

After the Peace:

Performing Placelessness in David Ireland's *Cyprus Avenue*

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I. Introduction

In *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989), David Harvey points out “the collapse of spatial barriers” (293), a situation where space is seemingly annihilated through the ever-increasing economic and cultural homogenization. Harvey continues this debate in connection with people’s sense of place:

In the face of a fierce bout of time-space compression [. . .] the security of places has been threatened and the map of the world rejigged as part of a desperate speculative gamble to keep the accumulation of capital on track. Such loss of security promotes a search for alternatives, one of which lies in the creation of both imagined and tangible communities in place [. . .] liberating places - materially, symbolically, and metaphorically - is an inevitable part of any progressive socio-ecological politics (*Justice* 326)

According to Harvey, when the security of places is threatened amid the expansion of homogenizing space, people strive to create material places to fit their own particular and contested aspirations. Although it is a quite different strand of geographical inquiry from the materialist and Marxist accounts, Edward Relph's concept of "placelessness" captures what Harvey points out as "the loss of security."¹⁾ As Relph emphasizes a more human-centered and empathetic understanding of place, his humanistic perspectives concern with people's sense of place, the psychological and emotional attachments to place.

Influenced and inspired by Stewart Parker (1941-1988) who took a central place in the Northern Irish dramatic tradition, many of Northern Irish playwrights have been exploring the theatre's possibilities of turning Northern Irish geography into a space that is liberated from or unburdened by heavily demanded meta-narrative of the Troubles. In contrast, David Ireland takes a different trajectory dramatizing the process of spatial homogenization, a sense of "placelessness," as a crisis. With the onset of globalization, Northern Ireland's sense of placelessness is more highlighted than ever. This paper discusses the dramatization of placelessness, the concern over the problem of Ulster Protestants' sense of place²⁾ in Ireland's *Cyprus Avenue* (2016). For

1) Relph introduces the concept of the "placelessness" in *Place and Placelessness* (1976) and Marc Augé echoes his concern in a discussion of "non-place" in *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity* (1995). The use of the term "placelessness" in this paper follows Relph's investigation of people's perception of attachment to place: specifically, the loss of sense of place.

2) Ulster is one of the four traditional provinces of the island of Ireland and lies to the north; the others being Leinster to the east, Munster to the south, and Connaught to the west. Six of Ulster's nine counties, Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry and Tyrone form Northern Ireland and remained part of the United Kingdom after the partition of Ireland in 1921.

Ireland's unionism, *place* takes priority over *space*;³⁾ spatial homogenization erases the socio-culturally distinct Northern Irish identity. Challenging the assumption that the peace process necessarily liberates Northern Ireland's places from cultural overdetermination, his play channels Northern Ireland unionists' fear of identity dissolution, a sense of insecurity attributed to the gradual disappearance of unifying socio-cultural places for unionism.

Cyprus Avenue reveals the burdens of geo-ideologically liminal positioning of Ulster unionism in the political changes emanating from the peace process on the one hand, and reconfiguration of European and British political unions, on the other. Focusing on Eric Miller, an aging middle-class unionist character, the play traces the development of fear and antagonism in the unionist's psyche in tandem with the displacement of Ulster in a world of changing spaces. The play amplifies unionists' fear, frustration, and anger that stem from the British indifference to Northern Ireland's unionist loyalty, and its sense of the political and cultural encroachment by the Republic of Ireland. This paper looks at how Ireland dramatizes the psychogeography of Northern Irish unionists. The dramatic power of Ireland draws on the tension between the placelessness in a

Three majority-Catholic Ulster counties, Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan form part of the Republic of Ireland. Although part of Ulster is in the Republic of Ireland, the term Ulster (or sometimes even "the Six Counties") is used to refer to Northern Ireland.

- 3) The distinction of the terms, place and space, comes from a number of theorists, yet one significant development that paves the way for any contemporary analysis of space and place is referred to as ideas proposed in French sociologist Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1974, translated in 1991). In contradistinction to the place and challenging the traditional notions of space as an abstract or passive container, Lefebvre reads space as dynamic and agentive, which can change over time as people move within and around.

world of changing spaces and the quest for the assertion of the primacy of place.

II. David Ireland and the Ulster Protestant Imagination

Born in Belfast in 1976, Ireland went to England when he was seventeen to study drama, where everyone around him was English and he was referred to as Irish. He currently lives in Scotland, where he has become less comfortable calling himself British as a result of the Brexit negotiations. Ireland explains his own work and its background in terms of much confusion regarding his sense of belonging: “I’m an Ulster Protestant living on the south side of Glasgow, surrounded by Scottish theatre makers [. . .] survival lies in the ability to live within the contradiction of being both Irish and British [. . .] And I don’t know that I can either” (“In conversation”). His complicated feelings about growing up in Northern Ireland are invariably the main source for rich dramatic references to the lingering symptoms of the Troubles.

Ireland’s experience is also reminiscent of the insufficient portrayals of Ulster loyalists (or Northern Protestants more broadly) that Tom Maguire discusses: “While an increasing international commodification of Irish culture has provided for a generalized sympathy for nationalism, loyalism has been found wanting in relation to the apparently rich and endlessly marketable resources of Irish nationalism, not least by some nationalists” (153). Connal Parr also points out the lack of cultural representation of loyalist identity in Northern Ireland to be a consequence of “the general dearth of the Ulster Protestant ‘imagination’” (14). The pity and fear that they do not have an acknowledgeable culture forces a number of Protestant playwrights to partake in

their own portrayal to “[rechannel] conflict of post-Troubles Northern Ireland, with endless rumbling debates on culture and community” (91). Aware of “the necessity of articulation” (Parr 91) of the Northern Irish Protestant experience for the stage, Ireland, too, has recently been introduced to the group of those playwrights whose plays are generally and deeply influenced by their Protestant upbringing in Ulster, which stretches far back to Parker.

However, Northern Irish Protestant experiences that Maguire and Parr talk about do not fully capture important lines of difference within the Protestant population in Northern Ireland. They seem to conform to the term “loyalist” to represent the extreme of unionist politics as both terms identify someone as Protestant (in an ethnic sense) and as supportive of continued union with Great Britain. They tend to use the terms “Protestant,” “unionist,” and “loyalist” indiscriminately and interchangeably even though they carry their own connotations “which, in isolation, are often unacceptable to any given individual or organization” (Smithey 72-73).

As Ireland has referred to himself as “unionist” in an interview with the Royal Court Theatre, saying, “You won’t find anyone more Unionist⁴) than me” (“In Conversation”), the terms loyalism and unionism connote specifically different political/cultural meanings. Within unionism, it has been noted that there are more than two distinctions between Ulster British (or commonly British unionist) and Ulster loyalists of Protestants in Northern Ireland. In her analysis in “Two traditions in unionist political culture,” Jennifer Todd sees

4) Generally, “Unionism” in upper case is understood to refer to political parties or members of those parties. “unionism” in lower case is used to describe political support or preference for the maintenance of Ireland within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Critics also have followed this approach but have also been given some flexibility in their application.

British unionism values progress liberty, internationalism, freedom and progress whereas Ulster loyalism views the state as first and foremost the “defence of [Protestant] faith and liberty against the Catholic attack” (6). According to Carolyn Gallagher, there is a fundamental divide between loyalism and unionism; “class positioning and tolerance for violence” (*After the Peace* 31). In general, the loyalist designates someone as working class, while the unionist label positions someone as middle or upper class. The term loyalism also denotes a greater tolerance toward violence while many unionists oppose paramilitary violence on religious grounds.⁵⁾

In light of the ideological disintegration within unionism, Ireland’s drama attempts to address the dilemmas for unionism in times of peace and reconfiguration of European and British political unions. The ways in which his plays articulate the unionists’ sense of exclusion from both the Republic of Ireland and the UK challenge the general expectations for a Northern Irish post-conflict theatre. Mark Phelan notes that:

If Troubles drama has been largely defined by the expectation that artists deal with the conflict, perhaps post-conflict theatre in the North can be defined as an expectation that it should play some sort of role in the process of truth and reconciliation. (384)

As Phelan argues, many other so-called younger generation post-Troubles playwrights in contemporary Northern Ireland—such as Lucy Caldwell, Jimmy McAleavey, Lisa Magee, Stacey Gregg, Tim Loane, Rosemary Jenkinson, and

5) For a more ethnic explanation for the intra-unionism divisions, see Byrne and O’Malley’s “The Two Types of Ulster Unionism: Testing an Ethnic Explanation for the Unionist/Loyalist Divide.” *Irish Political Studies* 28.1 (2013): 130-39.

Abbie Spallen—attempt to dramatize the process of truth and reconciliation or project other issues beyond the Northern Irish conflict. By omitting direct reference to the Troubles or its aftermath, their plays attempt to overcome mainstream narratives of the Troubles, stimulate new conversations about peace and reconciliation, and question how much things have really changed in Northern Ireland.

Among the works, for instance, Magee's *Girls and Dolls* (2004) is a play about two characters re-inviting traumatic memory twenty-six years after their murder of a baby girl when they were ten years old during the 1980s in Derry. The play creates a post-conflict context with traumatic narratives emerging from the Troubles as the two characters are divided into their past and present selves and also playing upwards of 30 characters. In addition, Spallen's *Lally the Scut* (2015), which is on Fintan O'Toole's cultural playlist for 2015 and acclaimed as "darkly hilarious Swiftian satire on the peace process" (O'Toole), focuses on the desperate effort of the eponymous protagonist to rescue her young son, who has fallen down a hole in a bog hole where dead bodies might be buried during the Troubles.

Called "Troubles-free plays," there are also plays that project other issues beyond the politics of orange and green, such as gender, body, and global issues. Caldwell's first full-length play *Leaves* (2007), for example, is set in the Belfast home of a 19-year-old girl who returns from London after taking an overdose. In addition to the eldest daughter's malaise, Caldwell leaves fluctuating families as an open source for questioning the fears for the global future against Belfast's strained reality. Jenkinson's dark satire *Planet Belfast* (2013) raises questions and debates about genetics, climate change, and dead or dying babies and how the issues may prove to be inconsequential in the socio-political context of Northern Ireland. Gregg's *Perve* (2011) moves well

beyond the Northern Ireland conflict by dramatizing the impact of deception and manipulation through the use of social media platforms.⁶⁾ The old fears of sectarian violence are replaced by a more diffused anxiety about humanity's position in a techno-cultural or digital era in her play.

While these and other younger generation Northern Irish playwrights focus more on a Belfast trying to change and develop beyond the Troubles, Ireland dramatizes the present that is recalcitrantly continuous with the past by depicting the unionists' sense of loss, betrayal, defeat and humiliation in times of political changes. Ireland strongly argues that "I feel compelled to write about the Troubles" (Cormack) and "find it hard to end my plays without violence" (Lawson). His plays delve into inimical responses to the current political change in peace building contemporary Northern Ireland though the plays are set far distant from the period of conflict and written and staged during an ostensibly post-peace process moment. Discussions on the subject of the ongoing Northern Ireland conflict are still at the center of his drama and even manifest frenzied rage and violence. Challenging the notion that the 'post' is a temporal marker that designates a break with what came before, his dramas raise awareness of what remains to be worked through. This does not mean that his dramas repeat the cruelty and violence of the thirty years of the Troubles, but unleash the security problem that the unionists might fear. Ireland

6) It is also true that only some of her plays such as *Ismeme* (2007), *Lagan* (2011), *Huzzies* (2012), and *Shibboleth* (2015) are analyzed and compared with the works of other major contemporary artists in Northern Ireland. Additionally, the most recent affair around Gregg concerns her short film entitled "Your Ma's a Hard Brexit," which is included in the series "Shorts: Dramas from a Divided Nation" commissioned by the *Guardian* in June 2017. More specifically, *Lagan* and *Shibboleth* are Gregg's much-admired works, as the two plays are set in her birthplace, Belfast.

brings the inherent fragility of unionist identity into the dialogue with an emphasis on its psychological status.

For instance, *Everything Between Us* (2017) begins on the first day of Northern Ireland's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Two sisters, Sandra a unionist politician and her little sister Teeni whom she has not seen for eleven years, clash behind the scenes of this historic day. Although the play touches on issues of race, homosexuality and addiction, it primarily focuses on a family who has been blown apart by the Troubles. *Ulster American* (2018) is set in contemporary society as the characters talk about the post-Brexit environment, with the protracted confusion of cultural identities. However, the play deploys strong languages and graphic violence as one of the reviews in the *Guardian* reviews the play, calling it "Jacobean revenge tragedy played as uproarious comedy" (Fisher). It challenges the issue of Ulster Protestant identity that has been constantly conditioned in relation either to Irish Catholic Nationalism or British Unionism.

Above all, *Cyprus Avenue* reveals the darkest depth of the middle-class unionist psyche in coping with the peace process in Northern Ireland. It also questions the masculine/patriarchal power in times of change that has not been a major theme of the conventional Troubles plays. Yet, the play challenges the prevailing dramatization of the Troubles that has been dominated by the working-class experience. Ireland's *Cyprus Avenue* explores the sense of 'placelessness,' a lack of socio-political space to explain the Ulster unionist imagination after the peace. The play shows a complex dynamic of Ulster unionist's dilemmas in times of change by highlighting bizarre and violent ways in which unionism is maintained and reproduced in the post-process Brexit era. Rather than defining or constructing a unique identity, the play allows us to examine contrasting dramatic focuses for contemporary Northern

Irish geography as the play adheres to, yet challenges the Northern Irish identity problems. On a broader scope, this paper aims to demonstrate that Ireland's drama can significantly contribute to understanding different dimensions of the Northern Irish milieu.

III. Pitfalls of Ulster Nostalgia in *Cyprus Avenue*

The emergent discourses of 'peace' in Northern Ireland are partly subverted by fatalism in *Cyprus Avenue*. Ireland exposes both the ideological distortion and a haunting sense of anxiety through the main protagonist Eric Miller's memory. Eric does not participate in social change, instead succumbing to the male-dominant hegemony, and finally to madness. The scenes in the play are recollections or reenactments of his memory through the mental therapy session, thereby foregrounding the theme of his paranoid fixation on the past. His deep attachment to the past and the place of Ulster becomes the continuous thread reaching back to the fraught discourses of sectarianism. As the play unfolds, the skewed view of unionism looms large over Eric's mind like an indelible mark. The sense of crisis and the absence of social and political spaces that contain or 'explain' Eric carry the play forward.

Cyprus Avenue is an unusual play in that it focuses on the middle-class unionist: instead of being a working class paramilitary man, Eric is a former public officer worked for Her Majesty's Government to combat the terrorism of the IRA.⁷⁾ "I am exclusively and non-negotiably British" (9), says Eric. As he

7) Eric's middle-class background is quite rare not only in the works covered in this paper but also in the traditional Troubles plays. Taking Owen McCafferty's works alone as an example, most of his works revolve around

declares, Eric is a unionist, a son of Ulster, living on Cyprus Avenue⁸⁾ in East Belfast, one of the city's most prosperous middle-class areas. Eric believes the political reality of contemporary Ulster is under threat due to the peace building process saying that "the inevitability of a united Ireland will eradicate Ulster loyalist culture" (144). In a therapy meeting, he tells the psychiatrist that he believes his five-week-old granddaughter, Mary-May, is actually the incarnation of Gerry Adams, the former Republican leader and president of Sinn Féin:⁹⁾

a working-class experience. *Scenes from the Big Picture* (2003) features everyday lives of laborers in the abattoir or shop steward. *Mojo Mickybo* also centers on an 8-year-old Catholic working-class boy, Mickybo, and his unemployed, drunken father's sudden death at the bar. Even in *Quietly* (2012), the main narrative is a conversation between two middle-aged working-class men. Quite exclusively, McCafferty's 2017 play, *Fire Below (A War of Words)* shows the dynamics of a middle-class narrative of Belfast. Listening to opera with glasses of wine, two middle-class married couples who self-consciously live in "a Western capitalist country" (McCafferty, *Fire Below* 32) watch working-class Protestants' Eleventh Night bonfire on a working-class estate below their fancy terrace deck. Furthermore, as Parker was a working-class Protestant, *Pentecost* (1987) is set in a working-class parlor house, which is the last inhabited house on the street between Protestant and Catholic ghettos, and a redevelopment zone.

- 8) Cyprus Avenue is a street name in a middle-class area of east Belfast, celebrated by Northern Irish singer Van Morrison in his 1968 album. Morrison described Cyprus Avenue as follows; "a place where there's a lot of wealth. It wasn't far from where I was brought up, and it was a very different scene. To me it was a very mystical place. It was a whole avenue lined with trees, and I found it a place where I could think."
- 9) Féin means "We Ourselves" or "Ourselves Alone" in Irish. It is an Irish republican and democratic socialist political party in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Gerry Adams led the party from 1983 to 2018. Although the party is widely regarded as the political wing of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA), Féin strives for an end to the

“Gerry Adams has disguised himself as a new-born baby and successfully infiltrated my family home” (52). In Ireland’s exploration of conflict in the post-peace process period, Eric’s wife Bernie and daughter Julie keep telling him to stop living in the past and fighting old battles that nobody cares about anymore. Overcome by the fear that his own home has been infiltrated by anti-unionist morals and feelings, Eric murders his wife, daughter, and granddaughter.

The spatial sense of the play is in thrall to the place of Ulster. However, the dramatic space of *Cyprus Avenue* is fractured, and within it, Eric is a multifaceted subject. Ireland intertwines four main narrative strands and four indeterminate dramatic spaces: A process of self-reflection in the therapy room; his murderous past invoked by the therapy session; meeting with a man in a balaclava at the park; while storytelling ‘in his mind’ about the bizarre experience in an Irish pub in London. Scenes switch seamlessly and indistinctively as the play develops upon Eric’s psychological complexity and self-doubt. Each of the four spaces may serve as a metaphor for the cultural and political diagnosis of a sense of identity crisis in the face of the peace-building process in Northern Ireland. Eric’s psychological and political positioning, as a middle-class, unionist, middle-aged man, is represented in such ostensibly open and free spaces as therapy room, pub, and park. However, these spaces are (re)presented on the stage as indeterminate and indefinable, thus posing potential threats at the same time.

First, the play’s domestic scene in the psychiatrist’s office is the anchor of realism. The therapy room can be an extension of the same social and/or governmental policies that encourage Eric to modify his sectarian biases and

anger for the ongoing peace process in Northern Ireland. Yet, Eric's flashbacks continuously deviate from and work against the dominant power of the therapeutic governance. In Eric's flashbacks, the space of the imaginations through which life is directly lived is revealed. The therapy session thus provides a framework not for Eric's psychological restructuring, but for his flashbacks that continuously distend reality. With only a sterile set of cream-colored chairs and a small table on the large square of cream carpet, the wall-less setting reflects indefinable and indefinite Eric's psyche.¹⁰⁾ The therapy session shows how unknowledgeable Eric is about multi-culturalism in contemporary Northern Ireland. The play begins with Eric questioning a therapist named Bridget, a Nigerian British, with a racist epithet: "Why are you a nigger?" (7), "I did grow up in Belfast. I never met a black person until I was forty-seven. Is it ok to say 'black'?" (8). While the dramaturgical purpose of dealing with the past through therapy session has often been linked to reconciliation and the truth recovery in many post-conflict dramas, *Cyprus Avenue* represents how localism and nationalism have become stronger to reaffirm the parochially defined security and power of place and community in a world of changing.

Second, following the drift of Eric's delusional reflection, the stage becomes Eric's home as his daughter and wife appear onstage. Eric's dilemma is fundamentally spatial as his psychological and political position is in the 'middle.' Ireland's setting of Eric's home in a reasonably well-off middle-class area in Belfast implies the core dilemma for middle-class unionist¹¹⁾ in

10) The stage description is based on the film version of the Royal Court Theatre stage production, which was streamed via Royal Court Theatre website for two months from 27 March 2020.

11) Not only in the Northern Irish dramatic works, little has been researched

Northern Ireland faced by peace process. In Eric's case, the increasingly entrenching reality of the peace process in Northern Ireland generates anxiety as he has felt comfortable with traditional classifications, "the mythological land-owning Protestant settler who fought for Queen and country" (Singleton 17) and the Protestant economic and social supremacy over Catholics. Eric's daughter, Julie, criticizes Eric for his bigotry and sectarian bile:

ERIC. I do not hope for a united Ireland! I do not pine for a thirty-two country Irish socialist republic! [. . .] They all vote for Sinn Fein.

[. . .]

JULIE. Nobody votes for anyone! Nobody cares anymore! As long as people aren't getting killed nobody cares! [. . .] You're living in the past, Dad. You're fighting old battles that nobody cares about anymore.

ERIC. This country is sleepwalking into a united Ireland.

[. . .]

JULIE. Nobody wants it. Just as none of our lot cares enough to fight against it none of their lot care enough to fight for it. It's a good balance.

ERIC. You're very naïve, Julie. You underestimate the relentless tenacity of pan-nationalism.

JULIE. Everyone born in Northern Ireland. Protestant or Catholic. Whatever. We're Northern Irish. We're Irish. What's the big difference? (61)

about the middle classes and Ulster unionism in Northern Ireland. In "Leadership, the Middle Classes and Ulster Unionism since the Late-Nineteenth Century," N. C. Fleming argues that not many theorists and historians have focused on 'class' as a framework to analyze Ulster unionism. Though the middle classes had a significant impact on the make up of Ulster unionism, religion, ethnic, and political issues have taken over many fields of scholarships.

After a series of disputes and quarrels with Julie over his “theory” (58) about whether or not Gerry Adams is his granddaughter, Eric proclaims his doctrine: “Without prejudice we’re nothing! If we don’t discriminate, we don’t survive!” (62). Angered by the conversation, Eric finally kills his daughter to save her from her naivety. He justifies the murder because the daughter’s crisis of identity, the loss of unionism, is defeat and humiliation for Ulster ideology. In his delusion, Eric believes that he is protecting the cohesion of the unionism by murdering her daughter who has weakened the sense of unionism.

The third space of the play, representing the main part of the plot, is used to play out the conflicts between Eric’s unionist vision and Irish Catholic republicanism that Eric disdainfully refers to with the sectarian epithet “Fenians.” Scene Six provides the most interesting theatre space, which is imagined through Eric’s talking to Bridget “in his mind” (34). Sitting on a park bench, Eric talks about the bizarre experience in an Irish bar in London he visited on a business trip ten years ago. In the Irish pub place, where all seem to think of him as Irish, Eric confesses that he thought; “the most terrifying thought of all, Maybe I am Irish. But I can’t be! I can’t suddenly be Irish anymore than I can suddenly be French! And then I thought - maybe I’ve always been Irish” (36). In the park and pub, the public spaces where social norms dominate people to be self-policing, Eric rather becomes more aware of his deep attachment to the Irish identity. Indeed, his identity crisis amplifies the play’s probing of the long paranoia of the Ulster unionist identity. Eric’s own sense of ethno-national identity is more complicated as it is disintegrating in his mind:

But is that all I am? A puppet? A patsy? Is that the sum of all I am? There were men standing outside the pub, smoking. I have

nothing in common with them, I thought. [. . .] I can't be like them! I'm not like them! And then I thought . . . This is London! All these men are English! All these Irishmen waking in and out of this pub! Every one of them is English! They go to England for a hundred years and call themselves Irish and we go the Ireland for four hundred years and call ourselves British! If I'm insane, I'm clearly not the only one! It's catching! It's catching! Throughout these islands, it's catching . . . ! [. . .] I was so happy that night. I was Irish. For one night, I was allowed to be Irish and I had a grand ay' time, so I did. [. . .] I woke up the next day full of shame and regret. (37-39)

In metropolitan London where Northern Irish sectarian connotations are easily erased, Eric's dilemma lies not in the loss of British self-categorization, but in a comfortable feeling to find a place to belong as "Irish." Ireland critically engages in this unionist dilemma of both wanting to re-affirm the British self-categorization and the sense of belonging to be an Irish.

The last episode is reenacted as an armed Protestant paramilitary terrorist Slim approaching Eric while he is sitting in a park. For Slim, the peace process is a "dystopian blueprint for the annihilation of beleaguered, beloved Ulster" (53). As a protector of the community's law and order, Slim's mission is to tackle the peace process and eliminate the Republican cause to promote community cohesion. As Eric talks himself in Irish reflecting on the experience in London's Irish pub, Slim mistakes Eric for one of the "Fenians" he is supposed to kill.¹²⁾

12) For a more detailed account on the paramilitary "punishment attack," see Johnny Connolly, *Beyond the Politics of 'Law and Order': Towards Community Policing in Ireland* (Belfast: Centre for Research and Documentation 1997); Paddy Hillyard, "Popular Justice in Northern Ireland: Continuities and Change." *Research in Law, Deviance and Social Control* 7

SLIM. [. . .] Why were you talking to yourself? And why were you talking Irish?

ERIC. I was talking to my psychiatrist.

[. . .]

SLIM. Where is she?

ERIC. I don't know [. . .] I was in her office and I was talking about the past. This is the past.

SLIM. No this is the now.

ERIC. No it's the past. In my mind it's the past.

SLIM. How can it be the past? How can this be the past? This is the now!

ERIC. But this happened in the past! (43)

Asked what he is worried about, Eric says, "The inevitability of a united Ireland will eradicate Ulster loyalist culture" (44). Quite forced to answer, Eric brings about his second but the most exhausting problem: "I'm worried that I might be Irish. And that my entire existence has been an elaborate lie driven by the forces of history" (44).

Cyprus Avenue reaches its climax when Eric's recollection of murdering his five-week-old granddaughter is reenacted onstage.

He ties up the bag.

ERIC. It's not an easy thing to kill a baby. You have to make peace with the violence inside.

The baby struggles inside the bin bag. [. . .] He slams the baby in the bag over his shoulder and hard on to the floor. He swings the bag once more over his shoulder and slams it on the floor. He does this a third time, harder and heavier than before. (79)

(1985): 247-67; and Rachel Monaghan, "The Return of 'Captain Moonlight': Informal Justice in Northern Ireland," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 25.1 (2002): 41-56.

The play further heightens the violence as Eric reflects that the murder of his family was heroic at the end of the play. In the conversation with the therapist in the final scene of the play, Eric recounts the day when he murdered his granddaughter, wife, and daughter:

BRIDGET. And how do you feel now? When you recount what happened?

ERIC. Proud.

BRIDGET. Why?

ERIC. I never knew I'd be capable of such heroism. And love.

BRIDGET. Love?

sERIC. Love, yes. I felt love.

BRIDGET. Who did you feel love for?

ERIC. Everyone. After I murdered the baby, a stillness came upon me. And I felt a compulsion as overwhelming as the compulsion to kill. A compulsion to forgive.

BRIDGET. Who did you forgive?

ERIC. The human race. The world. All of my family. My ancestor. And all Fenians everywhere. Sinn Fein. The SDLP.¹³ The IRA. [. . .] At the moment of killing Gerry Adams, I forgave him. (80)

His last words even reveal a deep cleavage between his murders and his memory of those murders. In a state of euphoria, Eric feels greatly relieved in

13) Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) is the first nationalist party to occupy a government position in Northern Ireland. For more detailed information on SDLP, see Sarah Campbell's "New Nationalism? The S.D.L.P. and the creation of a socialist and labour party in Northern Ireland, 1969-75" in *Irish Historical Studies*, 38.151 (2013): 422-38; Ian McAllister's *The Northern Ireland Social Democratic and Labour Party: political opposition in a divided society* (1977).

his Protestant faith: "For the first time in a long time, I feel at peace" (82). Eric's murder of his family members is, thus, a kind of ritual killing of individual/social striving for new connections or new understandings in the context of wider narratives of peace-era progress to complete a coherent Ulster unionism.

At the end of the play, Eric considers himself a hero in his own delusion. Rather than an individual madness, Eric's delusion is more of a national crisis that has been continuously represented throughout the history of Ireland. From the point of Irish nationalism, blood sacrifice has been glorified; the deaths associated with martyrdom, battles, and wars are glorified and even mythicized as heroic decisions. As the dramatic figure of the Mother Ireland in Yeats's *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902), for example, the blood sacrifice of young men on behalf of the Irish nation rejuvenates the poor old woman, the Mother Ireland, into a young girl with "the walk of a queen" (231), Irish history deem individual deaths to be heroic defeats. Mirroring the Irish nationalist teleology, the spiritual and physical struggle represented in *Cyprus Avenue* is more fatalistic. Counter to the heroic image of the blood sacrifice in the Irish nationalist trope, Eric is in the grip of a never-ending fate to struggle to succumb to violence. Eric's heroism is the inevitable fate of a self-subordinated Ulster unionist who fears losing the secure and comfortable place that has guaranteed glorifying national, regional power in union with Great Britain.

IV. Conclusion

Ireland's denouement is invariably violent. His drama remits to a structure of the meta-narrative of the Troubles as it confines to the troubled place its

protagonist who is fettered and deluded by the questioning of his/her attachment to and identification with the place of Ulster. With ruthless violence, from slamming the baby in the plastic bag to suicidal gun shooting, his drama employs the in-yer-face aesthetic of the mid-90s British playwrights.¹⁴⁾ In his review in the *Guardian*, Michael Billington points out how Ireland offers stereotypical images of loyalist/Protestant. Billington compares *Cyprus Avenue* with Irish playwright Martin McDonagh's *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* (2001), the second play from McDonagh's *The Aran Trilogy*. As the play features an extremist Irish republican who is driven insane by his beloved cat's death, it offers stereotypical images of Catholic Irish, often referred to as "The Stage Irishman."¹⁵⁾ Referencing the self-distasteful or negative representation of paranoid loyalism to a common problem that hampers loyalist plays, Parr also comments on *Cyprus Avenue* ran in Dublin and London in 2016; it "played on its audiences' inherent derision for a white working class whose sense of allegiance to Britain makes them 'insane' and murderous" (15). He further

14) The term "in-yer-face" is coined by Aleks Sierz in his influential book *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (2001). Sierz introduces the in-yer-face theatre as any drama that "question[s] moral norms," "affronts the ruling ideas of what can or should be shown onstage" and "taps into more primitive feelings, smashing taboos, mentioning the forbidden, creating discomfort. Crucially, it tells us more about who we relay are" (4). See also Sierz, "'We All Need Stories': The Politics of In-Yer-Face Theatre," *Cool Britannia? British Political Drama in the 1990s* (2008); *Rewriting the Nation: British Theatre Today* (2011).

15) To borrow Maguire's terms, there are Protestant stereotypes of Republican/Catholic, namely "extreme, working-class, unemployed and unemployable, and drunken" (*Making Theatre* 155). In contrast, there are stereotypical representations of loyalist/Protestant as "a sectarian, racist bigot, stupid, irrational, idle, and dependent on the state" (155).

argues that this tendency, thus, makes loyalist playwriting being written off as a kind of “liberal, middle-class outlets essentially telling their metropolitan readerships what they want to hear about Ireland and Ulster Protestants” (15).

However, the characterization of insane and murderous Eric is Ireland’s artistic defense against negative representations of Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist (PUL) tropes. Ireland claims that his drama originates from his compulsive need for self-examination and self-reflection of unionist. Ireland’s drama appropriates the negative portrayal of unionism found in mass media in order to highlight how the problematic nature of the ways the unionist identity is constructed, defined, and defended in times of peace. In an interview with the Royal Court Theatre, Ireland says:

My plays as a whole cover a wide range of Unionist perspectives and voices. Eric [in *Cyprus Avenue*] is very different from Ruth in *Ulster American* or Sandra in *Everything Between Us*. But people only see what they want to see. If they come into it with a prejudice, that prejudice will be confirmed. (“In Conversation”)

Ireland does not reject the cliché. He does not suggest that the fear should be either overcome or erased, yet he deploys the extremely negative representation of unionism to amplify fears, and frustrations of unionist in Northern Ireland. At the same time, the play does not merely ridicule the primitive and murderous portrayal of the “Stage ‘Northern’ Irishman.”

The play elaborates unassuageable, antagonizing unionist’s psyche concerning about identity, past, sense of belonging and the meaning of life in times of political change. Ireland endows his character with an almost tragic heroic status. Ultimately, his defense of Ulster unionism is achieved by his artistic creation of unionist character that are truly memorable and fully human

in all his glories and disgraces. Undercurrents of the repercussions of the shock effects, pity and fear, and varying degrees of empathy for the characters constantly run through the play. It could be Ireland's own pity and fear for the internal wrangling of the Ulster man. He argues that the play is about his "anxieties about what [he] would teach [his] children about their heritage, and who they are" (Lawson), and that he fears becoming similar to the main character Eric. Ireland projects these emotions onto the violent actions of Eric, which in turn functions as the microcosm of political violence increasingly visible among loyalists in Northern Ireland these days. It is the reason why there is certain dignity in the de-humanized character of Eric Miller. Adding some warmth and pathos to a particularly dark run of murderous scenes, *Cyprus Avenue* concerns Northern Irish unionist identity as something to be recovered, re-affirmed and further elaborated over time.

Cyprus Avenue is the narrative of loss, the placelessness of Ulster unionism. Through Eric, the play shows two major paradigm shifts in Northern Ireland: The homogenizing forces of peace process; and responses to placelessness by redrawing boundaries, re-securing parochial identities, the quest for ever-smaller communities. The characters' mental imprint in *Cyprus Avenue* constantly generates a tension between the placelessness and the quest for their place by affirming their status as people of Ulster. His plays make use of a way both out of and back into the sectarianism and violence of Northern Ireland, which is Ireland's way of acknowledging new predicaments and contestations of political attitudes and identities of Ulster unionism.

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After the Peace:

Performing Placelessness in David Ireland's *Cyprus Avenue*

Abstract

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This paper examines how contemporary Northern Irish playwright David Ireland's *Cyprus Avenue* (2016) articulates the Northern Irish unionists' antagonism in tandem with the displacement of Ulster in a world of changing spaces. While post-Troubles Northern Irish dramas have been easily grouped together with a shared sensibility in their attitude towards the processes of truth and reconciliation, Ireland's drama regards the process of spatial homogenization as a crisis, a sense of placelessness, or the loss of the socio-culturally distinct Northern Irish identity. *Cyprus Avenue* traces the unionists' sense of placelessness, fear, and anger for the identity dissolution, as globalization requires the psychological and emotional attachment to Northern Irish place to be erased. The play further shows the burdens of geo-ideologically liminal positioning of Ulster unionism and unionists' psychogeography by highlighting bizarre and violent ways in which unionism is maintained and reproduced in the post-peace process Brexit era. The dramatic power of Ireland draws on the tension between the placelessness in a world of changing spaces and the quest for the assertion of the primacy of place. Ireland's drama helps to acknowledge new predicaments and contestations of disintegrating Ulster unionism in shaping the milieu of post-peace process Northern Ireland. Rather than defining or constructing a unique identity, *Cyprus Avenue* allows us to examine contrasting dramatic focuses for contemporary Northern Irish geography as the play adheres to, yet challenges the Northern Irish identity problems. On a broader scope, this paper aims to demonstrate that

Ireland's drama can significantly contribute to understanding different dimensions of the Northern Irish milieu.

Key Words Northern Irish Drama, Ulster Unionism, Placelessness, David Ireland, *Cyprus Avenue*

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