

## Memory and forgetting in Irish culture

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TOO MUCH MEMORY is a form of madness.' So speaks Hugh Mor, the schoolmaster in Brian Friel's *Translations*, a play about Irish-British relationships on the eve of the Great Famine. Friel's point is that if often it is good to remember, there are times when it is better to forget — and move on. This delicate balance between remembering and forgetting can have an extra moral and political charge when it comes to Irish history.

It is interesting to recall that one of the first books published in Ireland was the Book of Invasions. This recorded the genealogy of incursion and settlements which made up the earliest annals of Irish history. But already we note a mixing of history - telling it *as it happened* - and fiction - telling it *as if it happened*; for in those ancient times the boundary between empirical fact and cultural imagination was often blurred. Historical remembrance, in short, has been a founding moment in Irish national culture but it is, from the outset, a matter of hermeneutic interpretation. When one begins a manuscript with the words *In illo tempore*, 'In the old days', *Fadofado ...*, one is already encountering a particular narrative take on the legacy of the past. Historical memory always involves some measure of interpretative selection or conflict - depending on who is telling and who is reading the narrative. History and story were never clearly separable in ancient literature. And many would argue that, in spite of all the advances in modern historiography, it is to some extent still true today. For, as Nietzsche provocatively remarked, 'there are no facts, only interpretations of facts'.

Philosophers have made various attempts to discriminate between different kinds of historical memory. Nietzsche made a famous distinction between 'critical' and 'monumental' memory in his influential essay, *On the uses and abuses of history*. Kierkegaard distinguished between what he called 'repetition' (repeating past moments forward in a liberating way) and 'recollection' (repeating the past backwards in regressive fashion). Later again, Freud urged his readers to find a way of moving beyond the obsessional neurosis of repetition compulsion (which he termed 'melancholy' or the inability to let go of the lost object of the past) in order to embrace the difficult and patient 'working through' of 'mourning' (letting go of the lost object). Finally, in his recent book, *History, memory and forgetting*, Paul Ricoeur draws on such precedents to develop a crucial distinction between 'blocked memory' (*memoire empechee*) and 'emancipatory memory' which opens up a future for our history, at a personal or collective level.

These various critical attempts to discern different ways of remembering and forgetting all acknowledge the stakes involved in any attempt to come to terms with one's national or cultural past. And given Ireland's complex history of violence and struggle such stakes are high indeed. Interpreting the wounds of history is never a simple matter. One need only recall the controversies surrounding questions of reliable and disputed memory in the Truth Commission on Bloody Sunday or the various commemorations of events like the Battle of the Boyne, the 1916 rising or the 1840's Famine, to be reminded of just how sensitive and contentious such issues can be.

Let me begin with some reflections on the role of memory in Irish literature before moving on, in the second part of this paper, to a consideration of the ethics of 'exchanging memories' in relation to the great Irish Famine.

1

One of the first lines uttered (in English) by an Irishman is Captain McMorris' famous question in Shakespeare's *Henry V*: 'What ish my nation?'

From the word go, we find the perennial Hibernian questioning of identity and belonging. An Irish person, as the bard of Stratford knew well, is someone who asks what it means to be Irish. Indeed we find a curious echo of this in Shakespeare's *Richard II* when the King returns from a trip to Ireland, puzzled and bewildered as to his one and indivisible sovereignty: 'I had forgot myself, am I not King? [...] Is not the King's name forty thousand names?'

In other words, the Monarch's traversal of the island of Ireland signals an experience of estrangement from his unitary identity. Ireland plays the role of deconstructive alter-ego, or cracked mirror, to England's Imperial selfhood. The King cannot remember himself as sovereign without remembering himself as multiply non-sovereign. He falls into a thousand pieces and cannot put himself back together again. His sense of nation involves alien-nation.

To return to the Irish literary tradition proper, one finds a complex play of remembrance and retrieval in the debates of the Literary Revival at the turn of the twentieth century. At the outset, we find a call for a radical de-anglicization by Douglas Hyde and the founders of the Gaelic League, issuing at times in an exclusivist brand of cultural nationalism. This was brought to an extreme by propagandists like D.P. Moran with his purist distinction between the 'Irish Irish' (meaning Gaelic and Catholic) and the 'non-Irish Irish'. But this sectarian and separatist attitude was countered by a more pluralist and dialectical notion of cultural memory, represented by great modern Irish writers like Yeats, Synge, O'Casey and Joyce.

Yeats' sophisticated retrieval of Irish myths and legends in light of a certain Nietzschean modernism was a case in point. Synge's *Playboy* offered a further gloss on the complex retelling of one's history, with the hero, Christy Mahon, reinventing himself as a storyteller who realizes that the past is not some predetermining set of facts but an occasion for creative reinterpretation. 'I was made a man by the power of a lie', he concedes at one point — a concession which does not prevent him from acknowledging the 'mighty difference between a gallous story and a dirty deed'. Samuel Beckett continued this modernist scruple of reinvention in plays like *Krapp's last tape* where the protagonist replays the tape of his birthday at ten-year intervals, each time struggling with the conundrums and paradoxes of a past which constantly deludes and eludes him. But it was probably in the literary works of James Joyce that the conundrum of Irish cultural memory is most dramatically interrogated.

From the beginning of *Ulysses* we realize that the young Stephen Dedalus is seeking to escape from the 'mothers of memory' - Mother Church (mariolatrous Catholicism), Mother Tongue (Gaelic revivalism) and Mother Land (ethnic nationalism). Stephen is crippled by a recurring pang of conscience — 'agenbite of inwit' — due to the fact that he did not pay due obeisance and honour to his mother on her deathbed. So, both culturally and personally, Stephen is seeking to escape the nets of memory which 'hold his soul back from light'. He is desperately trying to 'awaken from the nightmare of history'.

In the pivotal National Library episode, this theme is revisited when we witness Stephen rehearsing the case-history of Shakespeare's Hamlet as, in significant respects, a prefiguration of his own. The ghost's opening summons of 'Remember me, Remember me' echoes throughout Stephen's attempt to explain the great play in terms of Shakespeare's own life history of betrayal, child loss (the untimely death of his young son Hamnet) and painful sundering from his family and peers. But the lesson which Bloom ultimately helps Stephen to learn is that the past does not always have to be lived backwards as a matter of regret, remorse, resentment and revenge; it can also be lived *forward*. And literature, for Shakespeare as for Joyce, is, we learn, just that — a way of granting a future to the past. The Mothers of Memory return with Molly's final soliloquy. But with a difference. Not as a nightmare of history repeating itself obsessively in violence or neurosis. But rather as an invitation to epiphanic retrievals and reinventions, a process which enables one's personal and collective history to be woven, unwoven and rewoven — like Penelope's tapestry — so as to deliver history into hitherto undreamt of possibilities. Molly's yes to the past opens it to a new future.

'It is a brave man would invent something that never happened.' So says Joyce about his writing. And it is arguable that Joyce's *Ulysses* was, in important respects an attempt to remember moments of his own life-history in a manner which not only saved him from serious psychosis (as Jung believed) but enabled him to create one of the most innovative works of modern literature. I would like to suggest that there are three particular episodes in Joyce's own life which might be said to prefigure crucial 'epiphanies' in the novel. In each case, a significant moment in Joyce's last year in Dublin (1903—04) is recalled many years later in terms of a creative memory which enables the author to live his history forwards rather than backwards.

First, and most obviously, we know from Joyce himself that his first 'going out' with Nora Barnacle on 16 June 1904, lies at the core of the book. This is the very day and date for the setting of the whole story, subsequently commemorated as 'Bloomsday'. If this is so, by the author's own admission, then it is probably fair to conjecture that Molly's climactic phantasia is, in some respects, an epiphanic 'repetition' of this moment — the existential past being given an open future through the *kairos* of the literary moment. Here the human eros of space and time is celebrated in an epiphany of sacredness. 'What else were we given all those desires for I want to know ...' Molly asks. And as Joyce suggests in a letter to his Paris friend, Valery Larbaud, we can take Molly at her word — 'Penelope, le dernier cri'. Second, it is possible that a particular experience that Joyce had of being rescued after a mugging in Dublin was at the root of his motivation to invent Leopold Bloom. As he relates in a letter from Rome to his brother, Stanislas, dated 13 November 1906, a brutal mugging in Rome earlier that year which left him robbed and destitute, recalled the earlier mugging in Dublin when he found himself rescued by a Dubliner called Hunter who took him back to his home and gave him cocoa.

The Hunter in question, as Joyce's biographer Richard Ellmann explains, refers to a 'dark complexioned Dublin Jew [...] rumoured to be a cuckold whom Joyce had met twice in Dublin'. In his letter to Stanislas, Joyce reveals that this same Hunter is to be the central character of a planned new story called 'Ulysses'. Ellmann comments: 'On the night of 22 June 1904 Joyce (not yet committed either to Nora or to monogamy) made overtures to a girl on the street without realizing, perhaps, that she had another companion. The official escort came forward and left him, after a skirmish, with "black eye, sprained wrist, sprained ankle, cut chin, cut hand [...]" He was dusted off and taken home by a man called Alfred Hunter in what he was to call "orthodox Samaritan fashion". This was the Hunter about whom the short story "Ulysses" was to be projected.<sup>1</sup> Curiously, however, it was not until the second mugging in Rome triggered the forgotten memory of the first mugging in Dublin that Joyce resolved to create Bloom. Epiphanies seem to have something to do with a certain *anagnoresis* which coincides with a creative repetition or retrieval of some 'inexperienced experience' - a sort of *ana-mnesis* which in turn calls for a particular *ana-aesthesis* of literary epiphany. We might even propose the neologism, *ana-phany*, to capture this curious phenomenon of doubling reminiscence.

And Stephen? I would hazard a guess that the existential memory which lies at the root of the invention of Stephen - if there is one - relates to some pivotal event of awareness-through-sundering which the young Joyce experienced in a Dublin library. Such a moment would most likely have entailed a break with his Dublin literary rivals (for example, Oliver St John Gogarty and Vincent Cosgrove, who falsely claimed to have slept with Nora) — a break which finally prompted Joyce to take the route of exodus and exile. At least, that is what might be inferred from the National Library exchange. As Declan Kiberd remarks about this decisive Library episode: 'Written in 1918, but dealing with a day fourteen years earlier, this section includes lines which predict its future composition, implicitly uniting the young graduate of 1904 with the mature father and artist of 1918 [...]

Already Stephen sets himself at an aesthetic distance from events.<sup>2</sup> The recurring phrases which young Stephen addresses here in 1904 to his future authorial self- 'see this. Remember' and 'You will see' and so on — indicate the criss-crossing of past and future which epitomizes the singular temporality of epiphany (identified by Paul as *kairos* and by Kierkegaard and Heidegger as *Augenblick*). Moreover, the fact that a key epiphanic moment in *A Portrait* also takes place in a library - Stephen's revelation of the power of words in the famous 'tundish' exchange with the Jesuit Dean of Studies — might further point in this direction. As indeed might the National Library incident in 1903-04 concerning Joyce's exchange with a literary companion (Skeffington) about the untimely demise of his young brother — an incident, let us not forget, which Joyce entered as the first of his fifteen numbered 'epiphanies' recorded in his Paris notebooks. The place of this epiphany is explicitly stated — 'Dublin: in the National Library'. In this respect, might not young Hamnet's demise, as interpreted by Stephen, be a literary transposition of Joyce's own brother's demise? 'O he was very young ... a boy', writes Joyce in his notebooks. 'Still it hurts', replies Skeffington. The traumatic loss, perhaps, of a young child whose 'hurt' and 'sundering' could only find healing in literature?

All such attempts to link literature to life remain, of course, a matter of conjecture and surmise. Though the fact that pivotal experiences in Joyce's life around the time of 1903-04 - being rescued by Hunter, being separated from his friends in the National Library, being embraced by Nora Barnacle — were later revisited fictionally in the form of three epiphanic magi (Bloom, Stephen, Molly) cannot be dismissed as irrelevant. In any case, if one is looking for some kind of historical genesis for Joyce's epiphanies in his own life experience, these singular memories of 1904 — recollected while in exile in Pola (Pula), Trieste, Paris and Zurich - would be the year to begin. (As I have analyzed these three epiphanies elsewhere I will not delay further on them here.)<sup>3</sup>

## II

In the second part of this paper I want to explore the remembrance of Irish history through place. I take as my guide here the hermeneutic model of 'exchanging memories' advanced by my friend and mentor Paul Ricoeur.<sup>4</sup> So doing, I will suggest that certain topographical memorials of historical trauma can epitomize an ethics of hospitality, flexibility, plurality, transfiguration and pardon. My chosen example will be the Irish Hunger Memorial in Battery Park in New York city, an interactive monument designed and installed by Brian Tolle in 2001 to commemorate the Great Irish Famines of the 1840s and the subsequent immigrations to North America.

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First, a word about the memorial itself. The installation basically consists of an Irish stone cottage transplanted from the west coast of Ireland to Battery Park at the very heart of downtown New York, not far from where the Twin Towers once stood.<sup>5</sup> The memorial does not attempt some nostalgic retrieval of a quaint Irish past - so often

imagine the past in its present condition of destitution and ruin. As such, Brian Tolle's installation might best be described as a hybrid construct which serves as both a) a commemoration of the great Irish famine of the nineteenth century and b) a site-specific art installation in metropolitan New York in the third millennium marking the ongoing tragedy of world hunger. This double fidelity to separate moments in time provokes a sense of disorientation which prevents the act of memory regressing to some kind of sentimental fixation with the past (what Ricoeur calls 'blocked memory').<sup>6</sup> By the same token, it also prevents the exhibit from serving simply as an exotic curiosity of tourist voyeurism in the present.

This is a famine memorial with a difference. Whereas most conventional commemorations of the Famine featured 'people without land' (usually leaving on ships from Ireland or arriving off ships in the new world), we are confronted here with an uncanny experience of 'land without people'. Though the installation is located at the very heart of one of the world's most populous cities, there are no human beings represented here. As such it recalls the 'deserted village' of Slievemore in Achill Island, Co. Mayo, which was one of the artist's primary sources of inspiration for the work. A haunting depopulated row of abandoned and decayed stone huts facing out towards the Atlantic. And it is reminiscent in its way of other monuments of historical rupture and ruin - for example, the bare walls of Machu Picchu in Peru or the floating hulk of the Marie Celeste. It is a far cry in any case from the idealized portraits of rural Irish cottages by romantic landscape painters like Paul Henry or James O'Connor.

Tolle's installation resists mystification and mystique by presenting us with a powerful and disturbing sense of material 'thereness'. As we enter the site we are confronted with a fieldstone cottage, transplanted stone by stone from Ireland, and here reconstructed on its own quarter acre of soil in New York city. But it is impossible to feel at home here. This could never be a dwelling for us, contemporary visitors to the cottage. The most obvious reason for this is no doubt its location at the core of a bustling metropolitan cityscape where it is clearly *out of place*, misplaced and dislocated literally and symbolically. And the fact that the cottage and surrounded potato drills are themselves planted on a suspended limestone and concrete base doubly confirms the sense of not belonging. This sentiment of spatial disorientation provokes us, in turn, to reflect on the paradox that our sense of identity and placement in the world often presupposes an acute sense of loss and displacement. As when the Irish Captain McMorris asks 'What ish my nation?' in Shakespeare's *Henry V* his question betraying the fact that he is preoccupied with his national identity precisely because he *has, forfeited* it - he is speaking in the English language and wearing an English army uniform. Likewise, it has often been noted by Irish critics like Declan Kiberd, Roy Foster and Luke Gibbons that Irish tradition is in many respects an *invention* by modernity.<sup>7</sup> Just as our sense of the past is almost always constituted and reconstituted by our present historical consciousness. This sense of spatial and temporal inversion is compounded here by the fact that the roofless cottage remains un-restored and is exposed to local weather conditions. Unlike most works of art, this installation is half construct and half nature - it is an artificially contrived synthesis of 'real' stone and soil and architectural-sculptural design. The underground tumuli and passage ways, by which one enters the cottage from beneath, are further reminders that the cottage has a dark and buried history - recalling not only the neolithic Irish burial chambers of Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth in Co. Meath but also the unmarked mass graves of thousands of famine victims in Ireland and elsewhere. The fact that these subterranean passageways are themselves panelled with glass panes covered in various texts and subtexts — historical, political, fictional, rhetorical, spiritual, apologetic, testimonial — further adds to the sense of a plurality of voices and interpretations. Tolle's memorial refuses to yield any quick fix. There is no single, assured access to this placeless place, this timeless time. It cannot be 'naturalized' in the sense of celebrating some literal recovery of a landscape. Yet it cannot be explained away either as a purely 'aestheticized' sculpture residing in some museum space — for the site alters continually with the surrounding weather and climate, one season covered with weeds, potato shoots and wildflowers, another with snow or mud, and at all times registering the odours, reflections, shadows and sounds of the surrounding city. We are thus palpably reminded of the passing of time, of historical fluidity and transience which no monumental fixation can bring to a full stop. The myth of an eternal Celtic-Mist landscape is demystified before our very eyes.<sup>8</sup>

Not that there weren't efforts by certain officials and politicians to perpetuate the myths. On opening the site, for example, Governor Pataki of New York, spoke of the opportunity offered here 'to touch the sod of our heritage', while Mayor Giuliani concluded his inaugural speech with the words: 'May this beautiful Memorial, like Ireland itself, be forever free, forever green'. And some members of the Irish tourist board praised the installation's capacity to evoke the 'rolling hills of old Ireland' - conveniently forgetting that the quaint potato field is planted over a slab of concrete and surrounded by High Rises! Certain Irish-American societies and groups were also quick to contribute their own gloss to this sentimentalizing process. Even the Irish government weighed in at one point offering an authentic 'stone' from every county in Ireland (thirty two in all along with an ancient pilgrim standing stone). While Tolle initially resisted such appropriations he soon came to acknowledge that these readings should not simply be dismissed as inappropriate or misguided. Instead he realized that any *interactive* installation of this kind must learn to incorporate such views into the actual process of the work itself as an open text of interpretation and re-interpretation.<sup>9</sup>

Tolle decided, accordingly, to inscribe the deep aspiration of many visitors to relocate the old counties of Ireland by accepting the stones and then placing them at random throughout the landscape. The stones scattered throughout the site thus served to reiterate the role of the stones in the walls and lintels of the cottage itself—that is, to function as 'indices' for the lost meanings and bearings of forgotten dwellers rather than as 'icons' which claimed to restore the fetish of an original presence.

Tolle's installation is an invitation to 'mourning' (acknowledging that the lost object is lost) rather than 'melancholy' (refusing to let go of the lost object by obsessively fixating on it).<sup>10</sup> By soliciting visitors' active involvement with the site, as part of an on-going drama of semantic and symbolic reinvention, Tolle manages to insure that the work remains a work in perpetual progress, intertextually open and incomplete by definition. The fact that new readings and reactions are regularly included onto both the audio sound track of voices (which visitors hear as they traverse the underground tunnel) and the visual inscriptions on the glass panels, is a powerful token of Tolle's determination to maintain a process of active and responsible memory. Robin Lydenberg captures this radically hermeneutical sense of Tolle's design in her essay 'From icon to index: some contemporary visions of the Irish stone cottage' — 'Tolle designed the memorial to invite and incorporate the viewer's active engagement with, land and its history rather than with vague nostalgia or the iconography of fixed and sentimentalized stereotypes. One entrance into the memorial leads visitors through an underground passageway up into the ruined cottage [. . .] The walls of the passageway are constructed of alternating sedimented bands of stone and frosted glass on which official and unofficial testimonies from those who experienced the Famine are cast in shadows. This sculptured layering evokes the geologically and historically sedimentary aspect of the Irish landscape. Hunp is not naturalized or aestheticized here but contextualized historically and politically, giving forceful articulation, for example, to the failure of British officials to alleviate massive starvation. Entering the quarter acre of Ireland through this buried history, viewers cannot simply delight in the landscape as idealized icon: the cottage interior is cramped and exposed, the 'rolling hills' are the remnants of uncultivated potato furrows. Visitors may enter the installation by stepping directly onto the sloping earth and climbing up through the landscape to the ruined cottage and its prospect; there they discover, belatedly the textual history buried below. Whether the memorial is entered from above or from below, the charm of the landscape and its violent history exist in productive tension.'<sup>11</sup>

By deterritorializing the stone cottage from rural Ireland and reterritorializing it amidst the alien urban bustle of New York, Tolle is reminding us that the place of trauma is always haunted by a no-place of mourning. Such mourning calls for a letting go of the literal landscape of the past in order to give this past a future, in order to open it to new possibilities of interpretation. In this we could say that the artist is conjuring up the emancipatory potential of the 'Fifth Province'. Ireland, as everyone knows, has four provinces - Munster, Ulster, Leinster and Connacht — but the Irish word for province is *coked*, meaning a fifth. So where, one might ask, is the fifth fifth since there are only four actually existing as geographical places? The Fifth Province is a placeless place, a place of disposition rather than of position, of detachment rather than attachment. And it has been acknowledged since the beginnings of Irish myth and folklore that it is precisely this Fifth Province which provides a dimension of peace, wisdom and catharsis to the otherwise warring parts of Ireland.<sup>12</sup> Tolle's memorial might thus be said to remind us that all our lives - whether we are Irish or not, emigrants or natives, survivors or victims - are always haunted by an irretrievable sense of absence and loss, ghosted by a longing for some 'irrecoverable elsewhere'.<sup>13</sup>

Tolle attests to the Fifth Province by insuring that his poetical text — the site as work of art - remains answerable to an ethical context of responsibility. And he brings this about by turning his famine memorial into an intertextual play of multiple readings and perspectives. The hold of a single Meta-narrative of Irish history is thus loosened and liberated into a polyphony of discontinuous and competing narratives. Tolle juxtaposes, in both the written and audio commentaries juxtaposes statistics about the Irish Famine with equally perturbing facts and figures about other famines and world hunger generally. He mixes snatches of Irish history and politics with snippets of song and poetry. He blends together a variety of vernacular and postmodern art styles - Naturalism, Folk Craft, Conceptual Art, Hyper-Realism, Landscape Architecture, Theme Sculpture, Pop Art, Earth Art etc. Moreover, the fact that the installation can grow and mutate - thanks to the use of climactically sensitive organic materials, and to the deployment of flexible, alterable texts (silk-screened onto strips of clear Plexiglas) — illustrates Tolle's conviction that historical memorials are themselves subject to change according to the addition of new and alternative perspectives. As Lydenberg writes: 'This memorial makes no claim to enlighten visitors with a totalizing narrative of the Irish Famine; the texts create a mixture of facts, political propaganda, and personal experience — the imaginative work of fantasy, desire, and hope. Tolle's design offers a transitional passageway through fragmented, often anonymous, voices in the embedded texts and an accompanying audio collage, both of which will be revised, updated and expanded periodically in response to continuing crises in world hunger. The narrative is discontinuous, full of gaps and silences; Tolle teases out multiple meanings by placing fragments in shifting juxtapositions rather than in fixed narrative sequence. A

heritage industry presentation of history as a recoverable and repeatable past to be fixed "like a fly in amber" is displaced here by [...] a "preposterous history" that multiplies uncertainty and doubt. This alternative mode of history calls for an alternative mode of memorial, one that would [...] defy easy readability and consumer satisfaction to communicate instead dissatisfaction, complexity, and a sense of loss.<sup>14</sup> The transatlantic exchange between Mayo and New York, between abandoned stone cottage and postmodern concrete megapolis, solicits a response of profound questioning and curiosity in most viewers to the site, reminding us that if we pass *from action to text*, in entering this memorial, we *return from text to action* again as soon as we exit the installation — bringing the heightened poetics of remembering, that we experience in this placeless place, to bear on our ethics of remembering in the real life-world around us.

Finally, we might add that if Tolle's Memorial is an intertext in so far as it brings together the diverse idioms of poetics and ethics, and the diverse disciplines of history and geography, it also functions intertextually by relating to a number of what might be termed 'counter-texts' in the immediate or not so immediate environment.<sup>15</sup> One thinks of Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty visible to the south of the waterfront Memorial — both symbols of aspiration and expectation for so many Irish emigrant survivors of the Famine. One thinks of the giant Twin Towers, in whose shadow in lower east Manhattan the memorial was originally constructed and in whose wake it now stands vigil in commemorative commiseration. One thinks of the other Irish Famine memorials in Boston and different emigrant ports of North America, so different and so similar; or the memorials to other historical traumas and tragedies from the Holocaust to Vietnam - in particular the Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, also housed in Battery Park City; or Maya Lin's famous Washington Monument to the Vietnam War dead. One might, indeed, even extend the scope of intertextual reference to include the fictional testimonials of writers like Thomas O'Flaherty and Tom Murphy, or of film makers like Scorsese whose representation of Irish emigrant warfare in the *Gangs of New York* reminds us that within earshot of Battery Park stood the old site of tribal battle called the Five Points, a notorious battleground where blocked, fixated memories of vengeance and obsession played themselves out in bloody conflict in the 1860s — nativists and Hibernians locked in hatred, impervious to the work of mourning, catharsis and forgiveness. It is just such a process of therapeutic working-through (*Durcharbeitung*) which, I would argue, Memorials like the Battery Park City Famine installation solicit.

In sum, Tolle's memorial serves, I submit, as a model for a healing exchange of memories. The exchange in question here involves that between indigenous and emigrant, Irish and Irish-American, Irish-American and Anglo-American, Irish-American and non-Anglo American (Asian, African, Middle-Eastern, Hispanic etc.). It also involves an exchange between home and abroad, between the old world and the new, between Achill Island and Manhattan Island. And of course, to move from geography back to history, it involves an exchange - in both directions - between past and present. By refusing to either naturalize or aestheticize memory, Tolle keeps open a crucial critical 'gap' which prevents history from collapsing back into a frozen past. His memorial resists being obsessively reified and replicated. Instead, Tolle preserves the gap between Now and Then, Here and There, enabling both poles to transit back and forth between the everyday reality of New York life today and an imaginary place in the minds of those famine emigrants who left it behind over a century and a half ago. It is in this 'between' that contemporary visitors to the site may experience what we might properly call *a poetical ethics of memory*.

So how might we relate the case of the Famine Hunger Memorial in New York to a specifically hermeneutic paradigm of memory exchange, mentioned at the outset? In an essay entitled 'Reflections on a new ethos for Europe', Paul Ricoeur outlines just such a paradigm. He shows, first, how this can provide a basis for an *ethic of narrative hospitality* which involves 'taking responsibility in imagination and in sympathy for the story of the other, through the life narratives which concern the other'.<sup>16</sup> In the case of memorials like Tolle's this takes the form of an exchange between different people's histories such that we practice an art of transference and translation which allows us to welcome the story of the other, the stranger, the victim, the forgotten one. Second, Ricoeur shows how this calls in turn for an *ethic of narrative flexibility*. Memorials face the challenge of resisting the reification of an historical event into a fixed dogma by showing how each event may be told in different ways by different generations and by different narrators. Not that everything becomes relative and arbitrary. On the contrary, acts of trauma and suffering call out for justice, and the best way of achieving this is often to invite empathy with strangers and adversaries by allowing for a plurality of narrative perspectives. The resulting overlap may thus lead to what Gadamer calls a 'fusion of horizons' where diverse horizons of consciousness may at last find some common ground.<sup>17</sup> A reciprocal transfer between opposite minds. The identity of a group, culture people or nation, is not that of an immutable substance', writes Ricoeur, 'nor that of a fixed structure, but that, rather, of a recounted story.' A hermeneutic exchange of stories effectively resists an arrogant or rigid conception of cultural identity which prevents us from perceiving the radical implications of the principle of narrativity — namely, 'the possibilities of revising every story which has been handed down and of carving out a place for several stories directed towards the same past'.<sup>18</sup> This entails, by implication, a third ethical principle - that of *narrative plurality*. Pluralism here does not mean any lack of respect for the singularity of the event narrated through the various acts of remembering.

It might even be said to increase our sense of awareness of such an event, especially if it is foreign to us in time, space or cultural provenance. *'Recounting differently'* is not inimical to a certain historical reverence to the extent that the inexhaustible richness of the event is honored by the diversity of stories which are made of it, and by the competition to which that diversity gives rise.' And Ricoeur adds this critical point: 'The ability to recount the founding events of our national history in different ways is reinforced by the exchange of cultural memories. This ability to exchange has as a touchstone the will to share symbolically and respectfully in the commemoration of the founding events of other national cultures, as well as those of their ethnic minorities and their minority religious denominations.'<sup>19</sup> This point applies as much to events of pain and trauma (like that commemorated in the Famine memorial) as to events of triumph and glory.

A fourth aspect of the hermeneutic exchange of memories is the *transfiguring of the past*. This involves a creative retrieval of the betrayed promises of the past, so that we may respond to our 'debt to the dead' and endeavor to give them a voice. The goal of memorials is, therefore, to try to give a future to the past by remembering it in the right way, ethically and poetically. A crucial aspect of reinterpreting transmitted traditions is the task of discerning past promises which have not been honoured. For 'the past is not only what is bygone - that which has taken place and can no longer be changed — it also lives in the memory thanks to arrows of futurity which have not been fired or whose trajectory has been interrupted.' In other words, the unfulfilled future of the past may well signal the richest part of a tradition, and the emancipation of 'this unfulfilled future of the past is the major benefit that we can expect from the crossing of memories and the exchange of narratives'. It is especially the founding events of a community - traumatic or dramatic - which require to be reread in this critical manner in order to unlock the potencies and expectancies which the subsequent unfolding of history may have forgotten or travestied. This is why any genuine memorial involves a certain return to some seminal moment of suffering or hope, to the original events and textual responses to those events, which are all too often occluded by Official History. 'The past is a cemetery of promises which have not been kept', notes Ricoeur. And Memorials can, at best, be ways of 'bringing them back to life like the dry bones in the valley described in the prophecy of Ezekiel'.<sup>20</sup>

A fifth and final ethical moment in the hermeneutics of memory-exchange is *pardon*. If empathy and hospitality towards others are crucial steps in the ethics of remembrance there is something *more* - something which entails moving beyond narrative imagination to forgiveness. In short, the exchange of memories of suffering demands more than sympathy and duty (though these are essential for any kind of justice). And this something 'extra' involves pardon in so far as pardon means 'shattering the debt'. Here the order of justice and reciprocity can be supplemented, but not replaced, by that of charity and gift'. Such forgiveness demands huge patience, an enduring practice of 'working-through', mourning and letting go. But it is not a forgetful forgiveness. Amnesty can never be based on amnesia. It remembers our debt to the dead while at the same time introducing something other, something difficult almost to the point of impossibility, but something all the more important for that reason. One thinks of Brandt kneeling at Warsaw, Havel's apology to the Sudeten Germans, Hume's preparedness to speak with the IRA, Sadat's visit to Jerusalem, Hillesum's refusal to hate her hateful persecutors. All miraculous moments where an ethics of reciprocity is touched by a poetics of pardon. But I repeat: one does not replace the other - *both* justice *and* pardon are equally important in the act of remembering past trauma. 'To the degree that charity exceeds justice we must guard against substituting it for justice. Charity remains a surplus; this surplus of compassion and tenderness is capable of giving the exchange of memories its profound motivation, its daring and its momentum.'<sup>21</sup>

It is not difficult to see how this hermeneutical model of memory-exchange relates to the Irish Famine Memorial in New York. The one thing to add perhaps is that Memorials which are located in places far removed from the original trauma serve the extra purpose of seeking pardon not only from the victims and survivors of that particular event, but from all visitors to the site. This is where a poetics of narrative fantasy may usefully complement a politics of historical judgment. For when we dare to visit the memorials dedicated to other people and communities (not our own), we are suddenly all famine sufferers, we are all holocaust victims, we are all casualties of the Vietnam war. At least for a special impossible, fleeting moment.

It is perhaps fitting, therefore, that a paper which began its short genealogy of Irish cultural memory by referencing the ancient *Book of Invasions*, concludes with a memorial of *migrations*, bringing the question of national remembrance into an international setting. By leaving home we can return home in a new way. The shortest route from self to self is through the other.

## CONCLUSION

In my two main examples above - Joyce's *Ulysses* and Brian Tolle's New York Famine Memorial — I have tried to show how a complex dialectic of remembering can be brought to bear on Irish historical events. In both cases we see, however, that it is not simply a question of remembering, but of remembering in the right way. Memory is not always on the side of the angels. Indeed sometimes we need to forget to remember or to remember to forget. The important thing is to transmute masked, blocked or fetishized memory into enabling and liberating remembrance. And if this is sometimes a gracious gift -as in Proust's remembrance of times past — it also frequently involves a laborious and painstaking 'working through'. Joyce's notion of epiphanic memory in *Ulysses* is an example of these two kinds of memory — involuntary and voluntary — combining in a fortuitous way. But we are not always so lucky. Neither in literature nor in life. Often memory enslaves and paralyzes us, issuing in a form of 'paralysis' (Joyce's chosen term). Too much memory can indeed, as Friel warned, become a form of 'madness'. A recipe for sterile repetition and revenge. Unless we learn to 'translate' the past in a wise way. The task is to revisit the wounds of history so that, through acknowledgment of truth and where possible forgiveness, we can begin to give a future to our past. Amnesty is not based on amnesia any more than it is based on repetition compulsion or the triumphalist propaganda of Official History. True pardon suggests we remember forward rather than backward. For only in that way can history be retrieved as a laboratory of still unexplored possibilities rather than a mausoleum of dead facts.<sup>22</sup>

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1 *Ulysses*, ed. Richard Ellmann (London, 1968), appendix, p. 705.

2 See Declan Kiberd's very informative note to *Ulysses* (London & New York, 1992), p. 1013.

3 Richard Kearney, 'Epiphanies in Joyce' in Ondrej Pilny & Clare Wallace (eds), *Global Ireland* (Prague, 2005), pp 14-15.

4 Paul Ricoeur, 'Reflections on a new ethos for Europe' in Richard Kearney (ed.), *Paul Ricoeur: the hermeneutics of action*, ii (London, 1996), pp 3—14.

5 I am very grateful to my Boston College colleague, Robin Lydenberg, for her illuminating and instructive essay on this work, 'From icon to index: some contemporary visions of the Irish stone cottage' in Vera Kreilkamp (ed.), *Eire/land* (Boston, 2003), pp 127-33. Lydenberg also kindly brought my attention to the following relevant and informative literature on the topic: Philip Nobel, 'Going hungry', *Metropolis Magazine* (Nov. 2002), accessible at [http://www.metropolismag.com/html/content\\_1102/far/](http://www.metropolismag.com/html/content_1102/far/); Margaret Kelleher, 'Hunger and history: monuments to the Great Irish Famine', *Textual Practice*, 16:2 (summer 2002), 41-68; Yvonne Moran, 'Taking Mayo to Manhattan', *Irish Times*, 1 Sept., 2001; David Dunlap, 'Memorial to the Hunger', *New York Times*, 15 Mar. 2001; Marita Sturken, 'The wall, the screen and the image: the Vietnam Veterans Memorial' in Nicholas Mirzoeff(ed.), *The visual culture reader* (2nd ed. New York & London, 2002), pp 357—70; James E. Young, 'Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin: the uncanny arts of memorial architecture', *Jewish Social Studies*, 6:2 (winter 2000), 1-23; Vivian Patraka, 'Spectacular suffering: performing presence, absence and witness at US Holocaust museums' in *Spectacular suffering* (Bloomington, 1999), pp 109—32. 6 Paul Ricoeur, *La memoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Paris, 2000), pp 82ff.

7 Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (London, 1996); R.F. Foster, *The Irish story: telling tales and making it up in Ireland* (London, 2001) (see especially his critique of famine heritage parks and the cult of 'Faminism' for foreign export, pp 23ff); and Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish culture* (Cork, 1996). 8 Lydenberg, 'From icon to index', p. 131.

9 It is worth noting here that discontinuous readings of the Irish Famine in terms of rupture and trauma are always dialectically linked to continuous readings of the Famine in terms of an unbroken historic past which is still somehow present, or at least representable. Whereas romantic interpretations tend to stress the later approach and postmodern interpretations the former, most contemporary memorials (including Tolle's) signal some sort of balance or tension between the two.

10 Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and melancholy' in *The Pelican Freud Library*, ii, ed. A Richards (London, 1984), pp 251-68.

11 Lydenberg, 'From icon to index', p. 131.

12 See 'The fifth province' in Richard Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland* (London & New York, 1997), pp 99—100: 'Modern Ireland is made up of four provinces. And yet, the Irish word for a province is *coiced* which means fifth. This fivefold division is as old as Ireland itself, yet three is disagreement about the identity of the fifth. Some claim that all the provinces met at the Stone of Divisions on the Hill of Uisneach, believed to be the mid-point of Ireland. Others say that the fifth province was Meath (*mide*), the "middle". Both traditions divide Ireland into four quarters and a "middle", though they disagree about the location of this middle or "fifth" province. Although Tara was the political centre of Ireland, this fifth province acted as a second centre, which if non-political, was just as important, acting as a necessary balance. The present unhappy state of our country would seem to indicate a need for this second centre of gravity. The obvious impotence of the various political attempts to unite the four geographical provinces would seem to warrant another kind of solution ... one which would incorporate the "fifth" province. This province, this place, this centre, is not a political or geographical position, it is more like a disposition.' For an illuminating application of this concept of the Fifth Province to contemporary Irish-British literature and politics, see Aidan O'Malley's dissertation 'In other words: coming to terms with Irish identities through translation' (PhD, European University Institute, Florence, 2004), especially pp 20-41.

13 Lydenberg, 'From icon to index', p. 132.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 131. 15 I am grateful to Joel Gereboff of Arizona State University for this notion of 'counter-text'.

16 Ricoeur, 'Reflections on a new ethos', p. 7.

17 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and method* (London, 1975).

18 Ricoeur, 'Reflections on a new ethos', p. 7.

19 *Ibid.*, pp 8, 9.

20 *Ibid.*, pp 8,9.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

22 A version of this paper appeared in I. Gilsenan Nordin (ed.), *Recovering memory: Irish representations of past and present* (Newcastle, 2007), pp 2-19.