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- 1 Mike McCormack's novel *Solar Bones* has been compared<sup>1</sup> to Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*, but also to Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. It is easy to see why, for *Solar Bones* is a novel about memory, introspection and synaesthesia, and the writing is original and disturbing. But while Flann O'Brien contributed to reinvent fiction writing by contesting traditional forms of narratives, Mike McCormack's writing is not self-reflexive in any metafictional mode. Indeed, its methodology is more one of diffraction than one of self-reflection.
- 2 The unbalanced quality of the narrative strikes from the beginning because of the time and space warp on which the narrative is based: it begins in a kitchen at noon on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2008, and ends in a car, seven months earlier, a few miles from his home, as the narrator is driving home from an errand into town to get medicine for his sick wife, at one o'clock in the afternoon on 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2008. The seven months in between are a blank in the storyline, a void in the narrative - recreated by the material act of turning the book over and starting the reading all over again on the first page, to make sense of the whole narrative. It reads like an unending gasp of a kind. *Solar Bones* is Mike McCormack's first novel and the narrative is the fragment of one long sentence with no full stop. It was published in 2016 to wide public acclaim and earned McCormack a number of prizes. This novel is in fact perfectly suited to a discussion on balance in an Irish context, as indeed balance appears very fragile, and the narrator's voice is all along on the tipping-edge. McCormack uses this voice to question the state of Irish society in the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, raising the issue of what future Irish society desires for its children. In *Solar Bones*, space, place and time challenge the usual modes of representations and question our vision and our understanding of the future, not only in political and economical terms, but also in metaphysical terms. In this paper, I will first discuss the ambivalent status of the narrator, at once a haunting voice, a ghost, and yet a voice that is deeply placed and embodied. This will lead me to examine how the narrative challenges the collapse of traditional modes of

representations, and finally I will discuss the ways in which the novel avoids binary oppositions and promotes matter, materiality and intra-action as a mode of looking at the present and the future.

## Between here and beyond: emplacing voice and memory

- 3 McCormack's novel is a fragment of one long sentence and the story of a collapse on all scales, whether personal, physical, financial or economical – but it is also a stylistic feat. The narrator is an invisible ghost come back to haunt the world of the living on All Souls' Day 2008, speaking out from his former kitchen table, where most of his life memories come back although not chronologically, nor following any apparent rational logic. They follow a chain of emotions, weaving a pattern of affects and experiences. And yet, despite its evanescent quality, the enunciating voice is deeply anchored and embodied. The professional expertise of the narrator as a former civil engineer permeates his perception of the landscape and of the construction of the world in general. His understanding of the world around him and beyond is technical and political. His vision is one of construction and deconstruction, assembling and dismantling. The number of times those words occur in the novel shows how essential structures, measurements, timelines and deadlines are in the narrator's vision of life. His mind itself is built on an understanding of mechanisms and contraptions. But in order to take in the full scope of the narrator's enterprise, it is crucial to note that beyond his questioning of the world with a technical eye, he also adopts a metaphysical turn of mind. The spiritual and metaphysical dimensions are indeed central. The narrative mentions the religious heritage of Ireland, the influence of rituals, creeds, figures of saints, the liturgical calendar and the way it moulded the narrator's life and the life of the whole Irish society. Halfway through the novel he actually reveals to his children that, as a young man, he had first thought of becoming a priest. This shows that the narrator sees life and the world, at once physically and metaphysically, materially and immaterially.
- 4 Strikingly, the opening does not conjure up a visual landscape, but a soundscape:
- the bell  
     the bell as  
     hearing the bell as  
         hearing the bell as standing here  
         the bell being heard standing here  
         hearing it ring out through the grey light of this  
         morning, noon or night  
         god knows  
         this grey day standing here and  
         listening to this bell in the middle of the day, the middle of  
the day bell, the Angelus bell in the middle of the day, the middle of the day,  
ringing out  
through the grey light to  
    here  
    standing in the kitchen  
    hearing the bell (1)
- 5 The first impression is nonetheless visual, the word “bell” being positioned at the beginning of a line, without any capitalization. But in the second half of the first page,

almost immediately, the visual representation is counterbalanced by the repetition of the word “bell” and the numerous echoes scattered across the page. The visual unbalance created by the blank top of the page and the writing compacted in the bottom portion, are also counterbalanced by the insistence on the moment of the day, which the bell indicates as “the middle of the day”, repeated three times in the spell of two lines. It is an indistinct grey zone between the morning and the afternoon, the adjective “grey” being itself repeated three times in those 15 lines - as “grey light” twice, as well as “grey day” - a moment which the Christian religion has marked with pause of prayer, and the bell, the “Angelus bell”, with “god knows” right at the centre of the half page on line 8, as a landmark in the course of the day. And yet, the repetition of “hearing the bell<sup>2</sup>” is balanced with the repetition of “standing here”, also a gerund, and also repeated four times.

- 6 For, even if the narrative voice is still neutral and anonymous in those first lines of the novel, and if the indefinite form of the passive prevails, the narrative is anchored in time and place: “here”, “in the kitchen”, at noon, at the indistinct moment of the day when the scale tips towards evening. But on the second page already, the possessive pronoun “my” unveils the homodiegetic status of the narrator as he describes the effect of the resounding bell on his heart:

hearing this bell  
 snag at **my**<sup>3</sup> heart and  
 draw the whole world into  
 being here  
 pale and breathless after coming a long way to stand in this  
 kitchen  
 confused  
 no doubt about that  
 but hearing the bell from the village church a mile away as the  
 crow flies, across the street from the garda station, beneath the giant  
 sycamore trees which tower over it and in which a colony of rooks have made their  
 nests, so many and so noisy that sometimes in spring when they are nesting their  
 clamour fills the church and [...] (2)

- 7 The snagging at the narrator’s heart is as much physical as sentimental. For, although a reference is made to spring, the bell is ringing out the midday Angelus on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2008, and it is heard from the kitchen of a small family house “outside the village of Louisburgh in the county of Mayo on the West coast of Ireland” (9), where the narrator comes back, exactly seven months and twelve days after he died of a heart attack at one o’clock on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2008, on the day of the Spring equinox of that same year, just as the “time signal for the one o’clock news” (219) was “pulsing across the airwaves” in his car. He returns to haunt his kitchen on the day of All Souls Day 2008, a day on which both Christian and Celtic traditions share the belief that the boundaries between the mortal and unearthly realms break down and when, traditionally, a glass of milk and something to eat was left for the beloved ones who might return. A form of unbalance is therefore deeply and yet implicitly inscribed in the structure of the narrative: the traditional noon Angelus bell which the narrator hears on his return on November the 2<sup>nd</sup> and throughout the opening pages of the novel, echoes in an unbalanced kind of way the modern day radio signal of the one o’clock news which filled his car as he lay dying seven months before and is narrated in the final pages of the novel. Both the bell and the radio signal punctuate the day in the middle of its course, but not exactly the same middle, depending on traditions, whether religious or secular. And both snag at

his heart in different ways. The snagging is physical and literal, but also emotional and figurative. In any case, his standing here in the kitchen seems linked to a form of cosmic logic. Bearing in mind that he died on the day of the spring equinox, *equinox* being the Latin for “equal night”, Marcus Conway dies at the moment of perfect balance between night and day, just as the signal of the one o’clock news fills his car. And he returns on the day when boundaries between mortal and unearthly borders break, just as the Angelus bell chimes in the air, and he is standing there, reconsidering the state of things in Ireland and in his life.

- 8 For all those cosmic alignments and coincidences, the narrator is standing in a perfectly identifiable place. Louisburgh is in fact not a fictional place, but a real Irish small town that, as we learn in the course of the novel, experienced an upturn in its fortunes during the economic boom in Ireland, with high employment, especially in construction. The evasive, almost evanescent and abstract nature of the sound of the bell in the opening page is therefore counterbalanced by a precise description of the geographic features of the place, expanding in concentric circles around the kitchen where the narrator now stands:

the Angelus bell  
ringing out over its villages and townlands, over the fields and  
hills and bogs in between, six chimes of three across a minute and  
a half, a summons struck on the lip of the void which gathers this  
parish together through all its primary and secondary roads with  
all its schools and football pitches  
all its bridges and graveyards  
all its shops and pubs  
the builder’s yard and health clinic  
the community centre  
the water treatment plant and  
the handball alley  
**the made world** with  
all **the focal points** around which a parish like this gathers itself  
as surely as  
**the world itself** did at the beginning of time, through  
mountains, rivers and lakes  
when it gathered in these parts around the Bunowen river which rises  
in the Lachta hills and flows north towards the sea, carving out that floodplain to  
which all roads, primary and secondary, following  
the contours of the landscape, make their way in the middle of  
which stands  
the village of Louisburgh  
from which the Angelus bell is ringing, drawing up the world again  
mountains, rivers and lakes  
acres, roods and perches  
animal, mineral, vegetable  
covenant, cross and crown  
the given world with  
all its history to brace myself while  
standing here in the kitchen  
of this house  
I’ve lived in for nearly twenty-five years and raised a family, this  
house outside the village of Louisburgh in the county of Mayo on  
the west coast of Ireland, the village in which I can trace my seed and breed  
back to a time when it was nothing more than a ramshackle

river crossing a few smoky homesteads clustered around a forge  
and a log bridge (9)

- 9 The narrator first lists the social and economical “focal points” of what he calls the “made world” in opposition to the list he gives a few lines further of “the world itself”. So despite a disembodied narrative voice come back in the kitchen of his former home, at a grey moment of the year, when the limit between the living and the dead is blurred, the entire text is in fact deeply anchored in the physical space of experience. As Malpas underlines in his book *The Place of Landscape*, landscape is made of our complex relationship with place:

Landscape represents to us, not only our relationship with place, but also the problematic nature of that relationship – a relationship that contains within it involvement and separation, agency and spectacle, self and other. It is in and through landscape, in its many forms, that our relationship with place is articulated and represented, and the problematic character of that relationship made evident. (2011, 21)

- 10 And this is exactly what the narrator, Marcus Conway, experiences, as he returns to his kitchen: things are the same and at the same time profoundly other, because since the spring equinox when he died, the Celtic Tiger boom has gone bust. So from his special viewpoint, between the realm of the living and the realm of the dead, yet emplaced in his kitchen and seated at his kitchen table, and in fact inhabiting the place more fully than he ever did, Marcus Conway reconsiders what he calls the “over-realm of international finance” and a whole “new cosmology” (13). Gazing at the landscape unrolling in his memory, he strives to achieve a perfect balance comprehending the past and the present, as well as the local, regional, national and global scales. And from his peculiar point of view and the uninterrupted flow of words preceding even the first page of the novel, since the narrative opens in the middle of a sentence, the balance he tries to maintain is more than a mere tension between opposites and paradoxes. Just as anthropologist Tim Ingold states that place is an entanglement of lifelines in his book *Lines, a Brief History*, the narrator of *Solar Bones* also describes the major events of his life in terms of lines. For example when he recalls his wife’s announcement of her first pregnancy, the memory is evoked with a focus on lines:

this house which we were settled in only  
a few months the morning she stood over me  
at this same table  
waving the stick that was telling us, by way of an unbroken line  
through its tiny window, that she was pregnant (36)

- 11 The line of the pregnancy test is then compared to other lines that indicate boundaries or thresholds:

because that’s what the clear line through its little window  
was saying, definite as any line drawn in the sand or any surveyor’s  
contour or any of those global parallels  
longitude and latitude  
which demark those national borders that are drawn up in  
the wake of long, complex negotiations – the 45<sup>th</sup> parallel which  
separates Alaska from Canada or, more accurately, the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel  
which separates North from South Korea – a definitive boundary or  
threshold over which you can venture only if you accept that you are  
leaving your old life behind with all its habits and customs (36-37)

- 12 But in *Solar Bones* lines are not the straight lines of the tightrope walker linking two opposites. They are enmeshed in a complex manner. Lines not only indicate two

different spaces, but also changes in time, in experiences of the same space, as well as in habits.

- 13 In fact, the landscape depicted in *Solar Bones* exposes the collapse of ordinary representations. It is a discursive interface between human experience and the material environment. It does not offer a mere reflection of present day Ireland and its tensions and contradictions, but as Barad (2007, 89-90) writes, a diffractive approach to space and time, place and landscape, and our understanding of the world.

## Collapsing of ordinary representations

- 14 This novel is about embodied collapse, or rather, landscape perceived and experienced from an embodied experience of collapse. It is the story of a personal, organic experience of collapse understood from the full experience of chaos, at a bodily, local, as well as global scale. The collapse referred to goes “beyond the material satisfaction of things falling down” (29), as the narrator writes at the beginning of the novel. And therefore the whole experience requires, in his words, “some expanding beyond the image of things toppling and falling down” (29). Because the narrator’s mode of perception and representation is a diffractive one, it therefore calls for alternative modes of representation.
- 15 Although his mind is said to be spiralling (25), going from the kitchen to the house and the village, and onto Clew Bay, the narrative loops in and makes excursions in various regions of the past, constantly addressing construction and collapse, materiality and virtuality, the body and the soul, the organic and the spiritual or metaphysical, but not in any binary opposition. Rather, it exposes how entangled things are. The fundamental time warp at the scale of both the narrative and the enunciation is entangled in other time warps, the word itself occurring at least three times in the novel. First it occurs as the narrator describes the chaos of the economical collapse : “a strange mindset for an engineer whose natural incline is towards the stable construct and not/ this circular dreamtime of chaos which/ gives such warp and drift to this day so that/ [...] ” (29). Later, as he recounts his wife’s illness, he describes her “drifting through the damp currents of her sleep as if she inhabited some separate medium in which everything was given order to drift and fade, space and time warped” (111). In the last pages of the novel, as the narrator is dying, the word comes back again as “the whole warp and weft of the world is ongoing” (218). This constant warping is the viewpoint from which the narrator gazes at the world’s on-goings, warping his own viewpoint. He therefore embodies a new type of landscape representation, one that is not made of perspectives, vanishing lines and oppositions or symmetries, but a construct of entanglements. The word “construct” is itself recurrently used by the narrator, connoting wonder as to how things are built and come to be dismantled, how they collapse and are then reconstructed. The genesis of the narrative is given as the collapse of the economy at the end of 2007. The word “collapse” itself is one of the most recurrent words in the novel. In trying to make sense of the ways in which events are brought about, and in striving to think out the ways in which, what Barad calls “relational agency” (2003, 818) between things, people and events occur, the narrative exposes the various entanglements which correspond to the complex way in which the world is thought out and represented in *Solar Bones*. As Barad explains:

Quantum entanglements are generalised quantum superpositions, more than one, no more than one, impossible to count. They are far more ghostly than the colloquial sense of 'entanglement' suggests. Quantum entanglements are not the intertwining of two (or more) states/entities/events, but a calling into question of the very nature of two-ness, and ultimately of one-ness as well. Duality, unity, multiplicity, being are undone. 'Between' will never be the same. (2010, 251)

- 16 Entanglements are therefore not intertwining, but they are ghostly, impossible to count, superpositions. As Marcus Conway, standing in his kitchen, remembers different layers of the past, he is not simply entangling memories of place, he is in fact superposing memories and questioning the ghostly way in which they are related and how they return. Just as Barad promotes the notion of intra-action over that of interaction, the narrator of *Solar Bones* is concerned with the relational agency between elements of the past, or moments of the past, that he remembers, and how they morph in the course of their various intra-actions. In *Solar Bones* the moment of collapse escapes the logic of causality "because up to the moment the whole thing came down, it was never clear to me or anyone else what was happening". (30) This corresponds to the type of intra-actions Barad describes in a footnote of the same article in *Derrida Today*, as her "key concept of agential realism":

Intra-action is a key concept of agential realism (Barad 2007). In contrast to the usual 'interaction', the notion of intra-action recognises that distinct entities, agencies, events do not precede, but rather emerge from/through their intra-action. 'Distinct' agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute sense, that is, agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don't exist as individual elements. Importantly, intra-action constitutes a radical reworking of the traditional notion of causality. (2010, 267)

- 17 In fact, *Solar Bones* seems to be a perfect illustration of what Barad calls the "disjointedness" of time:

Time is out of joint. Dispersed. Diffracted. Time is diffracted through itself. It is not only the nature of time in its disjointedness that is at stake, but also disjointedness itself. Indeed, the nature of 'dis' and 'jointedness', of discontinuity and continuity, of difference and entanglement, and their im/possible interrelationships are at issue. (2010, 244)

- 18 In *Solar Bones* those concepts are not paired in any binary manner. What matters is the way in which the narrative implies that they are intra-related. Disjointedness concerns all scales of perception and experience: the small scale of constructing and dismantling objects, tools and instruments, or making bridges, is related and intra-acts with other agents from larger scales of perception and experience, such as for example, the dismantling of industrial facilities in the region, the wind turbines endowed with spiritual qualities, or the industrial complex which the narrator's father had contributed to construct (17) and which has become "a massive toxic dump" (17). The collapse is also related more widely to the lexical field of "catastrophe", "havoc", "calamity" (13), used to describe the collapse of the world economy, itself a "construction of air" (19). Because the narrator does not understand what is happening, he admits that his experience of the world as an engineer is limited: "figures and projections were never likely to map out the real contours of the calamity" (13) and imagines that other realms of experience and perception relate and intra-act together outside his capacities of understanding. The same vocabulary of bewilderment and ghostly perception of phenomena is used to describe what takes place on his computer screen as the Skype conversation with his son in Australia ends and he observes a "collapse of scale" (33) when the screen blanks out and only a "fizzy



interference” (75, 128) remains for a few seconds. The “fizzy interference” illustrates the material frontier between different realms. The screen is the material interface between the virtual and the real. In the same way, the narrator who never actually chose between “the cross and the theodolite” (175), as he describes his hesitation between two callings, the church and engineering sciences, embodies the interface between all those various scales or realms, trying to make sense of the world and the post Celtic Tiger situation in Ireland in 2008. He offers a distorted vision of a landscape warped by the intra-action of the virtual, the spiritual and the material. But in *Solar Bones*, matter and materiality expose a tangible, organic and performative counterbalance to virtuality, spirituality, or language even, that force the reader to reassess his own engagement in the world and in life.

## Matter and materiality: beyond landscape?

- 19 The question of materializing and dematerializing is at the heart of McCormack’s narrative. From the first lines when the bells ringing in the distance mark the materiality of experience and are described as “the real thing” and the “real bells” (8), to the precision of the perception by the narrator writing that “there’s no mistaking the fuller depth and resonance of the sound” (8). The resounding bells materialize the experience of being alive, of obeying a specific rhythm which, although uncharted, can be materialized through bells, radio pips, daily news, the papers on the kitchen table. The words itself, “materialized”, or “dematerialized” are used on several occasions throughout the novel to describe the bodily, material apparition of someone or something that existed only in the mind, as intellectual representations or as immaterial emotions. As the reader’s eyes fall on the text of an immaterial narrator come back in his kitchen although he has been officially dead for more than seven months, the fact that the sound of the bells is described as “a systolic thump” (8) can be read both as proleptic and analeptic. But more importantly, it draws a material link between elements that build the rhythm of life. Just as the pips of the 1pm news bulletin are described as “solid things” in the last pages of the novel (218), the word “materialize” (142) and its variations, “dematerialize” and “rematerialize” (140) punctuate the text and draw the reader’s attention towards materiality. In the whole novel, material and organic elements surface, in an attempt to create a balance between abstraction and materiality. In her article “Posthumanist performativity: toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter”, Barad (2003,1) writes that the body needs to be made visible, and the way in which it involves history and biology needs to be redeployed and exposed in a more complex manner and along new lines of logic. That need for a reinvestment of the body and its processes is exactly what McCormack’s narrative fulfils. But it also echoes Agamben’s theory of the biopolitics, what Agamben calls “bare life”. In the wake of Foucault’s work on biopolitics, Agamben (1998, 9) points at how “power penetrates subjects, the very bodies and forms of life”. And it is what takes place in McCormack’s novel as a virus called “cryptosporidiosis” has contaminated the network of drinkable water and thousands of people have been taken ill with intense vomiting and diarrhea, their own digestive system in intra-action with the region’s water network, itself connected and related to the political decisions made at local and regional levels. The reference to the virus is made in the first pages of the novel and since the narrator dies on the return journey from the village where he went to buy medicine for his wife, not only does the virus contaminate the entire

narrative, but the narrator's death is itself in a way intra-related to the general contamination process. For the viral contamination connects not only the material and the political, but the organic and the political, citizens' bodies and lives and the political, so that in a Skype discussion with his son the narrator describes the consequences of the virus on life as "ontopolitical":

These people marching in the streets are protesting against what they see as a contamination of the very stuff of life itself – what angers them is that life itself has been fouled at source by some ontopolitical virus which is hosted by water (126)

20 In drawing a direct link between the excrements that pollute the water and politics, the narrator highlights the material, organic connections between bodies and politics. In drawing attention to the organic and "ontopolitical" dimension of the cryptosporidiosis contamination, which happened in real life in the part of Ireland where the narrative is situated, the narrator does more than present Mairead's sick body as an extension of his political and engineering visions. (117) More crucially, he raises the question of responsibility. To do so, the emphasis is made in the novel on performance, both in the themes developed and in the writing of the novel itself.

21 To Barad, performance can be read as a political act, as it offers an alternative to mere representations:

Performativity, properly construed, is not an invitation to turn everything (including material bodies) into words; on the contrary, performativity is precisely a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real. (2003, 2)

22 This is precisely how the art exhibition and performance installation by Agnes, the narrator's daughter, is to be read and understood. As the narrator steps in the gallery where she has organized her first solo exhibition in Galway, he is mostly concerned by his own reluctance to mix with a crowd of artists and journalists and has braced himself to make the most of it in honour of his daughter. But when he realizes that instead of red paint, Agnes has used her own blood to write on her paintings, he has to leave the room in shock:

and I stood there in the middle of the crowd, vacant of everything save the single thought – that whatever dreams a man may have for his daughter it is safe that none involves standing in the middle of a municipal gallery with its walls covered in a couple of litres of her own blood because this, I slowly realised, was what I was looking at, this was the red mist that suffused the weak evening light which streamed in the front windows (...) (44)

23 The performance here is all the more powerful as the blood replaces the ink and becomes the medium through which language is inscribed, and in a way annihilated, since the material with which the word is written, the artist's blood, occupies centre stage and therefore erases both the signifier ("the red script" (42)) and the signified ("snippets of news stories lifted from the provincial papers" (42)). The material aspect of the performance forces the audience to refigure the meaning of the snippets of news copied out, but also of the lives of the people who make the news and those who read them, that is to say the political body as a whole, including the organs of mediation:

Performance is acted out again when a few weeks later Agnes jumps out in the void

in full possession of the moment, upheld in the gaze of the assembled ghouls, everyone teetering on the edge of some climactic gesture that would clinch the whole spectacle into a coherent act of political protest. (200)

- 24 At this point in the novel Agnes's performance "on the edge", is explicitly meant to question the responsibility of the viral disaster and criticizes the way in which the convergence of adverse circumstances – decrepit technology and torrential rains, overdevelopment and agricultural slurry [...] have smudged and spread responsibility for the crisis in such a way as to make the whole idea of accountability a murky realm [...] no blame or responsibility gathering anywhere (197)
- 25 In creating superposed realms of material and spiritual, real and virtual ways of engaging with life and the world, as well as through performance, *Solar Bones* attempts to expose the murky realm of accountability and to raise the necessarily complex questions of responsibility in Ireland today. Agnes's performance of jumping in the void seems to define the performance itself as the acknowledgment of a form of loss of balance, as the tipping-edge moment when questions should be asked, answers given and responsibilities taken.
- 26 In *Solar Bones* "matter matters" and, to echo Barad (2003, 3), "it is vitally important we understand how matter matters". In fact, in McCormack's narrative, life and death are refigured materially, and so is fiction writing. Just as the narrator recalls how fascinated he was at his daughter's birth, holding her birth certificate that was the material proof of her being part of the society in which she had been borne, his death on the instant when the last word of the novel is inked on the page finds its material nemesis on the printed page. The seven-month void between the instant of his death and the first word on the first page of the novel in a way refigures Agnes's jump from the edge of the installation into the dark void where she disappears. The writing of the novel itself, a 221-page long fragment of a sentence is in itself a performance – not only a gasp, or a long rasping sound before the end, but also the material act of writing a novel brought to the surface. Just as the narrative ends on the description of the narrator's body dying: "that spillage of filth within my organs which will eventually purge from every orifice of my body" (222), the narrative also spills out all its remaining thematic contents in the last pages, before starting the narrative all over again on the first page, as the departed soul stands in the kitchen, hearing the bell. The very structure of the narrative illustrates what Van de Tuin (2011, 276) explains in her article "New Feminist Materialisms", that thinking diffractively implies that we acknowledge that the past is entangled with its own projected futures. The balance McCormack's narrative points at is an ongoing search to make out the details of how those entanglements happen. In *Solar Bones*, writing becomes a performance which questions not so much the art of writing fiction, but more widely the process of representation and the notion of responsibility if we are to make a difference in the world and understand the meaning of our lives as becoming.

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## NOTES

1. Boland, Stephanie. *NewStatesman* (<https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2016/11/mike-mccormack-british-fiction-dominated-intellectual-conservatism>). Last consulted 7 November 2016.
2. The phrase is repeated four times, to which occurrences are added "hearing it ring out" and "ringing out".
3. All the emphases are mine.

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## ABSTRACTS

Often compared to Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*, Mike McCormack's novel *Solar Bones* published in 2016 is built on tensions and paradoxes. The narrator of *Solar Bones* is a dead man coming back to his home and his village on All Souls Day 2008 to reflect on his life on earth. The one-sentence narrative sounds like a gasp between life and death, the past and the present, real facts and virtual facts. Just as this in-between status of the narrator is a key-feature of the novel, the narrative questions the meaning of place, embodiment, and life in Ireland at the end of the 20th century and the turn of the twenty-first century. The narrator's death and his return coincide with the formidable end of the Celtic Tiger, so that the novel can be read as a dirge for Ireland, while the voice of the narrator, an ex-building engineer on a tightrope between the world of the dead and that of the living, implicitly questions what kind of future Ireland wants to construct. In *Solar Bones* reading becomes an exercise in balance between past and the future, materiality and abstraction, nature and constructs, life and death. And yet, for all its dramatic and morbid tone, this novel opens out moral, social, political and environmental perspectives

and points at the need to draw lessons from the past in order to build a sounder future for the generations to come in Ireland.

Souvent comparé au roman posthume de Flann O'Brien *Le Troisième policier*, le roman *Solar Bones* de Mike McCormack, publié en 2016, est construit sur des contradictions fondamentales. Le narrateur de *Solar Bones* est bel et bien mort en ce jour de la Toussaint 2008 quand il revient dans sa cuisine pour réfléchir à sa vie sur terre. Constitué d'une longue portion de phrase, ce récit résonne comme un ultime rôle entre vie et trépas, passé et présent, réel et virtuel. Tout comme cet entre-deux du narrateur est un trait essentiel du roman, le récit pose la question du lieu, du corps et de la vie en Irlande à la fin du XXe siècle et au début du XXIe siècle. La mort du narrateur et son retour coïncident avec la fin spectaculaire du Tigre celtique, si bien que ce roman pourrait être lu comme une élégie pour l'Irlande. Le narrateur, ancien ingénieur du bâtiment et des travaux publics, en équilibre tel un funambule entre le monde des morts et celui des vivants, pose de manière implicite la question de l'avenir de l'Irlande. Dans *Solar Bones* la lecture se fait exercice d'équilibre entre passé et futur, matérialité et abstraction, nature et construction, vie et mort. Et pourtant, malgré cette tonalité mortifère, le roman ouvre des pistes de réflexion morale, sociale, politique et environnementale et renvoie à la question essentielle des leçons à tirer du passé pour construire l'avenir des générations futures en Irlande.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** home, landscape, materiality, matter, place, virtual

**Mots-clés:** lieu, matérialité, matière, paysage, virtuel

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