Troubled Boundaries: Corporeal and Territorial Transgression in *Hunger* (Steve McQueen, 2008) and *'71* (Yann Demange, 2015)

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Abstract:
The legacy of the Troubles is still patently visible in Ireland. This period has never been absent from contemporary national discourse and, in fact, exists in living memory for the majority of the Irish. Brexit and the passing of Nobel Peace Prize laureate John Hume in August 2020 have only reinvigorated discussions on the Troubles, the IRA, and the Northern Irish peace processes, in which Hume was a central figure. This article presents a critical approach to the Troubles within a Gothic framework. This mode has long articulated anxieties engendered by the irresolvability of contested histories, territories and memories. I argue that the films *Hunger* and *'71* use gothic narrative structures and motifs to negotiate the emotionally and ideologically loaded Northern Irish conflict. Formally, the Gothic comes to the fore in each film's preoccupation with the unspoken and the visually untrustworthy. Both films rely on fractured chronologies and flashbacks to re-present lingering Northern Irish personal and collective traumas. I position *Hunger* and *'71* as essential components of an ongoing process of trauma negotiation in regards to the deep-set cultural wounds of the Troubles.

Keywords: Northern Ireland; Gothic; the Troubles; Colonial occupation; regional cinema; cultural trauma.

Hunger (Steve McQueen, 2008) and *'71* (Yann Demange, 2015) can be considered two of the most critically successful examples of 'Troubles cinema' in recent years. I argue that the Gothic mode is deployed in these films as a lens through which to interrogate an unresolved regional history of socio-political conflict and ongoing colonial occupation.

I address *Hunger* and *'71* in terms of their deployment of gothic narrative structures, themes, and stylistic motifs to negotiate the ongoing Northern Irish-British conflict. The Gothic mode has long been utilised to articulate anxieties engendered by the irresolvability of contested histories, territories, and memories. As noted by Linnie Blake, notions of cohesive ethno-cultural identities may be silenced or even 'violently challenged by traumatic events such as genocide, war, social marginalisation or persecution'.[1] In this article, I therefore present *Hunger* and *'71* as products of, and contributions to, an ongoing regional trauma process, 'works of mourning' which explore 'trauma by remembering it and repeating it in the form of diegetically mediated symbolisations of loss'.[2] Cathy Caruth's canonical definition of the trauma process determines it to be a response to an overwhelming catastrophic experience, one which 'occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena'.[3] Jeffrey Alexander further delineates the trauma process in terms of artistic productions. Avenues for the performance of culture and identity, such as I position regional cinemas, serve to fill the gaps between what has occurred and its representation'.[4]

The Gothic is itself a mode characterised by loss, traumatic memories, conflicting identities, and the pressures of unresolved buried pasts. In this sense, a Gothic critical framework is uniquely well suited to addressing the troubled identificatory boundaries and ongoing colonial occupation which permeates daily life in Northern Ireland, where both films are set. Further classic gothic themes observed in these films include racialised sectarianism, territorial ownership anxieties and compromised boundaries. The notion of boundaries, whether national, temporal, architectural, or corporeal, is my focus in this article as it delineates the unstable representation of boundaries in both texts. The most obvious cultural boundary in Northern Ireland is the Irish-British divide. The colonial presence of Britain in Ireland is historically considered to have begun with the 1169 Anglo-Norman invasion. Countless rebellions and uprisings occured over the ensuing nine hundred years before Ireland became known as the Irish Free State in 1922, still a dominion of the British Empire and part of the Commonwealth. In 1949 the Republic of Ireland Act was passed, supposedly securing the national position as a fully independent state. Of course, Ireland is not completely independent from Britain; a significant part of the island, namely the six counties which constitute Northern Ireland, remains part of the United Kingdom.[5] The colonial reality of the British occupation of Ireland and continued rule of the North is often side-lined in British discourses of Irish 'terrorism' in the region.[6] The films I address in this article relate to the collective

trauma engendered by the British colonisation of Ireland and reward analysis as Gothic texts.[7] The Gothic, a mode inherently concerned with incongruent dualities, is ideally suited to depict the unresolved conflict and ongoing occupation of Ireland, relating its complex past to its complex present in a decidedly haunting fashion.

A Troubled Nation

The island of Ireland consists of a twenty-six county Republic and six occupied counties in the North of Ireland, within the province of Ulster. Namely these are the counties Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Derry, and Tyrone. The removal of British rule in the North was the unifying cause shared by Irish nationalist groups during the Troubles (which roughly lasted from the 1960s to the late 1990s). *Hunger* and *'71* narrativise two very different aspects of this, one of the most chaotic and violent periods in the history of Irish-British relations. It is also a period so highly contested, and indeed unfinished, that referring to it in the past tense is in itself problematic.

The Troubles largely began as a Catholic civil rights campaign, protesting British discrimination against Northern Irish Catholics, brutal regional police tactics, and voting rights (among many other issues). As protests garnered increasingly violent responses from the British Army, support for Irish nationalist paramilitary organisations grew. The ensuing conflict, which became known as the Troubles, reached its peak in the 1970s and 1980s.[8] It is worth noting the broadly applied terminology used to reference the main groups of the conflict. National and religious identities were, and remain, largely conflated in the region. Catholics were generally aligned with Irish republicanism or Irish nationalism while Protestants were aligned with British loyalism or unionism. Ulster Protestant unionists are characterised by unwavering dedication and loyalty to the English monarchy and the United Kingdom. Ulster loyalists are considered a distinctly working class strand of unionists whose loyalty depends on the perception that unionism is in their best interests. Irish republicans or nationalists were generally inclined towards a Catholic, unified thirty-two county Irish Republic, entirely independent from British imperial rule, colonial occupation, and oppression. While the notions of unionism and republicanism act as ethno-cultural identities, during the Troubles they characterised key factions of the conflict.

The para-military organisations and state forces associated with the republican cause included the Irish Republican Army (IRA, further divided into the Official and Provisional branches) and the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA); those associated with the loyalist cause included

the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), and the British Army. The organisations directly addressed in this paper are the IRA, the British Army, and the RUC; these are the organisations central to the narratives of *Hunger* and *'71*.

In generalised terms, alongside the Catholic civil rights movement, the inciting purpose of the IRA was the liberation of Northern Ireland from the United Kingdom, the removal of all British forces from Irish shores, and the recognition of the Troubles as a legitimate political war. In contrast, the British loyalist forces sought to quash the IRA, suppress Catholic rights, and maintain British rule in the region. The Troubles is broadly considered to have come to an end in the 1990s with the 1994 ceasefire of the Provisional IRA and the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. The Good Friday Agreement, also known as the Belfast Agreement, was signed in Belfast, in the county of Antrim on Good Friday, the 10th of April 1998. It functioned as a peace treaty of sorts appeasing relations between the British and Irish governments, as well as between the people of the North and the people of the Republic of Ireland. A complex set of provisions was laid out to essentially cease most of the political violence which by this time had come to define the region. The protection of civil rights and the decommissioning of para-military weapons were two crucial prongs of the agreement. This agreement also acknowledge the ongoing contestation over the interstitial status of Northern Ireland. At this juncture, the majority of the people in the North aligned with unionism and desired to remain within the United Kingdom thereby establishing a certain alienation of the Catholic minority in the region.[9]

Though the Irish republican element of the North was in minority at this point, the conflict of the Troubles if nothing else indicated the substantial weight and power held by this ethno-cultural group. The Good Friday Agreement went so far as to formally recognise that while the North would remain part of the United Kingdom, a substantial faction of Northern Ireland Catholics as well as the vast majority of citizens of the Republic defiantly desired the establishment of a thirty-two county united Ireland. The inherent contradiction and irresolvability of this region is thus legislatively acknowledged in this landmark agreement. At this juncture, which many saw as the close of the Troubles, it appeared that aside from the reduced military presence, few of the initial republican aims had been achieved. Inter-personal sectarian violence and discrimination continued and Britain remained in control of the region. As such, this is widely considered an unfinished conflict.[10]

As Cavallaro notes, 'fear is not a sporadic event but an ongoing condition endowed with eminently ambivalent powers'.[11] I present the

argument that Northern Ireland exists within this ongoing condition of fear rooted in British colonisation which is directly explored and performed in the films at the centre of this article, *Hunger* and *'71*. Within these texts the Gothic, 'the perfect anonymous language for the peculiar unwillingness of the past to go away', is utilised as the ideal mode for exploring this unresolved, traumatic regional history.[12] The fear, unease, and precarity experienced by the characters in both texts establish in equal measure the lived reality of regional terror as well as empathy for those on all sides. The Gothic positions these texts within an ongoing trauma process, striving for clarity in response to an exceedingly murky and complex colonial conflict.

The Troubles, however, have never truly been consigned to the historical past. This period has never been absent from contemporary national discourse and exists in living memory for the majority of the Irish (across all thirty-two counties). The legacy of the Troubles remains patently visible throughout the Republic and the North of Ireland, whether in the ubiquitous graffiti of the 'IRA' across Dublin (the capital of the Republic), the still-standing peace walls which divide many Catholic and Protestant areas in the North,[13] or the success of the Belfast hip-hop trio KNEECAP, whose anti-British songs have amassed hundreds of thousands of streams on Spotify.[14] Brexit and the passing of Nobel Peace Prize laureate John Hume in August 2020 have reinvigorated discussions on the Troubles and the Northern Irish peace processes, in which Hume was a central figure.[15]

Irish and British filmmakers alike continue to produce texts set in this period. Films such as *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan 1992), *In the Name of the Father* (Jim Sheridan 1993), *Bloody Sunday* (Paul Greengrass 2002), *Omagh* (Pete Travis 2004), *Breakfast on Pluto* (Neil Jordan 2005), *Fifty Dead Men Walking* (Kari Skogland 2008) and *Good Vibrations* (Lisa Barros D'Sa 2012) can be considered examples of 'Troubles cinema' which have garnered global critical and commercial success. This points to continued global interest in this period. I position Troubles cinema, not as a formal genre but as a descriptive term deployed to reference films which centre the era of the Troubles and/or its aftermath in Northern Ireland and beyond, as an active process of working through the intersecting personal and collective traumas engendered by British colonisation, cultural and political suppression, and a decades-long violent conflict.

While I characterise *Hunger* and *'71* as crucial examples of Troubles cinema I also position them as distinctly Gothic texts. This mode has evolved to become defined by its culturally valuable 'capacity to channel historic, economic and national discourses of exclusion and oppression' in particular those of the repression of minorities, such as is observed in

the regional history of the North.[16] Both texts are presented here as essential components of an ongoing process of trauma negotiation addressing the deep-set cultural wounds of the Troubles. *Hunger* follows Irish republican icon Bobby Sands (Michael Fassbender) who rose to prominence while undertaking a series of strikes during his imprisonment. In 1975 the British government instated a policy of criminalising the political violence in Northern Ireland. One of the most significant effects of this was the removal of political prisoner status for those imprisoned in relation to republican activity. As Eugene McNamee summarises it,

> [i]n search of the restoration of 'political status' some prisoners instituted a 'blanket' (refusal to wear prison uniform) and eventually 'no-wash' or 'dirty' protest (the refusal to remove body and food waste from cells). When this was unsuccessful, the decision was taken to go on hunger strike in pursuit of 'political status' and Sands was the first of ten men to die before the tactic was abandoned.[17]

McQueen's film tracks the period leading up to this IRA hunger strike and the dirty protests which took place in the Maze prison (also known as Long Kesh or H-block) in County Down. The film focusses on numerous people within the prison system from unionist prison guards, visiting Catholic priests to, of course, Sands and his fellow IRA members turned inmates.

In contrast to McQueen's focus on an icon of Irish Republicanism, *'71* follows a young British soldier, Gary Hook (Jack O'Connell), who gets lost 'behind enemy lines' in a densely Catholic area of Belfast. Hook is severely injured in a republican explosion of a loyalist pub, after which he is rescued and given lifesaving guerrilla surgery in the flat of a Catholic father and daughter. Hook is eventually returned to his platoon but leaves Belfast deeply disillusioned with the conflict which he now sees as deeply convoluted and inherently without a 'good' side. While Hook is a fictionalised character composed of accounts of the experiences of British soldiers deployed in the North, Sands is a historical figure (indeed, icon) whose imprisonment, strike, and death were pivotal milestones in the Troubles. It is important to note that I do not use the term 'icon' lightly in relation to Sands. This is the cultural status Sands has adopted in his death and subsequent martyrdom. Countless pubs, primary schools, roadside walls, and sports clubs across the country bear a mural of Sands, often alongside the leaders of the Irish 1916 Rising (a foundational moment for the Irish Republican movement) or others who died on hunger strike during the Troubles. McQueen's film takes place in 1981,

the year that would see Sands embark on one such hunger strike, become elected to the British House of Commons, and eventually die of starvation.

Much like the Troubles, Sands has entered an uncanny afterlife that continues to haunt contemporary Ireland. His likeness, among other images of the past, lingers in the cultural imaginary of the present, straddling and transitioning fluidly between past, present, and future, which are connected through the transgenerational burden of unresolved trauma. Cavallaro positions such 'times of transition' and interstitiality as crucial gothic themes.[18] The Northern Irish region epitomises the anxieties motivated by betwixt and between gothic states of being. Thus, not only do I position these films as Gothic texts, I present these texts as representing a vision of Northern Ireland that (owing to its ongoing conflict and occupation) is distinctly Gothicised.

In the era of Brexit, anxieties surrounding the unstable boundary between the Republic and the North have resurfaced as the possibility of a hard border returns. Furthermore, the 'peace walls' which separate Catholic and Protestant areas see the entire region become an in-between space, where a simple wrong turn could take you from a street of safety and family to a street where your life is at risk (that is, turning from a Catholic street to a Protestant one). Peace walls have appeared in the North in numerous iterations since the 1920s but have increased in size and intensified in structural integrity since the 1960s. As of 2021, there are over 20 miles of peace walls, also known as peace lines, across Northern Ireland.[19] These barriers have been erected in what are referred to as interface areas, where a densely republican neighbourhood meets a densely unionist one. The term 'interface area' itself highlights the interstitiality and precarious safety that defines daily life in the region. Sectarian riots have endangered the lives of residents in interface areas as recently as 2021 with street fires, Molotov cocktails, and physical combat again filling the streets.[20] Individuals who live directly alongside a peace wall often take the extra precaution of encasing their home in metal cages as a form of protection against the rocks, bricks, and glass bottles that are often thrown over walls as an act of violence between communities. Residents on both sides of the walls note that without these barriers daily life would be impossible.[21] Thus, we encounter a disturbing contrast between freedom and entrapment as individuals live in personally-erected cages in order to ensure their safety. This reality of daily life in such a highly contested region is indicative of the ubiquity of borders and imprisonment in Northern Ireland. Such boundaries are tied to safety, precarity, nationality, religion, and the unstable line between life and death in a region mired by sectarian violence and colonial oppression.

Boundaries in Northern Irish Gothic

The Gothic has a long association with colonial power dynamics and anxieties surrounding national or ethnic purity. The Irish question is no exception to this tradition. Paravisini-Gebert indicates that by the turn of the nineteenth century, Gothic writers came to realise that 'Britain's growing empire could prove a vast source of frightening "others"'.[22] From this point on the Gothic mode in literature, and later cinema, would be invoked by the oppressed and oppressing groups alike to 'give voice to the fears awakened by colonial realities'.[23] The mode is utilised in the context of Troubles narratives as a frame within which to understand the chaotic and often paradoxical nature of continued socio-political conflict which keeps the Irish history of British occupation very much alive in the Irish present. The mode functions in *Hunger* and '71 'as a linguistic paradigm through which we can interpret experience and culture', a frame and a filter that shapes intersecting personal and collective identities in the region.[24] The Northern Irish identity, although necessarily multi-faceted and polyvocal is consistently preoccupied with boundaries (ethno-national, sectarian, and geo-political), a preoccupation that is expressed in the gothic motifs and narrative structures of *Hunger* and '71. Both films are addressed in this article in terms of their representations of compromised temporal, architectural, corporeal, and, of course, identificatory boundaries.

The unstable boundaries of memory are highlighted in Marot Camino's discussion of the delicate balance between collective remembering and forgetting when addressing cultural traumas and internal conflicts.[25] This balance becomes more delicate still in the context of complex temporal entanglement in the North. Historical memory invades the present in *Hunger* as visiting priest Father Moran (Liam Cunningham) accuses Bobby Sands of being trapped in the past, desiring to follow in the footsteps of past Irish revolutionary leaders, such as Theobald Wolf Tone and Pádraig Pearse, into martyrdom for the republican cause. Sands' relationship with the past deepens in complexity as his mind and body deteriorate. While on hunger strike Sands hallucinates a visit from his younger self in a performance of the space of his present being invaded by the irrepressible memories of his past. Unstable temporality is also witnessed in Demange's film as Hook traverses the increasingly maze-like streets of Belfast with no clear indication of passing time or when this terrifying night will end. '71 moves through times of transition. The film begins in daylight, transitions into a seemingly endless night and closes with a sunrise as Hook is found and returned to his unit. The darkness of the urban-scape Hook is lost within generates a decidedly gothic atemporal sense of disorientation and paranoia.

Just as temporal boundaries are blurred in these films, architectural boundaries are compromised too as familiar spaces are repurposed for paramilitary use. Cavallaro lists stereotypically 'gloomy' Gothic settings to include, ruined castles, murky crypts, clammy cellars, dank passages, and secret cabinets.[26] Gary Hook encounters each of these motifs throughout his journey as he runs through the decrepit buildings, family homes with secret weapon stores, dripping subterraneous tunnels, and graffitied alleyways of Troubles-era Belfast. Sands' entrapment within the Maze prison is also indicative of Aldana Reyes' description of the Gothic as a mode which 'continues to manifest architecturally', where the edifice at the centre of the narrative in question acts as a 'memento mori': a concrete manifestation of the unstoppable passage of time, a representation of the past standing in the present, unreliable memories, and issues of inheritance.[27]

Sands' tenure in the Maze prison is marked by dirty protests, covert IRA operations, starvation, death, and decay. In this sense, the prison acts as a hyperbolic microcosm of larger territorial anxieties and conflicts. The Maze prison, as well as the numerous tunnels and decrepit buildings among which '71's Hook must find refuge, produces Baldick's 'Gothic effect' and establishes the North as an inherently Gothic space. Baldick's 'Gothic effect' is described as a 'fearful sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space', each dimension reinforcing the other, producing an 'impression of sickening descent into disintegration'.[28] Naturally, Sands' literal imprisonment and ongoing decay within faecal matter-stained walls is a claustrophobic and in many ways desperate state of the destruction of the national self at the hands of colonial oppressors. The Gothic architectural association with death and terror is performed in '71 as we observe Hook scramble from hiding place to hiding place, moving across Catholic-Protestant borders in the process. Hook's journey unveils the literal crack in the veneer of Northern Irish unity as a region and as a dominion of the British Empire. As Hook runs through the Catholic homes on the Falls Road, we see gaping holes torn between the attached houses which serve as IRA tunnels. This is further illustrative of the colonial duality which exists in the region, a region which is both entrapped and independent, both Irish and British, both a home and a warzone. Demange's gothicised representation of the Troubles actively intersects with local colonial identity politics and territorial anxieties. The occupied colonial space is by nature 'bifurcated' and ambivalent, 'where the familiar and unfamiliar mingle in an uneasy truce'.[29] For example, Hook observes family living rooms acting as paramilitary escape routes, and when he is injured the bedroom in which he is tended to becomes an operating theatre. A local pub becomes a

shootout site, and the residential streets of Belfast become minefields. This uncanny transformation of space in Demange's text politicises the private sphere, blurring the boundaries between the two. Indeed, this blurring between the private and the political persists in the region.

McNamee suggests that during peak periods of the Troubles 'it was impossible to maintain the everyday fiction of a generally normal society with some trouble around the edges'.[30] For example, in the opening of '71, as British Army trucks drive onto the Catholic Falls Road the female residents are observed clattering metal bin lids on the pavement to signal the incoming raid. This was an all-too-familiar sound during the Troubles, and it can also be heard over the opening titles of *Hunger*. It must be noted that this symbolic sound is not consigned to the past. Brexit protestors in counties which border the Republic have begun to incorporate the act into their anti-Brexit, and anti-hard border, demonstrations. This action is, of course, further indicative of the unwillingness of this troubled past to go away and indeed of the blurred and permeable borders between past, present, and future in this fractitious region.

The conflict of the Troubles can be seen to infiltrate and destabilise supposedly apolitical spaces in *Hunger*; indeed, within a conflict as murky and convoluted as the Troubles, perhaps it is impossible to locate any space truly detached from the political sphere. Despite British legislative efforts to criminalise Irish republican activities, prison facilities such as the Maze (where Sands was held) remain highly politicised spaces. This is illustrated as the prisoners attend a Catholic mass, which devolves with little ceremony into an IRA gathering led by Sands. The Catholic versus Protestant dichotomy is of course a major thematic concern in early Gothic novels and has been violently enacted throughout Irish history. In the seventeenth century Britain launched a highly successful plantation campaign in Ulster (the Irish province that the six counties of the North are situated within). The tense Catholic-Protestant dichotomy remains particularly prevalent in the North owing to this history. Both *Hunger* and *'71* foreground the complex regional relationship with dual religions and widespread sectarianism. *Hunger* has been decried by some critics as a 'blatant "hagiography" of a terrorist'.[31] It cannot be ignored that Sands is presented as a Christ-like saviour figure, as demonstrated in his taking control of the mass and later in his repeatedly battered body, brought to destruction by state forces in the name of ideology. Sands was at this time, and has remained, in Irish public imaginations an icon of Republican ideals in the face of British cruelty. McQueen's film, rather than simply canonising Sands, deftly positions the character on the precipice of human and icon, just as he stands on the precipice of life and death, often oscillating between the two. Indeed, McQueen's film repeatedly

destabilises religious iconography and paraphernalia. Not only does Sands, an imprisoned paramilitary organiser, claim the authority of the priest in the prison's Catholic mass, but he is shown using the pages of his Bible to roll cigarettes, and using his filter paper to write clandestine notes to be smuggled to IRA contacts outside of Long Kesh.

It is deeply paradoxical that in a conflict which is so often drawn along sectarian lines, actual religious practices are overshadowed by the nationalist causes which claim them. At one point in *'71* Hook, who is from Derbyshire in England, is asked by a precocious – and staunchly loyalist – young boy what his religion is. Hook says he does not know if he is Catholic or Protestant, highlighting the regional specificity of such sectarian concerns. Religious affiliation is crucial to the ongoing Northern Irish self-determination discourses ultimately rooted in colonisation anxieties. As Hook alternately encounters Catholics and Protestants, republicans and loyalists, throughout *'71*, each group utters a variation of 'he's one of yours' or 'he's one of theirs'. The effect is to destabilise Hook's corporeal and identitarian ownership simultaneously, while calling attention to his position as a pawn in a much larger war.

Grotesque Gothic Bodies

As actors in this war, the bodies of Hook and Sands are never static, they are constantly subjected to abuse and trauma at the hands of state and sub-state organisations alike. Costa suggests the Gothic is a 'space of possibility and peril, a world in which definitions are never static, and identities – and bodies – are always in flux'.[32] The boundaries between spaces, religions, loyalties, and even victim-victimiser dichotomies are blurred throughout both texts. In the depictions of the torture and violence which each respective protagonist is subjected to, both films engage in ideologically loaded forms of 'body-horror spectatorship'.[33] The tortured bodies of Sands and Hook may be intended 'to re-authenticate the boundaries of state', but their 'ruination only registers how insecure those borders are'.[34] We see this in *'71* as a severely injured Hook is taken to the apartment of a Catholic doctor who stitches the bleeding wounds while muffling Hook's screams so they are not discovered by the IRA. Sands' grotesque and 'violently transgressed' body while on hunger strike is heavily fetishised in *Hunger*.[35] McQueen's careful editing and excruciatingly tight close-ups of Sands' state of living decay (needles filling with blood, vomiting over the side of the bed, blood in the toilet, stained bedsheets from infected wounds) is shown in a manner that generates both physical repulsion and empathy in the viewer. The period in which Sands' body is transformed from imprisoned IRA operative to republican martyr is more grotesque than glorious in McQueen's film.

The deterioration of Sands' body establishes an understanding that the audience is now witness to a dead man walking, a living ghost.

Spooner discusses the 'radically provisional or divided nature of the self, the construction of 'individuals as monstrous' or Other and the preoccupation with 'grotesque' bodies as central concerns of the Gothic.[36] The grotesque gothic body transgresses boundaries, whether societal norms or imperial oppression. The grotesque preoccupation with the 'monster within' is a notion which takes on a decidedly post-colonial meaning in the text studied in this paper. In the Northern Irish context, on one hand the monster within may refer most obviously to the monster of colonial rule and occupation within the Irish state. On the other hand, the monster within may refer to the uncovered abilities of 'ordinary' people to enact great violence and cruelty against those on the opposing side of this murky conflict. The presentation of bodies as grotesque entities unleashes a myriad of issues surrounding oppression, violence, death, bodily ownership and, of course, the torture of political bodies.

The bodies of Hook and Sands are alternately presented as grotesque entities in their respective texts. Cavallaro suggests the 'grotesque' to be a concept which combines 'disparate and even logically incompatible elements' to undermine the 'myth of corporeal unity'.[37] The audience witnesses Hook repeatedly wounded by bombs and gun shots throughout *'71* while the corporeal fallibility and mutability of McQueen's protagonist is observed as he slowly dies of starvation. Images of grotesque bodies and their compromised boundaries – bleeding, sweating, exuding puss and more – are positioned as manifestations of regional oppression and the resilience of the tortured body in the face of colonial trauma and persistent violent conflict. The body of each protagonist is invaded by external destructive forces, whether they be bullets or infection, which are by-products of invasive British colonial rule.

The lives of both characters are frequently threatened and Sands in particular is often literally seen oscillating between life and death. Furthermore, I argue that Sands not only oscillates between life and death but between death and un-death. In this context, Sands' body becomes an increasingly permeable entity. In alternate sequences we observe bodily fluids, covert IRA messages, hallucinated flies, and his very life force exceed the boundaries of his iconic body. McQueen thus represents Sands as less of a saint and more of a Gothic zombie-like figure. Sands as Gothic zombie aligns with the kind Paravisini-Gebert has positioned in a post-colonial Gothic context as the return of the oppressed body to haunt its oppressors. This framework, in a manner that recalls Luckhurst's understanding of the tortured body, acts to destabilise the regime responsible for creating the conditions which led to zombification.

The zombie is a figure that even in death cannot be suppressed, asserting its 'indestructible immortality' in the face of oppression.[38] Throughout both texts Sands and Hook are alternately seen as 'dead men walking'. Hook is in an extremely precarious position as a British soldier lost in a Catholic neighbourhood at night. At any moment Hook could meet his end either by falling into the hands of the IRA, by bleeding out or by being caught in an unexpected bomb blast. Sands is a dead man walking in an extremely visually visceral sense as the audience observes him physically decaying over the course of his hunger strike. Sands' body is literally wasting away and his weakened skin is broken and oozing. The image of Sands at this narrative juncture it seems would slot easily into a zombie apocalypse text.

Sands, then, is certainly presented as a living dead, republican zombie figure. The Gothic tropes of the zombie, the revenant, the living dead, 'gain curious new life' in the postcolonial context

> from the need to assert continuity where the lessons of conventional history and geography would claim that all continuity has been broken by the imperial trauma.[39]

Aside from the visualisation of Sands as zombie, another recurring symbol of decay seen throughout *Hunger* is that of the fly. The fly is associated in this text with freedom and connection to the outside world beyond the constraints of imperial imprisonment. Early in the film we see the prisoner Gillen sticking his hand through the barred window of his cell, allowing flies to land on his fingers. The image in the closing act of a hoard of flies bursting forth from Sands' dying body as he writhes in pain thus takes on a deeper meaning. On one hand this relates to the state of decay Sands exists within. On the other hand, however, it may be read as the resounding escape of Sands' free soul from his entrapped body. A triumphant symbolisation of the Irish republican spirit living on in Sands' death. The boundaries imposed by his imprisonment are exceeded by his status as martyred icon of the republican movement and, however briefly, member of the British parliament.

Conclusion

The characters of Sands and Hook alike serve to undermine the illusion of British control over the North, revealing the chaos, violence, and terror that lie beneath this thin imperial veneer. Reading *Hunger* and *'71* as gothic texts reveals the bifurcation of the occupied Northern Irish space and the multitude of cultural and ideological layers within the Troubles. In this context the Gothic acts as a tool to unveil and process the

complexities of an unfinished conflict haunting a troubled region. In line with Spooner's definition of the Gothic, these films explore the legacies and 'burdens of the past on the present', the radically divided nature of the self and the 'preoccupation with bodies that are modified, grotesque, or diseased'.[40] Both texts layer divergent perspectives and memories to construct complex, often contradictory images of the as yet unresolved Troubles period.

The Gothic mode specifically allows McQueen and Demange to explore fluctuating definitions of time, space and identity. Therefore, my study of these texts through the lens of the Gothic reveals cultural nuance, and deeply sensory historical experience to the viewer, indulging audience members in a unique performative trauma process. Both filmmakers address questions of what is past and what is present, as well as what is morally right or wrong. Divisions between national ideologies and cultural affiliations are revealed in these Gothic Troubles narratives to be just as unstable as the boundary that supposedly divides the Irish past and present, the coloniser and the colonised, the Republic and the North. The production of texts such as these allows filmmakers and audiences alike to re-experience the traumatic events of the Troubles, to humanise those individuals involved and to examine the lingering presences of the conflict and inter-community hatred in the region. It remains unclear if the issues of territorial, identificatory and political contestation in the North will reach their resolution; only by incorporating these personal and public conflicts into the cultural products of a regional trauma process can a resolution be worked towards. Texts such as *Hunger* and *'71* establish terror and empathy in response to a murky, complex and unfinished period of violence and conflict. I present texts such as these as key elements of the regional trauma process of performing, examining, and hopefully coming to terms with unfinished colonial conflicts; leading to the establishment of unity within the North, and perhaps one day throughout the island of Ireland.

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Notes

1. Linnie Blake, *The Wounds of Nations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 1.
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