legacy of ghost stories in her cultural past. Okorie's employment of her own invented Nigerian pidgin English patois echoes the class issues taken up by gothic novels of the past, such as *Dracula* or *Frankenstein*, where characters' outsider positions are often signalled by dialect and narrative difference. Approaching *This Hostel Life* from the perspective of global gothic allows us to understand Okorie's critique of Ireland's immigration system as a cracked looking glass for Irish capitalism and conservatism, a warning against repeating the mistakes of the past. Channelling Mindi McMann's argument from her essay in this issue, 'Failed Heterotopias: The Postcolonial Gothic in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, and Anna Burns's *Milkman*', we could read Okorie's approach as offering the revelation that the independence of the postcolonial state is, at best, nominal while its inhabitants continue to be subjected to oppressive power structures. The contemporary gothic affords literary genres the possibility of holding onto a postcolonial narrative of liberation while witnessing the transgression inherent to that same process of national emergence and emancipatory national identity.

In light of the vogue for gothic in contemporary Ireland as well as its rich potential for reflecting and productively refracting current social, cultural, and political realities, this special issue seeks to survey and probe the field of twenty-first century Irish gothic production and studies. Our aim is to produce an analysis of the current state of critical and creative practice, charting trends, conflicts, and changes while also highlighting past achievements and future possibilities. Among the questions the issue poses are: Why is Irish gothic experiencing a vogue – in both scholarship and cultural production – in recent years? How has our scholarly view of Irish gothic changed and evolved over the years? What issues – terminological, definitional, or otherwise – are we still struggling with today? Where do we go from here? In addressing these questions, the articles in this issue cohere around three key thematic foci: the revisiting of well-known 'Irish Gothics' with the view to providing fresh insights; the exploration of the rich potential afforded by interdisciplinary approaches that bring Irish gothic into contact and conversation with exciting new developments in the areas of, for instance, eco-criticism, medical humanities, and digital humanities; and the production of new creative engagements with and iterations of Irish gothic. Renée Fox and Sean O'Rourke, for example, consider the works of Bram Stoker and Sheridan Le Fanu, respectively, but do so in a way that simultaneously invites re-reading of these authors' oeuvres and emphasises the rewards to be had from turning a fresh critical eye on them. Fox's incisive reading of *Dracula* argues that by understanding how that novel adopts and manipulates a form of 'gothic realism' to yield an affective mode of representing present day realities, we can better appreciate the limitations of once-cherished ideas about the dominance and distinctiveness of nineteenth-century realism. O'Rourke, meanwhile, brings theories of social constructionism to bear on Le Fanu's lesser-known fictions to demonstrate how these works use the gothic both to build and to undermine the communities described within their pages as well as the carefully but tenuously maintained boundaries of their shared

existence. Further, reflecting on the ways in which Le Fanu invites his reader into the narratological process of reality-creation, O'Rourke suggests that Le Fanu's fiction might ultimately help us 'can be an illustrative tool to experience and theorise about damaging constructed configurations such as those continually reified in the academy'.

Where Fox and O'Rourke interrogate Irish gothic literature's relationship to realism and the real, articles by Lauren Cassidy and Brian Cliff re-think the traditional formal and generic borders of Irish gothic literature. Cassidy's perceptive reading of Emma Donoghue's *Hood* (1995) teases out the importance of folklore and, in particular, the figure of the sovereignty goddess in contemporary Irish gothic, arguing that Donoghue calls on this mythical trope 'to both deconstruct the nightmare of Ireland's history, and produce inchoate, utopian daydreams for the nation's future' (p.xx). Also focusing on modern and contemporary literary production, specifically Irish crime fiction, Cliff traces the varied engagements with gothic modes and forms in works by a number of popular writers, including Liz Nugent, Tana French, John Connolly, and Declan Hughes. Cliff's analysis demonstrates Irish crime novels' repeated attraction to the gothic, which Cliff ably contends, proves a key literary influence for Irish crime writers throughout much of the twentieth century and into the contemporary period.

Addressing the second thematic focus noted above, namely interdisciplinary approaches that juxtapose Irish gothic and newer fields of critical enquiry, articles by Deirdre Flynn and Matthew Reznicek ask pertinent questions about what Irish gothic has to say about particularly pressing issues of our day, namely climate change and the impact of global health crises. Flynn's discussion builds, in implicit and explicit ways, on the growing body of eco-gothic criticism and, in a particularly Irish context, Gladwin's trenchant discussion of postcolonial Irish gothic literature as a response, at least in part, to Ireland's geographic and natural realities, especially the bog.[7] Her attention to Kevin Barry's 'Fjord at Killary' (2011)

yields a smart analysis of the ways in which the text, and a larger tradition of twenty-first century Irish dystopian fiction, looks back to traditional ideas of Ireland as a peculiarly gothic geographical space to dramatize the real urgency of global warming and environmental crisis. In so doing, Barry's story, Flynn argues, underscores the literary gothic's continued relevance, in this case, as a mode of activism and protest in a period of disaster. In turn, Reznicek's timely investigation of the biopolitics of early-nineteenth century literature written at a moment of deep change – in Ireland's case, the Anglo-Irish Union of 1801 – reminds us that the realities of pandemics and global health crises have long been both a threat to the world's population and, accordingly, a consideration in the creation of national identities, boundaries, and politics. By approaching national tales by Maria Edgeworth and her Scottish contemporary Walter Scott via the combined lenses of gothic literary criticism and disability studies, Reznicek suggests that we can better appreciate the ways in which the Romantic era's shaping of the nation relied upon a model of citizenship open only to the able-bodied. This ideal body politic was, however, haunted by its gothic counterpart, as is vividly demonstrated in Edgeworth's *Ennui* (1809) and Scott's *The Black Dwarf* (1816).

If Reznicek's fresh take on two oft-studied novels of the early nineteenth century speaks to the value of revisiting beloved favourites, the realm of Digital Humanities offers exciting methods of expanding the horizons of received canons. Edward Kearns and Christina Morin point to some of the possibilities in their article, in which computational analysis is used to run comparisons between the gothic novels of little known Irish writers publishing with London's Minerva Press – the genre fiction publisher par excellence of the Romantic period – and the British Library's digital archive of nineteenth-century books comprised of nearly 70,000 volumes. By gesturing to the possibilities of this analysis, namely the identification of intertextual references to Irish Minerva texts in the long nineteenth century, the article suggests the value of twinning quantitative and qualitative analytic tools to

understand the real cultural impact of these works in both transnational and transhistorical contexts.

Finally, this collection spotlights new forays into gothic writing and representation beyond traditional literary criticism. Ed Madden's poetry series and Declan Long's essay about gothic impulses in Willie Doherty's art exemplify new creative interpretations and recapitulations of Irish gothic. In both Madden's work and Long's essay, the gothic emerges as a driving artistic force for conversations about personal and political violence as well as family histories fraught with absence and loss. In some ways, this final lens of the special issue offers a path to understanding the various ways gothic both influences and documents our experience of living with the constant flux of contemporary modernity. We present this issue as an amalgamation of critical and creative voices that expand the field while preserving the multitude of ways that gothic resonates for readers and writers today. Madden's description of his family's 'prayer cloth' might just as easily describe this special issue and gothic studies today, as it is 'stitched with history and disease and prayer' (p.xx).

New gothic studies boasts a repertoire that places gothic literary and cultural production alongside urgent global narratives of exploitation and trauma while articulating the genre's strongest feature: the betrayal of the ideological state apparatuses of canon construction and national biases of state power, simultaneously, through the persuasiveness of popular aesthetics and the transparency of marginalized narratives. Few genres carry this discursive power and influence, and even fewer possess the ability to transcend periodization to confront modernity in every changing moment of the development of capitalism since the Enlightenment. Gothic studies today is the articulation and interrogation of the process of becoming modern through every historical iteration that has led to our present moment. It is evergreen as a literary genre and one of the most strategic approaches to literature's foundational role as the public critique of private power.

[1] Tana French, *Broken Harbor* (Penguin, 2013), pp.11-12. The novel was originally published in Ireland by Hatchette Books in 2012 and was then titled *Broken Harbour*. We will use the latter throughout this introduction.

[2] Jarlath Killeen, 'How Celtic Tiger's Death Led to a Gothic Revival', *Irish Times*, (28 April 2017). Available online from https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/how-celtic-tiger-s-death-led-to-a-gothic-revival-1.3065069.

[3] On the subject of Morrissey's gothic aesthetic, see, in particular, Isabella van Elferen, 'Morrissey's Gothic Ireland', in *Music and Identity in Ireland and Beyond*, ed. by Mark Fitzgerald and John O'Flynne (London: Taylor and Francis, 2014), pp.165-77.

[4] David Punter, 'Scottish and Irish Gothic', in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. by Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.105-23 (p.122).

[5] Catherine Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), p.8.

[6] Killeen.

[7] See Derek Gladwin, *Contentions Terrains: Boglands, Ireland, Postcolonial Gothic* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2016).