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Jitka Svědřihová

**Neil Jordan and the Irish Impatience with  
Realism: Introducing the Fictional Works of  
the Writer/Director**

Vedoucí práce: Mgr. David Livingstone

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Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně a uvedla v ní předepsaným způsobem všechnu použitou literaturu.

V Olomouci dne 28.4. 2008

I would like to thank David Livingstone for talking me out of writing yet another thesis on E.M. Forster, consequently helping me discover the unexplored work of Neil Jordan, and for supporting me throughout.

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## ***Introduction***

The subject of this thesis is Neil Jordan, the Irish writer and film director. I intentionally put writer first as I consider his fictional achievements no less important than his cinematic, despite the fact that in comparison to his extensive filmography the five fictional works he has published up to date may give the impression that writing for Jordan is merely a hobby. I dare to argue that Jordan is firstly a writer, because apart from the books he has published he also writes screenplays. Screenplays are of course a modern day genre as well, and only a few of his films have not been based on screenplays he has written or on which he has collaborated.

Sean O’Faolain acclaimed the title story of Neil Jordan’s (\*1950) first collection *Night in Tunisia* (1976) in his foreword to the American edition as “one of the most remarkable stories that I have read in Irish story-telling since, or indeed before, Joyce”.<sup>1</sup> The now well known film director first emerged as a promising fiction writer and although it was to be the film direction that has consumed most of Jordan’s time and talent, he has been continually returning to fiction to create remarkable and daring novels.

Jordan studied English in college and intended to become a fiction writer. He started out with short stories because that has always been the prominent medium for the Irish writers. His first collection, however, is also the last collection he has ever published. He moved on to writing novels. When it comes to his literary influences, he mostly mentions two names, William

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<sup>1</sup> Ciaran Carty, “How to Keep the Novel Alive by Writing Movies”, *Sunday Independent* 2 Nov. 1980: 14.

Butler Yeats and Samuel Beckett. He said “I was obsessed with Yeats. It’s a lovely world to get into. It’s magnificent to be Irish and have some kind of kinship with him”.<sup>2</sup> As far as Beckett is concerned, it was not the plays that inspired Jordan: “Beckett’s novels were a very large influence on me. Beckett was pushing fiction to the very limit of what it really is, to the most abstract, the purest form basically”.<sup>3</sup>

His second novel, *The Dream of a Beast*, came out in 1983 and signalled Jordan’s movement away from literary fiction. Neil Murphy lists three main reasons for this transition in his book *Irish Fiction and Postmodern Doubt*.<sup>4</sup> Firstly, Jordan started to prefer the immediacy of the film medium, secondly, he felt that there were no “ancestral Gods” in that area, in comparison to all the prominent Irish writers to whom he could not avoid comparison to, and thirdly, he felt at the time that he had written himself out of the literary form. Indeed, it would be another eleven years till his next novel was published. Jordan himself said that “Making a movie keeps you in touch with the world. You could go mad with the loneliness of just writing”.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, Jordan would always return to fiction, he has never been able to decide to pick only one art form. Even though films opened up new possibilities of expression, fiction writing has never lost its magic for him:

Films gave me an opportunity to write stories which have nothing to do with myself, that deal with melodrama and

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<sup>2</sup> Ciaran Carty, “Helping New Writers Find Their Voice”, *Sunday Independent* 17 Nov. 1978: 31.

<sup>3</sup> Colm Toibin, “Interview with Neil Jordan”, *In Dublin* 29 Apr. 1982: 14.

<sup>4</sup> See Neil Murphy, *Irish Fiction and Postmodern Doubt* (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press Ltd, 2004) 215.

<sup>5</sup> Carty, “How to Keep” 22.

dramatic tension, all those things that Joyce and Beckett threw out of the novel. With a book you're dealing with your own internal life much more. When I write fiction there's a certain fidelity to language that I have to adopt, or else I feel I'm cheating or telling a lie. There's a tremendous satisfaction in doing that.<sup>6</sup>

The only monographic study about Neil Jordan I came across, *Exploring Boundaries* (2003), was written by the Irish scholars Emer and Kevin Rockett and deals predominantly with Jordan's films. However, the Rocketts formulated certain truths which are universal about both Jordan's fiction and films:

A central concern within Jordan's work is that of transformation and related issue of mutability and non-fixity of borders and identities. Concern with appearance or the surface of things and perception, its fascination with the dark and surreal aspect of the ordinary, its recognition of the compulsive autonomy of desire and emerging sexuality.<sup>7</sup>

Jordan indeed explores and crosses various boundaries, as I will try to show in this thesis. Since the secondary sources are limited I plan to make extensive use of what Jordan himself has said in interviews.

It is the aim of this thesis to concentrate on Jordan's fiction, which has not gained the attention it deserves. I do not

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<sup>6</sup> Marianne Brace, "Neil Jordan: The Writing Game", *The Independent* 14 Jan. 1995, 10 Feb. 2008 <<http://findarticles.com/p/search?qt=%22Marianne+Brace%22&qf=qn4158&sn=70>>.

<sup>7</sup> Emer and Kevin Rockett, *Neil Jordan: Exploring Boundaries* (Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2003) 37.

intend to ignore his cinematic achievement altogether but I am going to deal with his movies only in terms of the themes that extend into them from his fiction. Because there is no study so far dealing exclusively with Jordan's complete fiction, I decided to take a more general approach rather than choosing a narrow topic. The aim is to introduce Neil Jordan's books in their richness and in their thematic diversity, even though I do intend to concentrate on the topics which appear repeatedly. To name the most important ones – the juxtaposition of reality and unreality that seem to define Jordan, the father and son relationship, the love triangle, the unusual forms of love which he likes to explore and the concepts of identity, dreams and memories.

I decided to include a chapter on contemporary Irish fiction to provide an introduction to the general situation in Irish literature in the period in which Jordan himself has published his works. Chapter 1 will therefore present an overview of the themes and tendencies that are found in Irish literature from 1980 onwards.

In Chapter 2 I want to sketch Jordan's biography to date as a great deal of his early life and college years is not generally known, even though it played an important role in forming his opinions. This chapter will also include an overview of Jordan's work, both fiction and film, to provide a time line for his artistic activities.

Chapter 3 will deal with Jordan's short stories, predominantly the collection *Night in Tunisia*. I will try to ascertain whether there is a general pattern behind these stories, whether there are themes that appear repeatedly, something the characters have in common. I also want to highlight the topics

which appear in *Night in Tunisia* for the first time and are developed in Jordan's later fiction.

In Chapter 4 I will attempt an analysis of Jordan's first novel, *The Past* (1980). I will try to show the stylistic complexity of the book and once again pay a special attention to Jordan's typical concerns.

Chapter 5 will focus on *The Dream of a Beast*. I will provide different interpretations of this novella, consulting essays and studies published about this work so far. I also want to find out who was Jordan influenced by when creating the rich imagery and who inspired the general idea of the book.

In Chapter 6 I will explore the novel *Sunrise with Sea Monster* (1993). I want to show that it is precisely in this book where Jordan fully develops his recurrent father-son relationship theme and I also intend to analyse Jordan's use of the unrealistic elements in the book, how they contribute to the action.

Chapter 7 will deal with Jordan's latest book, *Shade* (2004). I will establish whether there are any themes which connect *Shade* to the rest of Jordan's fiction, but at the same time I want to look at what makes *Shade* different from the rest of Jordan's work.

## **1. Contemporary Irish Fiction**

In this chapter I intend to provide a brief overview of contemporary Irish fiction, or rather of the general themes, tendencies and influences within Irish prose, not so much specific authors. By contemporary I mean for the purpose of this thesis fiction published from 1980 onwards, that is the time period when Jordan himself has published his literary works. The authors I am going to mention are by no means more important than the ones I will omit, but will be chosen for the purpose of demonstrating certain tendencies. I will also try to point out how Jordan's work corresponds with the general tendencies in contemporary Irish fiction. I will not deal with poetry or drama because it is outside the scope of this thesis; for the same reason I will not discuss themes or authors which are exclusively connected to Northern Ireland.

Secondary sources on the latest Irish fiction are scarce given the fact that it is an evolving field. During my research I discovered many studies dealing with contemporary Irish poetry and also drama but the amount of books dealing exclusively with prose was considerably smaller. Derek Hand gave an explanation on this phenomenon in his lecture "The Future of Contemporary Irish Fiction" delivered at the Irish Writers Centre in Dublin in 2001. He argues that the critics are reluctant to engage with the recent fiction simply because "what might seem radically new and innovative in the immediate moment could in a number of years seem limp and weak".<sup>8</sup> He insists though that the critics "should be capable of engendering a set of values or criteria by

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<sup>8</sup> Derek Hand, "The Future of Contemporary Irish Fiction", 20 Feb. 2008 <<http://www.writerscentre.ie/centre/anthology/dhand.html>>

which to gauge the fictional output” when they do not hesitate to evaluate poetry and drama. He sees the lack of studies on contemporary fiction as a severe deficiency in contemporary Irish criticism.

This general introduction to contemporary Irish writing will be based mostly on two works: *The Contemporary Irish Novel* (2004) by Linden Peach, *Contemporary Irish Fiction* (2000) by Liam Harte and Michael Parker.

Linden Peach concentrates in his book on the novel. He claims that the novel in Ireland does not have a strong tradition, and thereby manages to avoid the crisis of the novel in England. He points out that due to the long history of the English realistic novel the prose in England has undergone anxiety in the last decades while the Irish novel is an art form that has not been explored thoroughly. He quotes from Garry Smyth’s study *The Novel and the Nation: Studies in the New Irish Fiction*:

The novel, it was felt, was a form that had emerged specifically from the concerns of the British cultural history and the existence of its leisured middle class... . At the same time, it seemed to many that the Irish society was too “thin”, not subtle or developed or large enough to sustain a novelistic tradition, and when prose fiction did emerge as a form it was the short story – with its roots in the Gaelic story-telling tradition.<sup>9</sup>

This again proves that poetry and drama have always been the genres associated with Ireland and as I mentioned above the marginalization of the novel still continues nowadays.

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<sup>9</sup> qtd in Linden Peach, *The Contemporary Irish Novel* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 2.

Peach further argues that in Ireland “there has always been a strong sense of the novel as a mutable and transgressive form”.<sup>10</sup> What he means is that in the Irish literary tradition the novel as such has never been strictly defined, and the Irish writers have accepted parody, pastiche and fabulation to be part of the novel rather than representing its crisis. He claims that realism has always been perceived as a much more open concept in Irish fiction than in the strict English tradition. It is true that the Irish have always been more open to the world of the “non-realistic” and there has never been a strong opposition between realistic and non-realistic fiction. Hand, in the above mentioned lecture, points out that realist fiction tells us what we already know and Irish writers have always been reluctant to do that, they prefer to imagine the world in new ways, to transfigure the world they see.<sup>11</sup>

Peach considers the most significant feature of the Irish fiction of the 1980s and 1990s to be the emergence of voices that were silenced before. He claims that it is the first time that the Irish authors can speak their minds freely and thus marginalized themes find expression. Among these themes he lists child abuse (Patrick McCabe’s *The Butcher Boy* (1992)), domestic violence (Roddy Doyle’s *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (1996)), self-harm (Dermot Bolger’s *Father’s Music* (1997)). There are also themes connected to sexuality - “coming-out” (Emma Donoghue’s *Stir-fry* (1994)), being transsexual (Patrick McCabe’s *Breakfast on Pluto* (1998)) or incest (Neil Jordan’s *The Shade* (2004)). All these authors are giving voice to what was once concealed or denied, and they “find themselves in spaces that are not only new to

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<sup>10</sup> Peach 3.

<sup>11</sup> Hand par. 15.

them but also marked by uncertainty”.<sup>12</sup> He points out that secrecy has always been a prominent feature of Irish cultural life on the national, local and even domestic level, and in contemporary literature authors suddenly have a chance to speak freely of whatever topic they choose, no matter how taboo it might have been before.

This openness is not, however, complete, since the authors are still aware of the “inappropriateness” of the themes they choose, as Peach admits:

When socially marginalized groups begin to achieve recognition for themselves they do not immediately cast off the stigmatization to which they have been subjected. ... [They are not] entirely free of their marginalized social, physical and cultural status.<sup>13</sup>

What he means here is that there is still a sense of concealment of the “otherness”, of hiding what differentiates the unusual characters from the majority. The authors then deal with the impact of what is hidden upon the individual. This can be seen in Jordan’s work in many instances, most obviously in Dil’s character in *The Crying Game* or in the narrator of *The Dream of a Beast*. Peach lists a few other works where a secret identity is a central concern: Seamus Deane’s *Reading in the Dark* (1996), Joseph O’Connor’s *The Salesman* (1998), Jennifer Johnston’s *Fool’s Sanctuary* (1987) and Linda Anderson’s *To Stay Alive* (1984).

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<sup>12</sup> Peach xi.

<sup>13</sup> Peach 9.

Ireland as a country has become much more open in the last twenty years, multicultural and economically stable. The authors have been subjected to new influences, and while some of them are still occupied with Irish themes, they have accepted a wider perspective and outlook. As can be seen on the example of Neil Jordan, the themes are becoming more general, less local. The authors react to the accelerated modernisation of Ireland, sometimes by creating characters who have lost their sense of continuity, as Peach points out: "... in many contemporary novels the identity of the central protagonist is a matter of fantasy arising from their sense of dispossession".<sup>14</sup> This can be seen in Jordan's *The Dream of a Beast* where the protagonist creates another identity for himself as he feels that he does not belong into the life he is living.

Harte and Parker also mention that the idea of identity and dissolution of boundaries – personal, social and sexual – is central to the recent Irish fiction:

The transgression of boundaries, both literal and figurative, appears as a familiar trope in contemporary Irish fiction, as novelists attempt to reimagine 'Ireland' as a syncretic space, thereby interrogating established narratives of identity and difference.<sup>15</sup>

This quotation supports Peach's theory about the emergence of previously silenced voices, and Harte and Parker also mention the same books Peach mentioned – Donoghue's *Stir-fry* and McCabe's *Breakfast on Pluto*. Both these books try to deconstruct

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<sup>14</sup> Peach 12.

<sup>15</sup> Liam Harte and Michael Parker, ed., *Contemporary Irish Fiction: Themes, Tropes and Theories* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000) 4.

the fixed notions of identity and authenticity and open up new ways of thinking about the globalized society that Ireland is becoming. Donoghue gives voice to the lesbian community, she tries to subvert the lesbian stereotypes and advocates the integration of lesbianism into mainstream Irish society.<sup>16</sup>

Another theme late twentieth century authors have come to terms with is the nation's past. Some authors present an almost romanticized view of the past, some are aware that the past is less and less approachable as the events of the Easter Rising and the consequent Civil War become more and more unclear. Peach claims that in Patrick McCabe's *The Dead School* (1995), as well as in other novels, "the past and present continuum is interrupted by the uncertainty about inscribing the 'modern'".<sup>17</sup> He goes on to say that the past is revisioned "by the unresolved uncertainties of modernity".<sup>18</sup> It seems that the authors are not sure how to approach the past and do not want to accept the black and white vision of the glorious deeds of their ancestors. Neil Jordan is once again one of them. In *Michael Collins* he rejects the stereotypes which were created about this Civil War hero and although he tries to keep the film action faithful to the known historical events, he does add his version of what Collins was like as a man.

Peach explains that for the end of the twentieth century authors the past is indeed a complex notion:

The contemporary novel at one level seeks to repossess the past, but at a deeper level conceives of subjects exposed to the shock of what was hidden for so long, and the subsequent continuum

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<sup>16</sup> Harte 8.

<sup>17</sup> Peach 15.

<sup>18</sup> Peach 15.

but the nature of the past preserved in the public consciousness and the State's institutions.<sup>19</sup>

The authors who published their work during the 1980s and 1990s are a different generation from those who were alive when the critical events of the Irish history took place. They have to find their own ways to deal with the past, and in the doubting postmodern times they realize that the glorified version of the past is only one of many aspects of what happened. Hand mentions two novels which view the nationalistic past as a complete nightmare – Sebastian Barry's *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* (1998) and Roddy Doyle's *A Star Called Henry* (1999). Hand claims that both these novels present an overwhelmingly negative attitude to Ireland's history and view the past as something the late twentieth century Irish should separate themselves from.

Dealing with the present is not an easy matter either. The traditional values were changing rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s when the economical growth accelerated and brought with it the phenomenon of the Celtic Tiger. One of the books which are specifically set in this time of changes is Roddy Doyle's *The Van* (1991). The action takes place in the summer of 1990 when Ireland reached the quarter finals of the football World Cup and the mood of the nation was triumphant. The text concentrates on the fact that the economic boom has changed the nature of employment and generally examines the impact that the modernisation is having on Ireland. Peach highlights the main concern of Doyle's novel:

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<sup>19</sup> Peach 17.

The text focuses upon the way in which the traditional notions of masculinity and work are being revised as employment patterns the people have been used to, especially the notion of a job for life and the value accorded traditional skills, have been revised.<sup>20</sup>

With the whole social system changing the role of the Irish male has changed as well. Because masculinity has always been partly defined in connection to work and providing for the family, the Irish men find themselves in a new situation which some of them find hard to accept. It is evident in Jordan's work that the men are undergoing a crisis of identity, they no longer know how to define their masculinity. Peach goes as far as saying that "emasculatation of the Irish male"<sup>21</sup> is taking place. This is according to him evident in Patrick McCabe's *Carn* (1993), where McCabe describes the disillusionment, anger and frustration which this rapid modernisation of Ireland has brought about. Peach suggests that McCabe is quite sceptical over Ireland's integration with a wider, modern world.

Harte and Parker mention two works that concentrate on women and their fates: William Trevor in *Felicia's Journey* (1994) and John McGahern in *Amongst Women* (1990). Trevor's novel is set in the 1990s. It is a story of a young Irish girl searching for the father of her unborn child. The novel shows that it is not only men who feel lost in the changing times of the 1990s. Felicia lost her job and in this country where abortion is forbidden she does not have the option to decide about her fate, she feels entrapped. According to Harte and Parker McGahern also hints at the fact that Ireland in the 1990s was not able "to generate sufficient

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<sup>20</sup> Peach 18

<sup>21</sup> Peach 20.

social and economic opportunities for its young people, particularly women”.<sup>22</sup>

McGahern’s novel is set in the middle of the twentieth century, and even though the protagonist is male, the book focuses on his tyranny over the household which is predominantly female. It shows that the theme of female suppression and male dominance is still topical even at the end of the twentieth century. Whereas McGahern expresses disillusionment with the post-revolutionary order in Ireland, Trevor gives voice to a deep disquiet about the orderlessness of contemporary society.<sup>23</sup> It is obvious that the authors question the progress Ireland has made as a country.

There are also female authors who tackle specifically female themes, such as motherhood and the figure of the mother, to be found in the work of Mary Levin, Edna O’Brien, Jennifer Johnston and Clare Boylan. Their portrayals of mothers are far from simplistic, on the contrary, they are multilayered. Each of the authors approaches the topic differently and according to Ann Owens Weekes’ essay “Figuring the Mother in Contemporary Irish Fiction” included in Harte and Parker’s study the portrayal of women in their works is not always positive – Johnston creates cold and calculating women, and Boylan’s characters are also quite manipulative.<sup>24</sup> Weekes points out the powerlessness of women in those books and shifts the blame on society rather than condemning the mothers’ failures. The authors also analyse the mother-daughter relationships and they portray them as

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<sup>22</sup> Harte 3.

<sup>23</sup> see Harte 3.

<sup>24</sup> see Anne Owens Weekes, “Figuring the Mother in Contemporary Irish Fiction”, *Contemporary Irish Fiction*, ed Liam Harte and Michael Parker (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000) 121.

difficult, similarly to the father-son relationships in Jordan's fiction.

Women writers also deal with the once taboo subject of child abuse and incest. Harte and Parker give the examples of Dorothy Nelson's *In Night's City* (1982) and Edna O'Brien's *Down by the River* (1996). Both these books are a reaction to reports on child abuse which suddenly made the public aware of this phenomenon.

Woman writers have contributed to the new space which is being created, an "interrogative space" as Peach labels it, where Irish authors try to come to terms with the new situation in the country. This space allows for exploration, experiment and revision, but also involves a reclamation of tradition. The contemporary Irish novel confronts and contradicts the traditional definitions of Irishness, nation, home, belonging, exile, sexuality, desire, religion and spirituality.<sup>25</sup>

In this chapter I have tried to provide an introduction into the situation in contemporary Irish literature. My overview was by no means supposed to be a list of the "important" books recently published. As I discussed above, it is very difficult to evaluate the contemporary novels as the necessary detachment is missing. I tried therefore to look at the general tendencies rather than concrete works.

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<sup>25</sup> See Peach 20.

## **2. The Life and Career of Neil Jordan**

Neil Jordan was born in 1950 at Rosses Point, County Sligo, a seaside area near Sligo town.<sup>26</sup> His father was a teacher and musician, Jordan has said about him:

He was a very eloquent and educated man. But he grew up in a very confined society dominated by the Catholic Church. He allowed his imagination to go so far and no further. When I began to write fiction, it alarmed him. There were areas to which he wasn't willing to come. So there was a certain tension between us because of that.<sup>27</sup>

As this quote shows, Jordan's relationship with his father was not an easy one. The father – son relationship and their difficulty or even lack of communication constitutes quite an important theme in Jordan's writing and it is obvious that there is some autobiographical element to this.

Jordan's mother was a painter. Life in the Jordan household was arty but strict, the father forbade the children to watch TV or read comics and cinema-going was rare.

The family moved to Dublin when Neil was two, settling in the middle-class area Clontarf. He used to spend summertime on the north Dublin and Meath beaches, an experience which is reflected in his writings, especially *Night in Tunisia*. He remained faithful to the seaside environs as an adult - he lived in Bray, a small town close to Dublin which became setting for both *The*

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<sup>26</sup> The biographical information and data used here comes from the aforementioned monographic study by the Rocketts, mainly pages 1-15.

<sup>27</sup> Brace par. 9.

*Past* and *Sunrise with Sea Monster* and at present lives in Dalkey, a rather expensive seaside area outside Dublin.

As a child he was educated at the local primary school, Belgorve, where one of his teachers was the writer John McGahern, and then in St Paul's College in Raheny, a secondary school, where he won a prize for his short story entitled "Sunday". He then went on to study English and History at University College Dublin. He told Marianne Brace about his studies: "I found the academic study of English very depressing, and strange that something so personal could be analysed so coherently". In another interview, he elaborated on this topic:

I knew I wanted to write and it seemed to me to be an abomination to come to a book like *Great Expectations* and to regard it as a theorem that has to be dissented. One's primary response to a piece of fiction or art is a mixture of the intellectual and the emotional and I felt there was no room for my primary response, to me the most important – which was the way you feel something.<sup>28</sup>

He did not obtain a degree in English but finished his History studies, his specialty was Early Christian History and his thesis was on the lives of the saints. He said: "There are very few existing records, it's a bit like anthropology. You're studying a society where history is invention, a form of fiction really." Jordan used this concept later in his books, for example in *The Past* – the narrator reconstructs his family's past only from a few photographs and postcards, the rest is fiction.

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<sup>28</sup> Toibin 15.

At university, he met the brothers Jim and Peter Sheridan (both later became playwrights, theatre and film directors) and they collaborated on theatre and music projects. They established two groups: the Children's T Company (they organised shows for children which they staged in schools and public spaces such as St Stephen's Green park, the intention was to open children's eyes to the possibility of drama) and the SLOT (St Lawrence O'Toole) Players, based in Dublin's inner city. They performed, for example, a version of Yeats's "The Cat and the Mouse", and Jordan even acted in a production of *Oedipus Rex*. The group's biggest achievement was a trip to Chicago funded by an Irish-American, where they put on plays by Sean O'Casey and Samuel Beckett.

In addition to his writing and theatrical work, Jordan also played guitar, banjo and especially the saxophone in a band called *Eyeless*. Music was later to play quite an important role in all of his work.

He married and due to the economic recession in Ireland migrated with his wife and two daughters to London, where he worked as a labourer and wrote short stories in his spare time. In 1972, Jordan wrote a radio play, *Miracles and Miss Langan*, which was later broadcast on RTE (the main Irish TV channel) and the BBC. Coincidentally, the play was heard by an American agent in England, who then contacted Jordan and established some connections for him in the USA, which helped him very much in his film industry career. In 1979, the play was made into a television drama by RTE.

He returned to Ireland in 1973 where he worked as a teacher and night watchman. When his wife started to work as a lawyer, he stayed at home with the children and spent his time

writing. His first short story, “On Coming Home”, appeared in the *Irish Press*. Another story from this period is “Last Rites”, which was published in the prestigious British literary magazine, *Stand*, in 1975, and later became the first story in his collection *Night in Tunisia* (1976).

It was precisely this collection which made Jordan widely known as a writer of short stories and won him the *Guardian* Fiction Prize.<sup>29</sup> The collection was published by the Irish Writers’ Co-operative, a collective of writers founded in 1974/5. It was Jordan’s idea, he got *Night in Tunisia* ready for publishing but could not find anyone willing to publish it, mostly because the prices of paper were on an extreme rise and new unknown writers had problems having their work published. Consequently he decided to found a publishing co-op to publish Irish writers, with help from other young authors like Desmond Hogan and Dermot Healy, and received a £700 grant to get the Co-op started from the Arts Council. He has commented on it:

The intention of it really was to publish new fiction but specifically fiction that either for reasons of its experimental nature, or its Irishness, or its newness could not be published by a publishing house in England.<sup>30</sup>

The *Night in Tunisia* collection brought Jordan to the attention of film director John Boorman<sup>31</sup>, who, like many others,

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<sup>29</sup> Awarded since 1965 by the *Guardian*, this prize is worth £10,000 to the winner. The selection is made by a panel of critics and writers, chaired by the Literary Editor of the *Guardian*. This is the oldest and best-established of the awards sponsored by a newspaper. In 1999 the prize was altered. It is now the *Guardian* First Book Award, and is no longer restricted to fiction.

<sup>30</sup> Toibin 16.

<sup>31</sup> John Boorman (\*1933) is an English born film director who has been living in Ireland since the 1980s. His most critically acclaimed film is *The General* (1998), which won him “Best Director” at the Cannes Film Festival.

highlighted the visual quality of Jordan's writing. Boorman engaged him to work on his film project *Excalibur* (1979), and granted him £25.000 out of the film's budget for a documentary about the film. *The Making of Excalibur: Myth into Film* (1981) provided Jordan with his first experience as a director. Boorman and Jordan share an interest in the supernatural or the non-realistic, which later becomes apparent in both Jordan's fiction and his films.

Around the same time Jordan worked both on his first novel, *The Past*, which eventually came out in 1980, and on a film script, *The Traveller*, for which he won the Arts Council Film Script Award in 1979. In this script some topics typical for Jordan's work already emerge – incestuous tendencies, crime and escape to the west of Ireland in search of peace. It was the only feature film script he has written which was made by another director, Joe Comerford, and Jordan was not satisfied with the result, he thought that the film made was too different from the script he wrote and he decided he could not accept that for the future, he wanted to direct his own scripts himself.<sup>32</sup>

His feature debut was *Angel* (1980). It starred Stephen Rea, in his first of many roles in Jordan's movies, as an Irish saxophonist who witnesses brutal murders and decides to take revenge. Despite exploring the darker side of the human psyche and having violence as the main theme, its dialogues are poetic, a contrast often found in Jordan's work. The film's style is surreal and has an interesting use of light and colour. Similarly to Jordan's other work, it also deals with the idea of performance and performers and what it means to take on a different identity.

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<sup>32</sup> see Toibin 18.

In 1983 emerged a TV version of Jordan's short story, "Night in Tunisia". Other television work by Jordan includes writing four of the thirteen episodes of the RTE production *Sean* (1980), based on Sean O'Casey's autobiographies.

Also in 1983 Jordan returned to fiction with the publication of *The Dream of a Beast*. In this book, often called "Kafkaesque" due to its similarities with *The Metamorphosis*, Jordan's surreal vision of the world finds its most elaborate expression. It again questions the concept of identity and a person's desire to be accepted for who they choose to be.

Another journey into the dream-like and surreal was Jordan's collaboration with Angela Carter on creating a film based on several short stories with a werewolf theme from her collection *The Bloody Chamber* (1979). The resulting script became the film *The Company of Wolves* (1984). Jordan has always been interested in the themes of sexual awakening, sexual identity and transformation. A gothic undertone can be found in *The Dream of a Beast* as well as in his latest novel *Shade* (2004) with its gothic mansion and its omnipresent ghost.

His first real commercial success followed with *Mona Lisa* (1986), a crime story centring on prostitution. When Jordan writes about love it is never a typical love-story, here love was connected with obsession and betrayal. Although this movie established him as an emerging talent, his two Hollywood comedies that followed, *High Spirits* (1988) and *We're No Angels* (1989) did not help his reputation much, they were unsuccessful both with the public and the critics. *The Miracle* (1991) dealt with more serious topics, Jordan's favourite coming of age of a young boy, father and son conflict and the clash between past and present. Despite of this it did not bring Jordan critical acclaim.

*The Crying Game* (1992) was an unexpected low budget success which won Jordan an Oscar for his screenplay. It again involves an extremely unusual romance between the IRA member Fergus and a black transsexual boy/girl Dil, whose boyfriend's death was partly Fergus's responsibility. Despite the fact that the film has a clear political background, as with many of Jordan's books politics does not seem to be quite as important as the personal stories of love and betrayal.

In 1994 Jordan published a work of fiction after a long break, the novel *Sunrise with Sea Monster*. He returned to more intimate topics in this book, a father and son relationship and a love triangle. Once again, even though politics is present in the novel, the family relationships are more important.

Jordan returned to the horror genre with the adaptation of Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1994), in contrast to *The Crying Game* a big budget movie with Hollywood stars. Jordan remained faithful to themes of his interest though, the idea of transformation has always been present in his work, and so was repressed sexuality and morality.

His next film was substantially different; Jordan left the realm of fantasy to concentrate on the historical with his treatment of the 1916 Easter Rising and the following civil war in *Michael Collins* (1996). Jordan has always been interested in that particular period of the Irish history and the figure of Eamon de Valera, which appears in many of his books, most obviously in *The Past*. Jordan's portrayal of both Collins and de Valera is far from traditional. He refused to submit to the usual depiction of Collins as the embodiment of masculinity and violence but rather showed him as an intelligent man who used violence only when it served a certain purpose. Jordan refused to present a black and

white vision of the past but rather showed Michael Collins as an ambivalent man.

Jordan's next film was the first of two projects done together with Patrick McCabe, whose novel they adapted for a screenplay, *The Butcher Boy* (1997). It tells the story of Francie, who loses the people he most cares about, starting with his mother and ending with his best friend, and ends up murdering a woman. What makes the film interesting is the point of view – the focus is on Francie and how he sees the world, thus making it possible for Jordan to avoid any moral judgment. He shatters the idea of childhood innocence and resists cinematic realism– the movie is a pastiche of everyday small town life, Francie's fantasies and excerpts from television and radio programs.

After *The Butcher Boy* success, for which Jordan won the Silver Lion at Venice film festival, came a disappointment called *In Dreams* (1999), a psychological thriller full of big name actors that nonetheless did not gain much interest among audiences. Another film came out in the same year, *The End of the Affair*, based on Graham Green's novel. It contained themes familiar to Jordan – forbidden love and self denial - and was accepted much better than *In Dreams*.

In 2000 Jordan participated on the project Beckett on Film. In this project famous directors and actors turned Beckett's plays into films. Jordan made his film version of *Not I*.

In 2002 Jordan reworked a French thriller from the fifties (originally called *Bob le flambeur*), *The Good Thief*. Its protagonist is a gambler and a drug addict and the film explores the international underworld. He returned to fiction thereafter, his latest novel, *Shade*, came out in 2004. In the centre of the book is a murder and even though the culprit is known from the start,

Jordan managed to put together an exceptionally gripping story, keeping the revelation of the motivation for the murder suspended till the end.

In 2005 came his second cooperation with Patrick McCabe, they wrote a screenplay based on McCabe's novel *Breakfast on Pluto*. Jordan revisited themes from *The Crying Game* since the protagonist of the film, Patrick "Kitty" Braden, grows up to be a transvestite singer in London in the sixties and seventies.

Jordan latest movie, *The Brave One* (2007), was not based on his screenplay. It is a story of a woman who lost her fiancé in a brutal attack and decides to take revenge into her own hands.

His diverse work to date has brought into focus new conceptions of the Irish culture but he has never wanted to be perceived as only an Irish artist dealing exclusively with Irish themes. He has never been afraid to take on projects with astronomical finances behind them but has never hesitated to make an interesting film with limited means. Additionally, there is always fiction which helps him deal with the more intimate themes in a more private way.

### **3. *Night in Tunisia***

In this chapter I will discuss Neil Jordan's short stories. I will analyse the collection *Night in Tunisia*, trying to establish whether there are common features connecting the short stories, whether there is a pattern Jordan uses. I will focus on what connects the protagonists of the different stories but also what makes them unique.

Neil Jordan's first attempts as a writer were short stories as I mentioned in the previous chapter. I came across some of his first published short stories which were not included in his only collection *Night in Tunisia*. They were two short stories published in *Icarus*, the Trinity College literary magazine, in the years 1975/6, called "The Bird Imitator" and "The House", and a short story called "Café" published in *The Journal of Irish Literature* in 1976. "The Bird Imitator" is merely a short literary exercise describing a man who sells whistles on Grafton Street in Dublin. In the two other stories, though, the Jordan of *Night in Tunisia* emerges.

"The House" portrays a middle aged woman who first comes into a house she bought without seeing it beforehand. She realizes the house is not exactly how she imagined it, the old layers of wallpaper are showing beneath the new ones and it looks cold and uninviting. She decides to take a bath and slowly takes her clothes off in front of a mirror. She looks at herself and realizes she is like the house, her old skin is hiding beneath her new clothes. She is, however, still a woman, and when she finally dips into the water in the tub she feels a certain sensuousness. Thus already in one of his first published short stories Jordan

connects water with the erotic, as he does later many times in his fiction.

“Café” touches upon subjects he later develops as well. The protagonist is a teenage girl who works in a café and observes the mothers with their children who come by, some of them pregnant again. She somehow feels that it is impossible to escape this “Irish” fate, that the same is in store for her. The story carries the feeling of quiet desperation and ever-present boredom.

Neil Jordan has commented on the short story genre:

The short story is probably the form in which the mundanity, the everyday nature of the Irish experience has been most coherently expressed, the everyday strata of sensations, images, impressions and concerns...<sup>33</sup>

As this comment shows, it was only natural for him to start his career with the publication of a collection of short stories. They seem to be autobiographical to an extent, many of them take place in little seaside holiday towns where Jordan spent every summer during his youth, and the protagonist of “A Love” is even called Neil. Jordan’s comment on this is a little ambiguous:

The stories in *Night in Tunisia* are all autobiographical, not in the sense of people I knew, or events that happened, but they’re strictly photo-realistic. I found that I began to write inventive stories, fiction, but I could never write about people I knew, and could rarely use the first person singular, the word “I”. But I almost always had to describe something I had seen.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Neil Jordan, “Word and Image“, *Film Directions*, Dec. 1978: 10.

<sup>34</sup> Toibin 14.

When reading Jordan's interviews it seems that he does contradict himself sometimes. It is true that only two stories in the collection are written in the ich-form, but one of them is the aforementioned "A Love" with Neil as the main character.

Sean O'Faolain has stated in the introduction to the *The Collected Fiction of Neil Jordan* (which is the edition I am using here): "A further cause for special interest in Neil Jordan is that while being so engrossed in his locale he is in no way, as Joyce was not, in the least bit parochial or religionist".<sup>35</sup> Despite the fact that all but one of the stories take place in Ireland and the seaside atmosphere and the Irish countryside are described in great detail and concrete place names are often mentioned, the problems the characters are facing are universal, not specifically Irish. Lori Rogers has mentioned in her study about Irish writers *Feminine Nation* that the problem the contemporary Irish authors face is that the main criterion the critics use for analysing their work is whether it is "Irish" or not, as if this was more important than whether it has other qualities.<sup>36</sup> She sees this as the main reason why Jordan has not received the acclaim he deserves – his fiction does not contain enough "Irishness". She also mentions that the Irish novel has always taken a third place in importance behind poetry and drama and since Jordan has not published any of these (even though he said he tried his hand at poems and plays) he is always labelled as the film director Jordan rather than the writer.

The stories in *Night in Tunisia* could be roughly divided into two groups. The first could be labelled as the "coming of age"

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<sup>35</sup> Neil Jordan, *The Collected Fiction of Neil Jordan* (London: Vintage, 1997) 5.

<sup>36</sup> See Lori Rogers, *The Feminine Nation* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1998) 4.

stories: “Seduction”, “Sand”, “Night in Tunisia” and to some extent “A Love”. The other group would be stories that deal with ordinary people who are not satisfied with their ordinary lives, and this dissatisfaction is either shown on an individual, in “Last Rites”, “Mr Solomon Wept”, “Skin” and “Her Soul” or it is connected with a dysfunctional relationship, in “Outpatient” and “Tree”.

First I want to have a closer look at the first group. “Night in Tunisia” is the most elaborate of them and it is also the one that is always mentioned in Jordan’s biographies. One of its themes is something Jordan revisited in his later fiction – the father and son relationship in a motherless family. It is a story of a fourteen-year old boy who spends the summer with his father and sister in one of the little holiday towns on the eastern coast of Ireland. They come back to the same town every year. This year though the boy feels that something is different. A seventeen year old girl, Rita, who him and his sister used to be friends with in the previous years, seems to be distant and unapproachable. She lives in the holiday town all year round with a father who is a drunk and the protagonist was told that she attempted suicide. The girl he used to know is changing into a woman and there are many stories the boys tell about her which he would rather not know about.

He feels that something has changed, not only in her but in the general atmosphere of the town, everything seems more “venal” as he says. There are still beautiful moments he enjoys though, the town has not lost its appeal for him entirely. As Murphy puts it, in Jordan’s stories and maybe his fiction in general “crudity and beauty struggle for supremacy”.<sup>37</sup> It is very

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<sup>37</sup> Murphy 200.

apparent in this story. There are poetic descriptions like this one of the twilight: “The tincture of the light fading, the blue that seemed to be sucked into the line beyond the sea into what the maths book called infinity, the darkness falling like a stone”<sup>38</sup> which are contrasted with the crude speech of the pubescent boys and the descriptions of their masturbation.

This conflict is taking place within the protagonist as well. He misses the innocence of the previous years and hates it when the other boys imply Rita’s sexual licentiousness, but at the same time he yearns to penetrate the mystery of the adult world. He watched Rita play tennis with an older man who was obedient while Rita seemed to have the upper hand. Thereafter he watched her get into the car with the man and drive off and felt that there was something wrong: “What had she lost to gain that ease, he wondered”.<sup>39</sup> He thinks she looks old, too old for her age, tired and apathetic. Later in the story this girl who is either completely alone when her father is on his travels or in the company of men who only want her for her body tries to commit suicide again. It seems, however, that she does not want to die, she only does it to get some attention, to have the feeling that she is important for someone, even if it is just for a moment and that someone is just a lifeguard.

The protagonist, on the other hand, feels as if he is getting too much attention from his father who wants him to stop wasting his musical talent on the bawdy simple songs he plays on his guitar. One of these songs is “The Crying Game”, which Jordan used years later as the title song for his film. The father wants him to develop his talent and learn to play the alto

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<sup>38</sup> *Collected* 35-6.

<sup>39</sup> *Collected* 41.

saxophone he gave him. The boy, nevertheless, wants to rebel, and does exactly what his father does not want him to do, Donal in *Sunrise with Sea Monster* does the same to his father when he leaves for the civil war in Spain knowing it is the only thing that will definitely hurt him. Instead of learning to play he wastes his days with the group of older boys and plays the silly songs, until one day the father offers to pay him if he allows him to teach him. The boy thinks of Rita using her body for “monetary gain” and agrees. It is these music lessons that enable the father and son to communicate in a way, to spend time together without the need for speech, as the fishing moments enable the same to Donal and his father. The boy enjoys the playing but does not really want to let it show to prevent his father from being too pleased, but at the same time deep inside he sees the joy in his father’s eyes and is glad. Murphy argues that the jazz they play “acts as a metaphor of release into maturity”,<sup>40</sup> and that could be supported by the boy’s feeling that he is indeed a boy no more: “He imagined childhood falling from him, coming off his palms like scales from a fish”.<sup>41</sup>

When he gets the money he heads to see Rita. The money is in his pocket but at the same time he would like to explain to her that it does not have to be this way, that somewhere out there must be a place where money does not change hands when two people want to be together. The ending is open, with him approaching her with a mixture of fear and excitement.

The story “Seduction” carries some similarities to “Night in Tunisia”. It is the other story written in ich-form in the collection. The “I” is again an unnamed young boy, this time the age is

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<sup>40</sup> Murphy 198.

<sup>41</sup> *Collected* 49.

unknown as well. He returns to the same seaside spot as last summer similarly to the protagonist of “Night in Tunisia” and there he meets his friend Jamie from last year who albeit being a bit younger tries to act older. One day Jamie told him about a woman he saw bathing naked and the narrator felt that “the summer throbbed with forbidden promise”.<sup>42</sup> They go together into the chip-shop she works in to have a look at her, the narrator cannot help being shy while Jamie is more forward.

When the boy gets home he sits on the bed in his room, holding his knees to his chest and rocking like a baby. He feels that something has changed, he would prefer boyhood games to spying on women. He sits there “weeping for the innocence of last year”.<sup>43</sup> In spite of the fact that the idea of seeing a woman naked excites him it seems he would prefer if it did not, if he could remain being a child. He still goes with Jamie to the beach to wait for the woman to come for her regular swim and Jamie talks about girls trying to sound experienced and then he suddenly stops and the narrator sees he is crying. Jordan again shows this transition between childhood and teenage years; Jamie feels as if he is pushed to say those things, as if he needs to sound like an adult to be accepted because he can no longer be a child, and even though most of the time he manages to pretend that he enjoys being “grown-up”, there is this boy still inside him who does not care about women, their nylons and their naked flesh. They go for a swim together then and there is a homoerotic image similar to those Jordan later uses in *Sunrise with Sea Monster* – Jamie hugs the narrator in the water and presses his lips to his neck saying “this is the way lovers do it”<sup>44</sup> and the narrator does

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<sup>42</sup> *Collected* 17.

<sup>43</sup> *Collected* 21.

<sup>44</sup> *Collected* 22.

not struggle. It seems that in the hostile adult world there is no place for them yet so they only have each other to share this painful transition.

The story "Sand" is merely a scene from the summer life of two siblings, a younger brother and older sister. The brother feels like he cannot measure up to the sister since she is older and is in charge of him. When an older boy offers him to ride his donkey in exchange for some time with his sister, he agrees not knowing what exactly is meant by this transaction. He comes to rescue the sister when he hears her screaming, nothing really happens though and for the boy it is only a funny story to remember, even though he gets a glimpse of the mysterious world of men and women.

In all the stories the characters deal with being young, not children anymore and not adults, they are scared of the unknown experience that they know awaits them, but at the same time they are curious and full of expectation. All the stories capture in detail the atmosphere of the holiday towns, their laziness, the way it seems that the time stands still in them, yet there are those subtle changes happening as well which are especially evident to those who only visit the town for a couple of months every year.

Out of the other group of stories, "Mr Solomon Wept" is the one that most obviously takes place in a holiday seaside town. This time though the sadness that was somewhere in the background in the previously mentioned stories becomes pervasive. All the protagonist, Jimmy, owns is his slot machines which earn him a living. He used to travel with them from town to town, but after his wife left him he decided to stay in one place. He has a son he does not really care about (another motherless

family with a dysfunctional relationship between the son and the father) and he uses alcohol to ease the everyday struggle to find some meaning in his meaningless existence. Another method he uses to cope with his loneliness is remembering only the bad things about his wife and in the end even telling people she is actually dead.

There is a hint that life really was not that different for him when the wife was still around, there was an emotional deadness already when they were together:

For he had long ceased to think of her with the words love or hate, he had worked, rolled his thin cigarettes, she totted the books while he supervised the rent, those words were like the words school or god, part of a message that wasn't important any more...<sup>45</sup>

This "message" was obviously still important for the wife, who could not stand this predictable and boring life and in the end left him a message that when she leaves she will not have to hate him anymore. Another reason for her leaving might have been Jimmy's problem with alcohol, even though it is unclear whether he used to drink then or not. Jimmy thinks it was the holiday town itself that made her leave: "... that impersonal holiday gaiety had enslaved them both, had aged him, like a slow cancerous growth, had annihilated her".<sup>46</sup> Jordan seems to say that the seaside towns can be beautiful and entertaining for those who come to visit, but for people who are forced to live there, like Rita from "Night in Tunisia", they can be suffocating.

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<sup>45</sup> *Collected 29.*

<sup>46</sup> *Collected 32.*

In “Skin” the protagonist is a woman approaching middle age. She is preparing dinner in her house and when she cuts the vegetables she keeps picturing the knife sliding into her finger. It seems that she would rather feel the pain from the cut than feel nothing at all as she does. She feels almost oppressed by the “vacuity”<sup>47</sup> of her suburban house, by the fact that there is probably a woman like her in the neighbouring house and in the house next to it, feeling lonely like her, unimportant like her.

She feels that she herself is responsible for her lack of “aliveness”, she knows she has “the need, the capacity for religiously intense experience of living”<sup>48</sup> and blames herself for her inability to make this experience happen. She reads a story in a magazine about the Swedish housewives who meet strange men for sex to feel alive and claims to be repelled by it, but in reality the idea attracts her. She gets into her car and drives towards the sea, where she gets out and walks towards the waves, tucking up her skirt and thinking how inappropriate her behaviour is. She feels the sensuousness of water and sees a man on the beach and wants to be desired by him, but he walks off without paying any attention to her. She feels the disappointment, the hopelessness, and is “heavy with the knowledge of days unpeeling in layers”<sup>49</sup>. This goes back to the image Jordan created earlier in the story, when she was peeling an onion, skin after skin, only to discover there is another skin, the same only smaller. It is like her days – every day is the same, and she struggles through it, hoping the next day will be different, but nothing changes, the next day is the same only more oppressing and less hopeful.

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<sup>47</sup> *Collected* 53.

<sup>48</sup> *Collected* 53.

<sup>49</sup> *Collected* 57.

The same idea is behind “Last Rites”, a story which was published as early as in 1975, when Jordan was only twenty five. It is based on his experience as a labourer in London. The protagonist is nameless, all we know is he is young and he works as a builder’s labourer. The reader knows from the first page that he is going to commit suicide which adds an extra pathos to the story. He states what he expects from the suicide already on the first page: “...something more and less than pleasurable, a feeling of ravishing, private vindication, of exposure, of secret, solipsistic victory”.<sup>50</sup> As the woman in “Skin” he prefers to feel pain rather than numbness, and similar to Rita from “The Night in Tunisia” he feels he will finally be noticed among the masses by doing this ultimate act.

He works with other immigrants and it seems he does not really fit in, while others are looking forward to a night out he only looks forward to the weekly shower and an extra sleep next morning. He is tired of the stereotype, of the fact that he knows his surroundings so intimately, he would prefer to see it again for the first time but knows that it is impossible, that he is doomed to live the same day over and over again and refuses to do this.

He remembers how he used to watch the sea-lettuce back in Ireland and think about “their impassivity, their imperviousness to feeling; their deadness” and he considered it “the ultimate blessing”.<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately he is not immune to feelings, even if it is just the feeling of desperation. Already back in that holiday town he encountered boredom, “boredom which is a condition of life”.<sup>52</sup> He felt there was more pain than pleasure in life and he did not know what to do with the long days and hours

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<sup>50</sup> *Collected 7.*

<sup>51</sup> *Collected 11.*

<sup>52</sup> *Collected 12.*

before him. He might have thought that if he leaves that lazy town, goes to England to the big city of London, something would change. But it did not, if anything it got worse when he had to spend his days with people from different nations he could not really relate to, far away from the Irish Sea which used to have a soothing effect on him. Realizing “there would never be anything but that exhaustion after all the fury and effort”<sup>53</sup> he slits his wrists in the spa cubicle.

When the other working class people discover him, they do not ask the question why he did it. As one of them sums up: “Every day the Lord send me I think I do that. And every day I drink bottle of wine and forget ‘bout doin’ that”.<sup>54</sup> All of them spend their lives doing their hard work, all of them feel the same hopelessness, no matter which country they are originally from.

The feeling of sadness and quiet desperation fuels both “Outpatient” and “Tree”. In both of the stories the reader is introduced to a couple, in which men are the pragmatic ones who take life more or less as it comes and do not muse much over whether they are happy or not. The women on the other hand are the sensitive ones who do not want to be satisfied with the ordinary, who need something more to feel alive.

In “Outpatient” the young woman has just been released from a mental institution where she lost a great deal weight and also her good looks. The man realizes all this yet he never contemplates leaving her, he wants to be the virtuous one, the proper citizen, he bought a house for them and he wants children. She dreads the prospect of the definiteness of this, of the idea that their marriage will just become a routine, she would

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<sup>53</sup> *Collected 15.*

<sup>54</sup> *Collected 16.*

prefer it to end tragically. The man desperately wants to make it work. Jordan once said: “True love is not about desire. True love is about moral responsibility”.<sup>55</sup> The male protagonist of this story acts accordingly. He thinks that love has nothing to do with a mature relationship, other things are important. The woman sees it differently, she is emotional, needs something to believe in, something to live for and the children do not seem to be an ideal candidate for that. She wants something different yet cannot define what exactly it is.

The woman in “Tree” also needs to believe in things that others, especially her partner, label as “impossible. When she sees the whitethorn tree in the distance which could not possibly be blooming at that time of year, she truly believes it is. Her partner considers her belief foolish and nonsensical and she decides to leave him, not for the first time. She goes to the tree and sees that the blossoms are only pieces of rags hanging from it. She feels a sudden comfort knowing she was not the only one with wishful thinking.

“Her Soul” is the shortest story of the collection and it is just a glimpse of a woman who feels lost, claiming she lost her soul. There is a man as well who lost his wife. And so they are drowning their sorrows in alcohol and she is thinking maybe she is better off without her soul, her feelings, maybe it is better feeling empty than feeling pain.

I left the story “A Love” until the end because even though it contains a coming-of-age storyline there is more to it since this storyline is only shown in the memories of the protagonist, Neil, who by now is a grown man. Even though it does contain some of

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<sup>55</sup> Stephen Dodd, “Love and Life with a He-devil”, *Sunday Independent* 22 Jan. 1995: 13.

the sadness of the “adult” group of stories, it seems to be a little bit less pessimistic. The two days in which the story actually takes place are the day of Eamon de Valera’s funeral (the first president of the Ireland who died in 1975, only three years before the collection was published). The story starts out in Dublin the first day, and ends in Lisdoonvarna, a town that repeatedly appears in Jordan’s fiction. Another typical feature is the main theme – a love triangle between a father, his son and a woman (he mother is again absent, Neil says he remembers her only from photographs). This story differs from Jordan’s later fiction though – the woman in question is closer to the father’s age this time, she was thirty nine while Neil only fifteen. Both in *The Past* and in *Sunrise with Sea Monster* the women are only girls at the outset. Here she is experienced and older and she initiates Neil into the matters of love. Neil remembers how she first seduced him, even though it was his father who was courting her. He remembers how they shared the same bed in her guest house while his father was sleeping only one floor below them. How he was full of fury when he had to come along to the dinners where his father was wooing her. How one night he took her gun and tried to shoot his father through the bathroom door in which he luckily did not succeed.

Several years later, he meets her in a café in Dublin, de Valera’s funeral creates a background. She belongs to the generation who remembers de Valera alive in the days of his glory, while Neil only knows him from the photographs and stories. She remembers how she was taught to idolize him.

She looks older now and has tuberculosis, wants to go to the West with the hope for relief from her illness, and as she tells Neil who has never been to the West “You’ll never understand

this country till you have”.<sup>56</sup> This is the first time in Jordan’s fiction where the West represents a return to the old mythical Ireland where the belief in the supernatural was not considered foolish.

Neil realizes she only fills him with memories now, not desire as she used to, but they make love one last time when they get to Lisdoonvarna. Another of Jordan’s recurrent ideas appears here – the idea that we can recreate our past, that memories are not something given but something fluid. Neil says: “As I remember you I define you, I choose bits of you and like a child with a colouring-book, I fill you out”.<sup>57</sup> Neil realizes that this is the end of their affair, yet no one can ever take his memories away from him, and he will always remember her the way she was when he was fifteen, beautiful, seductive and someone his father wanted but Neil owned.

*Night in Tunisia* is a mature work for an author who was only twenty eight at the time of its publication. He offers a deep insight into the psyches of both his male and female characters, and it is surprising how he can differentiate those. The collection unveils striking imagery, poeticism and a crude honesty at the same time. Its narrators are highly sensitive people who are either dealing with the difficulty of the early teenage years or are beaten down by their ordinary, uneventful lives. It is not an optimistic work and it does not seem to offer any hope or resolution for its characters. Yet it is precisely this sadness that makes this book so memorable.

In this chapter I tried to find common features connecting Jordan’s short stories in the collection *Night in Tunisia*. I

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<sup>56</sup> *Collected* 78.

<sup>57</sup> *Collected* 77.

established that there are two types of narrators – confused teenagers who are going through the pain of growing up and adults who are desperate to feel alive. I hope I demonstrated the intensity that the young Jordan invested in these stories and that this collection is far from being merely the first work of an inexperienced author.

#### **4. *The Past***

In this chapter I will analyse Jordan's first novel, *The Past*, examining how Jordan defines the concepts of past and memories. Furthermore, I will concentrate on how this novel contributes to Jordan's interpretation of what identity is, since that is a recurrent topic of his.

"Novels are like houses," Neil Jordan has asserted, "their architecture has to adapt to suit the changing reality of the world".<sup>58</sup> The architecture of *The Past* is quite complex, as is the reality of the postmodern world. The book consists of seven parts, each part taking place in a different year (between 1914 and 1934) and a different place, and the time span widens even more – there is also the time when the narration takes place, but that particular year and the year of the last part of the book remain unidentified to the reader.

A general summary of the plot would be the following – a young male narrator tries to piece together the "past" of Rene, his mother, with the help of her contemporaries' memories and a few postcards and photographs. Yet the fact that Rene is his mother remains hidden from the reader for quite some time, as does the true purpose of his research – he is trying to find out who his father was. It is also never disclosed when and how his mother disappeared from his life. The fact that he seems to be getting to know her only through the vague information he gathers indicates that he did not get a chance to ask her any questions himself, so she must have left his life early in his childhood.

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<sup>58</sup> Carty, "How to Keep" 14.

The narrator's sense of self and personal identity is diminished and he is trying to find some context for his existence. He does not mention any other family he might have and he seems to be completely alone in the world. He tries to retrace the journey that his mother took, at first only the short distance from Dublin to Bray and later the itinerary of the theatre group she was part of.

He soon finds out that the facts are scarce, the memories of his mother's former best friend, Lilly, are flawed by her advanced age and by the fact that everybody likes to adapt their memories so that they would suit their version of what happened and what they want to remember. As Neil Murphy puts it, "the memories are fluid, the past can be recreated at will".<sup>59</sup> The biggest part of the book is therefore not taken up by what actually happened but what the narrator imagines that happened. The narrator, in a truly postmodern way, shows his unlimited power over his characters: "I will have Luke open doors as quietly as James".<sup>60</sup> His will is all that is needed to paint a picture of the past. To be able to attempt an analysis of the novel it is necessary to accept the narrator's version of what happened rather than being constantly aware that it is only his imagination.

It all begins with a postcard which the narrator's grandmother, Una, sent from her honeymoon where she was with Michael, and which shows a scene familiar to most of Jordan's writing – an esplanade by the sea. Although this postcard and another later one is the only evidence the narrator has of how the unnamed holiday town in Cornwall looked like in 1914, he does not hesitate to imagine what he does not see:

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<sup>59</sup> Murphy 199.

<sup>60</sup> *Collected* 173.

So I extend the picture on the postcard beyond the serrated edge with a line, say, of unobtrusive shrubs, not quite trees, between the esplanade and the road proper. These shrubs are in wooden boxes, bound by metal hoops...<sup>61</sup>

He goes on to imagine the scenery to the smallest details, as he later imagines the actions of his deceased relatives.

Marriages in Neil Jordan's fiction are typically unhappy as the people strive to communicate but somehow are not able to. Lilli hints that Michael married Una because he felt it his duty since she was pregnant but then again she says that Rene was a "love-child". One way or another, the honeymoon, as the narrator – and Jordan – imagines it, was already a time of alienation for the couple: "He [Michael] had known for some time that she didn't love him and what was for him worse, that he might never love her".<sup>62</sup> Consequently, when Michael meets a prostitute, typically for Jordan on the beach, he does not really hesitate. As Rockett points out:

Water and seaside are treated as the *mise-en-scene* of desire and sexual liberation, so that it becomes a metaphor for the ultimate desire, which is to return to the maternal waters and total plenitude, a place where one is sealed magically from the world outside.<sup>63</sup>

Indeed, in the little hut on the beach where he continues meeting her for the duration of his stay, they both feel liberated. They

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<sup>61</sup> *Collected* 97.

<sup>62</sup> *Collected* 115.

<sup>63</sup> Rockett 109.

escape their everyday identities and choose their imaginary personalities instead. There they can be whoever they want to be, they can even pretend that those encounters are based on love, even though Michael still pays at the end of each visit. Their relationship only exists “among just sand, sea and canvas”<sup>64</sup> and “outside the curve of this sea and the soft gloom of this bathing hut his love has no meaning”.<sup>65</sup> In the end, they are forced to leave their “love palace” for a trip to London, where Michael helps this nameless girl get an abortion, an event which ends their encounters.

An untypical feature of *The Past* is the you-form – Jordan imposes his will on his characters telling them directly what they did, or, as the reader knows, what he imagines they did. For the most part of the book the you is Rene, there are parts, however, where the you changes – in Part 2 the you is one of the narrator’s potential fathers – the photographer James: “You turn away from the dialogue to watch the rain falling in sheets now on the prom. You can see the snout of Bray Head nudging past your window...”<sup>66</sup>

A topic which recurs in Jordan’s fiction is the father-son relationship, or, more specifically, a love triangle between father, son and an intruder into the household. This theme first occurs in the short story “A Love” in *Night in Tunisia*, but it is in *The Past* where it gets an extensive treatment for the first time. The newcomer to the house is Rene herself, who is left almost without means after her mother’s death. James knows Rene because he has taken a few photographs of her and Una and he offers her a

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<sup>64</sup> *Collected* 112.

<sup>65</sup> *Collected* 112.

<sup>66</sup> *Collected* 172.

job – teaching Irish to his son Luke, despite her knowledge of Irish being questionable to say the least.

The description of Rene’s arrival to the household is full of anticipation of things to come, when all three men living in the house, Luke, his father James and his grandfather, watch her enter the house:

He [James] stands at the open doorway watching her against the scene, thinking how her features blend with it. The old man, sensing something, clatters from his attic to the top of the stairs and gazes at her distracted, thinking the woman of his imagination, coaxed by his mural, has at last come alive. And Luke comes from the living-room with the tea things. He is now sixteen.<sup>67</sup>

Once again, the narrator tries to read James’s yellowed photographs as a book, he builds a story from the looks in the people’s eyes on the pictures, from their composition, from the fact that Rene became the centre of most of the pictures James took after her arrival: “She fills them and the perspective with which you viewed her must be one of love. As if you have tried to embrace her, she leans through the prints, almost falling out of them”.<sup>68</sup> Rene seems to give James’s photographs the ease and focus they lacked before.

Luke and Rene’s romance slowly develops during their walks along the sea when he accompanies her to the train station, and their first sexual encounter, again, takes place on the beach. So does her intimacy with James, this time in a

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<sup>67</sup> *Collected* 224.

<sup>68</sup> *Collected* 227.

canvas hut. The seaside again becomes a place where everything is possible and where physical desire finds its expression.

In contrast to Jordan's other work where he deals with fathers and their sons, there does not seem to be any real conflict between the father and the son in *The Past* despite their being in love with the same woman. Then again, this conflict could not have been captured in the photographs on which the narrator bases his perception of the life in the house. Those photographs capture a peaceful family atmosphere – picnics and walks along the sea. In this untypical family, Rene is Luke's mother and lover at the same time and for James she's both the daughter he never had and a substitute for his deceased wife.

Rene becomes pregnant and who is the father remains undisclosed. She runs away with Luke and they become part of a travelling theatre group. Although it is not dealt with in depth, it is obvious that James is very disillusioned by his son's and Rene's behaviour because they ran away. As Jordan puts it:

His camera dies, and there is only the spoken word to replace it, and memory, and imagination. And all three are frighteningly elastic, handing us as a gift that freedom that annihilates more than time, the contours of our subjects themselves.<sup>69</sup>

Jordan returns to the idea that memories are impossible to capture or describe as they are subject to change. Throughout the book there is a parallel drawn between a photographer and a writer, as they both cannot capture reality because their means are limited, so they both create fiction of sorts.

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<sup>69</sup> *Collected* 250.

The idea of fiction and identity returns again and again in the book. Jordan's work often deals with actresses or performers in general, people who disguise their own identity and put on an identity of their own – the extreme example of this being the transsexual singer Dil in the film *The Crying Game*. In *The Past* both Una and Rene end up acting, but Una is the one who does not really leave her role behind her on the stage but rather continues acting in everyday life. She stylizes herself into various roles throughout her life and changes the reality according to her needs, claiming that Rene was born much later than she actually was to rule out the possibility that she was conceived out of wedlock or telling lies about Michael after his death.

Jordan once stated: "Fiction is like a series of different masks that you use to disguise yourself",<sup>70</sup> and as he uses fiction to disguise himself, so do his characters use acting to disguise themselves or to create a fiction of their own. Rene, when she is pregnant and touring little seaside towns with the theatre group, is supposedly such a powerful actress that she is able to disguise her pregnancy. Her stage presence was so strong that even though she was not a great actress by traditional definitions the audience and journalists were stunned:

They didn't see her pregnant, they saw her simply resplendent. And they saw every other performance stretched to a pitch to conceal the secret. Since they couldn't glean the secret, all they could glean was the pitch, the richness. What they couldn't read of the real story made the apparent story all the more enthralling.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Toibin 14.

<sup>71</sup> *Collected* 261.

The idea of identity not being a fixed concept emerges again when James finally traces down the group and reunites with his son. The way Lilly describes that moment gives the impression that Luke and James are interchangeable, that one is only an extension of the other: "... between Luke's demeanour and his there was no difference, no difference at all. ... And when they came towards me I couldn't care which of them was father. Which of them was Luke even".<sup>72</sup> And when Luke says: "Father, we are pregnant"<sup>73</sup> it seems as if they were one person, Luke a younger version of James. Lilly says both of them were the father of Rene's child and that their unity of three was necessary.<sup>74</sup>

Thus the "family" is reunited again and that is all the narrator and the reader is left with. It remains unknown who the father was, when was this fragile union broken again or who the narrator actually grew up with. Towards the end of the novel the focus is shifted onto a figure that was somehow ever present, an identifiable father, father of the nation, the first president of Ireland, Eamon de Valera. In Jordan's postmodern world where real historical figures mingle with his fictional characters, de Valera attends the last performance of the heavily pregnant Rene. He was somehow connected to the family throughout the whole novel, it is implied by Lilly that he had an affair with Una before he became president<sup>75</sup> and his driver was for some time also the driver of Michael's. The narrator imagines de Valera in the places he travels through and so the line between past and present is erased again. So is the distinction between a family history and

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<sup>72</sup> *Collected* 284.

<sup>73</sup> *Collected* 277.

<sup>74</sup> see *Collected* 272.

<sup>75</sup> see *Collected* 125.

the history of the nation, they are interrelated. Once again, even though the politics does not seem to be prominent in *The Past*, it is somehow ever present.

Jordan has pointed out that he is one of the new generation of writers who “could never possibly have met Joyce” and his parents “could hardly have met Pearse”.<sup>76</sup> The stormy past of the nation seems to be more and more distant and less and less approachable since it is filled with so many legends and nobody seems to be able to distinguish history from fiction. Jordan has commented on this: “It is one of the most attractive things about growing up in Ireland, isn’t it? The way the mundanity of history is transformed by unbridled imagination”.<sup>77</sup> He does not seem to hesitate to add his share to create a fictional picture of the figure of de Valera. *The Past* is not the only novel where de Valera appears, he is a character, albeit a minor one, in *Sunrise with Sea Monster* as well, where Donal’s secret mission is directed by him and he is in a way a central character of one of the short stories in *Night in Tunisia*, “A Love”, where the background is created by his funeral which seems to paralyze the city of Dublin.

The narrator, who was searching through his family history, ended up understanding his existence in a much wider context even though he did not get an answer to his central question. He travelled through his native country and it seems that he discovered his roots in a more general meaning of the word.

In this chapter I examined Jordan’s novel *The Past*, focusing on the themes that recur in Jordan’s fiction – the love

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<sup>76</sup> Carty, “How to Keep” 14.

<sup>77</sup> Carty, “How to Keep” 14.

triangle between father, son and a woman who becomes part of both of their lives, the concepts of past, memories and identity. I hope that I have shown what Jordan's view on these problems is and that I have introduced *The Past* as the complex novel it is.

## **5. *The Dream of a Beast***

This chapter will discuss *The Dream of a Beast*, Neil Jordan's slimmest book, it should be called a novella rather than a novel. I will look at possible interpretations of this multi-faceted book and I will try to find out what the inspiration for the ideas expressed in it was. It is in this novella where Jordan's search for the nature of identity finds its most powerful expression and my foremost concern will therefore be examining this problem.

It is a story of an unnamed Irishman who again lives in one of the little seaside towns outside Dublin. He has worked as an advertisement designer for many years, is married to Marianne and has a daughter Matilde. He describes the changes happening to the world and it is almost an apocalyptic vision – the Ireland he lives in has lost its rainy mild summers and an unbelievable heat spread across the country. There are soldiers everywhere and wild plants are growing through the concrete streets. Something is happening to him too – he is changing into a massive beast.

There are two basic ways to read the novella - it can be read as a work of fantasy, meaning the changes are taken literally and the reader accepts that the protagonist ends up being a beast and the world is coming to an end. The other option is to understand those changes as a metaphor – the narrator's marriage is disintegrating and the estrangement from his wife is symbolized by the transformation into an unknown creature which Marianne no longer recognizes as the husband she once loved. Jordan himself has commented on this novel in an interview:

It's pure fantasy and very personal ... I like things that refuse to be satisfied with rational explanations. I'm drawn to stories where the motivations of the characters are deeper than they themselves understand and people become other things.<sup>78</sup>

He contradicts himself here a little because it can hardly be pure fantasy and very personal at the same time. It is obviously partly based on his own experience of a failed marriage (Jordan has five children by three different women, two of which he married and *The Dream of a Beast* was published after the divorce from his first wife).

He has said in another interview that he has “an impatience with basic realism”<sup>79</sup> and that he thinks that this is a typical feature of Irish fiction in general. It is definitely a typical feature of his work, both fiction and films and it is best exemplified with *The Dream of a Beast*. He does not abandon reality entirely though, he names a few real Dublin streets and the narrator goes to the Dublin zoo. The setting is not fantastic but it is a changed Dublin that he describes. Not quite a Dublin of the future, since there does not seem to be any technological advancement, but a Dublin created by his imagination.

When the narrator first speaks to the reader he says that he only noticed the changes when they must have been going on for some time.<sup>80</sup> There is no indication of how and when it all started, what were the causes. His marriage is already dysfunctional at this stage even though not completely ruined yet. It is apparent that Marianne acts distant, she withdraws every time he attempts physical contact. Even though he tries to

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<sup>78</sup> Brace par. 15.

<sup>79</sup> Marlaire Glicksman, “Irish Eyes”, *Film Comment* Jan. 1990: 71.

<sup>80</sup> see *Collected* 307.

be helpful and caring, he is not able to call her “love” anymore and she does not really talk to him except about their daughter. All this seems to indicate that he might be having an affair already and she knows about it. The fact that he is not able to look at himself in the mirror seems to support that, even though in the book it is of course explained by the fact that some physical changes are taking place. Once again though, it seems that something is changing inside him and he just does not recognize himself anymore as the person he used to be – a faithful husband following the norms of the society.

Even though they do not communicate much with words, there is music to connect them, which often happens in Jordan’s fiction – music brought together Rose and Donal in *Sunrise with Sea Monster* and it appears in some stories in *Night in Tunisia*. So here they play the piano together as they probably used to often in the happier times of their marriage, but Marianne feels that something is different, the harmony they used to create is gone.

At the beginning of the book they are still having sex: “We made love of course”<sup>81</sup> but the “of course” suggests that it is more a routine than an expression of emotions. Marianne is too distant and the narrator is getting tired of the attempts to prove to her that he still loves her despite whatever happened:

The moods that were between us were almost richer than speech. I sat watching her eat, eating only occasionally myself. However much I loved to watch her, I knew there was nothing I could do to dispel this silence. It had its roots in things done and said and it was like ivy now, twining round me.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *Collected* 313.

<sup>82</sup> *Collected* 316.

He continually remembers the happier days when they were still in love and everything seemed to be easy and natural. He often mentions how things are “unnatural” now, as if the unnatural state of the world would expand into their house as well.

While the house is full of gloom, when he is outside he feels much better:

I walked calmly, but inside me was building an unreasonable joy. This joy was nameless, seemed to come from nowhere ... It frothed inside me ... I knew I must keep it as much a secret as my monstrous hands.<sup>83</sup>

The change happening to his appearance seems to be triggering off an inner change, a transformation back to a more natural state of being, but he feels that it is something society would not approve of so he continues with his everyday duties as usual, he goes to work. There he first encounters the mysterious female client for whom he is supposed to design an advertisement for a perfume. He knows from the start that her interest is “more than professional”.<sup>84</sup> He shows her his drawing of the ad – a woman in a bathtub and an unknown creature creeping down the hallway which is only captured as a reflection in a mirror. The narrator struggles to give the creature a concrete shape and it becomes apparent that it is nobody else but him, or rather whatever beast he is changing into. They decide on an appointment in the zoo to determine the look of the animal.

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<sup>83</sup> *Collected* 317.

<sup>84</sup> *Collected* 319.

In the evening he is on the train back home and feels that by now the change taking place inside him must be apparent on the outside too:

Knowing how each of us assumes that what is seen of him by others is not what he knows to be the truth but a mask, I felt a sudden terror that the whole of me was about to be laid bare. Whatever adjunct of our persons it is that maintains this demeanour, it was slowly leaving me, I realized that now.<sup>85</sup>

He realizes that the impending affair with the client is unavoidable or he just does not want to avoid it, he does not want to pretend to be something he is not just for the sake of his family or society in general.

He sees his mother on the train but hides away so that she does not notice him. Here the usual disturbed father-son relationship typical for Jordan is replaced by a non-existent mother-son relationship, respectively father-daughter relationship. He does remember his childhood when everything was still “normal”, but something happened along the way, he grew up, and his visits “have become an embarrassment”<sup>86</sup> before they ceased completely. His relationship with his daughter does not seem to be ideal either, there are no activities they would do together, he is only occasionally there to say good night.

He comes home where his wife is having a dinner party, but he does not seem to fit in there and all he feels is embarrassment. Whether it is because the other couple know that his and Marianne’s marriage is falling apart or because he

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<sup>85</sup> *Collected* 324.

<sup>86</sup> *Collected* 326.

knows he could not possibly describe what is happening to him is not clear. That night though he does not share the bed with his wife but sleeps on the floor beside the bed. Before that he takes a bath and Matilde walks in on him, sleepwalking, having her “dreams of beasts”<sup>87</sup> and for the first time in the book there is a hint that the whole story might be just some kind of a dream: “Her eyes travelled down the length of this body that jutted in and out of water, that filled her dream, that perhaps even was her dream”.<sup>88</sup> The dreams then become more and more frequent and it starts to be less and less distinguishable which passages are dreams and which are happening when the narrator is awake. In the latter part of the book time is extremely condensed and the style is indeed dreamlike, and the final lines seem to indicate that it all really was just a bizarre dream, when the narrator kisses his wife in his dream, but than says: “I saw the globes of her eyes and in my visage reflected there saw something as human as surprise”,<sup>89</sup> which gives the feeling of waking up to a kiss.

On the morning of the day when he is supposed to meet with his client Marianne reproaches him for his behaviour, which means he has either done it before or she feels some kind of a foreboding of the things to come. She asks him in tears how he could do this to her, and when she watches him leave she looks at him with “anger, pity, love and hate”.<sup>90</sup> Nothing can prevent the inevitable from happening though so the narrator meets the woman in the zoo and makes love to her. She seems to understand what is happening to him and he describes to her

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<sup>87</sup> *Collected* 332.

<sup>88</sup> *Collected* 332.

<sup>89</sup> *Collected* 394.

<sup>90</sup> *Collected* 334.

how his sensitivity to the outer world increases, how his imagination grows. They walk through the zoo and they see the cast off skins of reptiles. The narrator observes how wise it is to “cast off a surface with each new season”.<sup>91</sup> This connects with Neil Jordan’s theory which appears in many of his works, especially in *Sunrise with Sea Monster* – we trap ourselves in social constructs, we create a fictional self and we are bound by it, it prevents us from being free. We are not able to cast off this mask unless we are ready to face the angry society and possible ostracism. Jordan often shows people who are “different” from the norm, who have tendencies which are unacceptable or deemed immoral and disgusting – there is the transsexual Dill in *The Crying Game*, the incestuous relationship between Nina and Gregory in *The Shade*, Donal whose lover is his stepmother and the list goes on.

When he comes back home reality merges again with dreams, he sees himself locked in the bedroom with mould covering it, symbolizing maybe his moral decay. In the end he feels he cannot stay anymore and leaves the house. Once outside, he does not feel guilt anymore, he starts exploring his imagination and with the help of a little boy who he encounters on top of a mysterious edifice located somewhere in the heart of Dublin he realizes he is changing into something beautiful rather than something horrible.

The epigraph to *The Dream of a Beast* “Kill not the Moth nor Butterfly / For the last Judgement draweth nigh”<sup>92</sup> is taken from William Blake’s “Auguries of Innocence” and Jordan seems to use Blake’s imagery throughout the book, especially in the

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<sup>91</sup> *Collected* 341.

<sup>92</sup> *Collected* 305.

latter part when the protagonist encounters the talking bat who teaches him about desire and tells him: “To fly clearly you must learn pure desire, a desire that has no object. Any attachment to things of the world leaves you earthly bound once more”.<sup>93</sup> This seems to mirror one of Blake’s “Proverbs of Hell” - “He who desires but acts not breeds pestilence”.<sup>94</sup> Jordan seems to agree with Blake’s views in the field of “free love” and joy and also condemns anything that prevents a person from living his or her life to the fullest – Blake often criticized the church, Jordan aims more at society in general. Another of the proverbs which seem to fit into Jordan’s scheme is “The soul of sweet delight can never be defil’d”.<sup>95</sup> The narrator feels a joy which he cannot describe and even though he knows the majority would not agree he feels deep inside that it must be right.

Neil Murphy has summed up the novel’s plot as follows: “The novel tells of an awakening of imagination and the relationship between reality and the narrator’s perception is radically renegotiated”.<sup>96</sup> The key word here is perception and Jordan again seems to be borrowing some of Blake’s ideas, again from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, this time from “The Memorable Fancy”, where Blake uses the famous lines “If the doors of perception were cleansed, every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees things thro’ narrow chinks of his cavern”.<sup>97</sup> These “chinks” are getting wider and wider for the protagonist as he sheds all the things that were preventing him from being who he wants to be

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<sup>93</sup> *Collected* 378.

<sup>94</sup> William Blake, *Poems* (London: Everyman’s Library, 1994) 184.

<sup>95</sup> Blake 186.

<sup>96</sup> Murphy 211.

<sup>97</sup> Blake 191.

or can be – he leaves his family, his job, and finally sheds even the bandages that he used to hide his changing body.

There are also many literal doors in the novella, doors that are being slammed in front of the narrator when he is still in the family house, and later doors that he opens himself when he explores the edifice or figuratively his consciousness. The doors can also symbolize the options one has in life and it is implied that the only thing preventing us from opening them is our own fear of something unknown. On the other hand, the narrator admits that since we do not understand what patterns we are following in life and we do not know the future, choosing from those options is extremely hard. He thinks there must be a “law” which governs our lives, some higher principle, maybe destiny, which we are not masters of: “So law, if law there was, revealed itself in retrospect, like a sad bride coming to her wedding too late to partake in it”.<sup>98</sup> The narrator’s colleague from work, Morgan, muses about the unfairness of life as well: “Is it fair...to have given us the memory of what was and the desire of what could be when we must suffer what is?”.<sup>99</sup>

Another one of Blake’s ideas suggests that “the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul is to be expunged”<sup>100</sup> and this is what Jordan is following, when the narrator changes inside it has to be mirrored by outside changes, because body and soul are one and cannot therefore be considered separately. When the body cannot be changed in accordance to the soul it brings unhappiness, as exemplified on Dil in *The Crying Game*, who is a woman inside but cannot escape her male body and therefore cannot achieve fulfilment.

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<sup>98</sup> *Collected* 372.

<sup>99</sup> *Collected* 382.

<sup>100</sup> Blake 191.

There is another similarity between *The Dream of a Beast* and *The Crying Game*. When living in the edifice, the narrator reunites with his lover, who for some time accepts him for who he is. This acceptance, however, is not complete, and when she wakes up one night in his arms, she says: “It’s the night, you’re different ... I can’t help my fear”<sup>101</sup> and she runs away. Dill in *The Crying Game* is different in the night as well, and even though Fergus accepts her during the day or while she still has her “mask” on, he is not able to accept her fully and is frightened as well when she reveals her male body to him. Even though he does not abandon her like the unnamed woman abandons the narrator, he does not give her what she wants – his unconditional love and his approval of who she is.

During my research I have come across two scholars who have brought up the idea that the protagonist’s change into a beast is a symbol for the crisis of his masculinity – Harvey O’Brien and Lori Rodgers. O’Brien suggests that Jordan follows the Cartesian argument “that reason is the (masculine) value which sets mankind above beasts”.<sup>102</sup> It is the world of reason that disintegrates for the narrator, when a classic male desire to control and possess clashes with the modern concept of life. The males’ classic providing position changed and as O’Brien puts it “Their bodies alter, reflecting the state of patriarchal anxiety”.<sup>103</sup> Here the narrator turns into a beast, in Jordan’s cinematic work men transform into wolves and vampires. Men at the end of the twentieth century no longer know how to define their

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<sup>101</sup> *Collected* 372.

<sup>102</sup> Harvey O’Brien, “Local Man, Global Man: Masculinity in Transformation in the Horror/Fantasy of Neil Jordan”, *Global Ireland – Irish Literatures for the New Millennium*, ed. Ondřej Pilný and Clare Wallace (Prague: Literaria Pragensia, 2005) 122.

<sup>103</sup> O’Brien 124.

masculinity, what it means to be a man in a world where women want to delete the boundaries between male and female and want to use the neutral concept of human beings.

Lori Rogers takes this idea even further in the already mentioned study *Feminine Nation*. She suggests that the narrator has many traditional feminine qualities, he has a creative job, he said he was never good at math, could not fill out tax-forms properly,<sup>104</sup> he is passive, too sensitive and his wife seems to have the upper hand in the household. So Rogers offers a feminist view:

As he can no longer be a traditional man and he is no longer allowed to become a woman, he is forced to go outside the two traditional human forms and become something neither male nor female – so he becomes a beast.<sup>105</sup>

She suggests that the physical mutation might be a metaphor for his recognition of his femininity in which case his wife is not repelled by him because he changes into something beastly but rather because he is simply not masculine enough.<sup>106</sup>

Rogers concentrates on another aspect of the novella in a less feminist essay called “In Dreams Uncover’d: Neil Jordan, *The Dream of a Beast* and the Body-secret”. She points out that in many of Jordan’s works “the trope of difference” is represented by “the location of the secret within the body”.<sup>107</sup> Apart from the *Beast’s* unnamed narrator and Dill who I already mentioned she

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<sup>104</sup> *Collected* 308.

<sup>105</sup> Rogers 108.

<sup>106</sup> see Rogers 110.

<sup>107</sup> Lori Rogers, “In Dreams Uncover’d: Neil Jordan, *The Dream of a Beast* and the Body-secret”, *Critique* Fall 1997: 48+. *Literature Online*. Palacký University, Olomouc, CZ. 8 Feb. 2008 <<http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk>>.

also names Rene from *The Past*, whose pregnancy again makes her in a way different and she does try to disguise it. She also highlights that the narrator's "body-secret" does not unduly alarm him, it only causes him to be ashamed when he sees the terror in the eyes of others.<sup>108</sup>

The ending of the book is ambiguous. I mentioned one of the possibilities above – it might all been a dream as the narrator sees his human reflection in Marianne's eyes as she wakes him up in the morning. There is another, much more pessimistic interpretation though. In the final pages all hope seems to be leaving the world and the protagonist. First he sees the bat, who taught him to fly through pure desire, being swallowed by an enormous fish. The irony is that he watched him earlier swallow a moth so mercilessly and now there is a bigger creature swallowing him. This seems to give a warning to us humans thinking that we rule the universe, yet we can never be sure how long this reign is going to last. This is supported by the epigraph I mentioned earlier about the last judgment, which could be interpreted either individually, none of us knows how much time is left for them in this world, or generally, humankind cannot know what is in store for them.

Indeed, the final pages indicate that there has been some lethal explosion, the days and nights no longer differ, and the boy, who is with the narrator, is dying, and the narrator somehow "assumes" him into himself.<sup>109</sup> This would support Lori Roger's theory about the differences between men and women vanishing. He encounters a woman who he later recognizes as his wife Marianne, and who bears inside her their daughter Matilde.

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<sup>108</sup> Rogers, "In Dreams" 49.

<sup>109</sup> *Collected* 391.

Marianne is at this stage a beast herself, it seems that all human beings are either dead or they have mutated into beasts. Jordan seems to be trying to convince us that the humankind has to change its perception of things and abandon the old definitions of “normality” and “deviation” to be able to survive.

They consequently wander through the apocalyptic countryside and they reach a signpost reading “HOPE ETERNAL”, but “the arrow had wound itself into a circle...the point of which pressed into its rear”.<sup>110</sup> Thus the book ends, with the narrator and Marianne kissing yet having no hope whatsoever.

*The Dream of a Beast* is Jordan’s response to the postmodern crisis of identity and masculinity. I hope that I have demonstrated how Jordan tackles these problems with the help of the metaphor of metamorphosis. I also tried to introduce different interpretations of this metamorphosis with the help of scholarly studies published about this novella up to date.

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<sup>110</sup> *Collected* 393.

## **6. *Sunrise with Sea Monster***

In *Sunrise with Sea Monster*, the father-son relationship becomes a central concern. It will be, therefore, my main focus in this chapter. I will look at the problem of (the lack of) communication between the father and son and also examine the rare moments where communication is unnecessary. I will also explore Jordan's use of the magic or unrealistic towards the end of the book.

The novel tells the story of Donal Gore whose father was part of the IRA and whose mother died when he was only five. When he is in his mid teens, a young girl, Rose, starts coming into the house to give him piano lessons. Both Donal and his father Sam fall in love with her, Donal has a brief sexual relationship with her but it is Sam who ends up proposing to her and she accepts. After that, Donal does not want to stay in the house any longer and leaves for Spain to fight against fascism, an act that he knows would hurt his father. When he returns, he finds his father paralyzed and speechless after a stroke and Rose taking care of him. Rose and Donal rekindle their old flame but Sam's mystical disappearance into the sea puts an end to everything. The story is told from Donal's perspective, he is held captive in a Spanish prison for about half of the book, which creates two timelines – the actual time when he is in the prison and later back home and then the past which he recollects. Even though politics plays a part in the book, it is a very insignificant one in my opinion, it only creates a background for the story, so I am not going to deal with it in detail, unless it is related to the main theme – the conflict between father and son.

Neil Jordan has commented on the book:

It's a very different book from my others. It's more straightforward, has a kind of stripped down style which has come from making films, from telling stories where the narrative is prominent.<sup>111</sup>

Indeed, there was an eleven-year gap between the publications of *The Dream of a Beast* and *Sunrise with Sea Monster*, and the books could not be more different, in style and in themes. Jordan became a famous film director during those eleven years, he won an Oscar for *The Crying Game* in 1993, and it was a surprise that he returned back to fiction. He said about *The Dream of a Beast* that it was first intended to be a screenplay because it is very rich visually but he had no doubts about *Sunrise with Sea Monster* being a novel: "The obsessional point of view, the solipsistic nature of the whole thing makes it a novel to me".<sup>112</sup> Indeed, some critics have reproached Jordan for the "cinematic" nature of his fiction, for his novels being too descriptive. *Sunrise with Sea Monster* is different and for the first and only time it contains real dialogue, not just never-ending monologues where one character retells the stories of the past to another like in *The Past* or later in *Shade*.

Another atypical occurrence happens in *Sunrise with Sea Monster* – the reader is not introduced into a family where the mother is already gone and it is not dealt with when and how she disappeared – here the mother is dying at the beginning of the book, which gives the reader some more insight into yet another

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<sup>111</sup> Brace par. 3.

<sup>112</sup> Brace par. 5.

motherless family. Even though Donal's memory of his mother is "uncertain",<sup>113</sup> what he remembers is intimacy of a kind - him climbing up to her sick bed, snuggling in, and her telling him stories about herself and his father, what he was like when he was young and fighting for the IRA.

Intimacy is something he is not used to at all with his father, who does not want to speak to Donal about his past. The only time when they connect is when there is no need for speech, when they are laying nightlines, which was a ritual for them, something they did together as a father and son. Donal describes that the main pleasure is "the evening walk with the hooks swinging between both participants",<sup>114</sup> meaning he is actually physically connected to his father at that moment with the metal line between them. Outside of these fleeting moments their communication was difficult so the time spent on the beach filled them with unaccustomed ease, it provided them "respite from the many gradations of awkward speech, and more awkward silences".<sup>115</sup>

After Donal's mother died, the house was filled with silence. Sam refused to even mention her, so Donal was trying to find his way back to her, remembering she used to play the piano when her illness still allowed it. He tried playing it a couple of times until his father heard him and decided to hire a piano teacher for him. Rose de Vrai comes into the house symbolically in spring and she brings with her a breath of fresh air into the dusty silent atmosphere of the house. Donal watches her when she walks towards the house for the first time along the sea laughing at the seawater hitting her legs, and then entering the house all wet but

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<sup>113</sup> Neil Jordan, *Sunrise with Sea Monster* (London: John Murray, 2004) 4.

<sup>114</sup> *Sunrise* 60.

<sup>115</sup> *Sunrise* 3.

cheerful. And he knew then something changed: “I became aware, slowly, that some new principle had entered the household, some new element that made me apprehensive and excitable all at once”.<sup>116</sup> Donal was only fourteen at the time, Rose nineteen, and Sam twice the age of Rose.

For a while everything seemed almost idyllic, Rose would come to the house regularly and bring her youthfulness with her. Donal remembers it as follows:

They were the happiest days, looking back on it, me, him and her, twice a week. He [Sam] took to coming home early on the days of her lessons. He would ask about our progress, hold her coat for her as she went to the door, sometimes walk her to the station.<sup>117</sup>

Donal felt like Rose “completed the house”<sup>118</sup> but he also had undeniable erotic feelings for her, even though he said he “could not call [it] desire”.<sup>119</sup> He was happy that he had something in common with the father again and that Sam had somebody to cheer him up.

In the meantime Donal explores his awakening sexuality with his friend Mouse, when he shows Donal what courtship looks like. Even though Donal says “The thought of his [Sam’s] lips on hers [Rose’s] made me feel sadder than I had ever felt”<sup>120</sup> he on the other hand finds pleasure in Mouse touching his hand. Their little erotic game continues later when Mouse plays the

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<sup>116</sup> *Sunrise* 28.

<sup>117</sup> *Sunrise* 31.

<sup>118</sup> *Sunrise* 31.

<sup>119</sup> *Sunrise* 31.

<sup>120</sup> *Sunrise* 32.

wise one and explains and shows to Donal what he thinks is going on or what might be going on between Sam and Rose:

We'd kiss and go through the inventory of gestures men went through with women. It was fine to imagine Mouse as her and him as me and I'd scour the roof off his mouth with my tongue to keep sadness at bay.<sup>121</sup>

It would be easy to dismiss those homoerotic images as child play but they recur in the book, when Donal is a young adult imprisoned in Spain, the officer who helps him to get out is clearly motivated by physical attraction and Mouse also does not exactly lose his feelings for Donal. These advances always come from the other side however and Donal is a passive receiver, on the other hand he never pushes Mouse away.

When it comes to Rose though the advances are all on his part. It is he who first grabs her hand and begs her to stay after she realizes there is nothing more to teach him, at least as far as the piano is concerned. It is his finger which touches her leg as she plays for him. But it is her who does not forbid those suggestions. Once Donal gets what he wanted and they make love to the sound of Rachmaninov's concert, Rose changes completely. She only allows it to happen that one time because she realizes then what is at stake. She comes from a poor family from the western coast, has many siblings and lives in a hostel in Dublin. She needs what Donal's father has to offer and it seems that she has always had that in mind, only Sam's political engagement forcing him to spend most of the time outside the house made her stray from her path.

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<sup>121</sup> *Sunrise* 35.

Sam and Rose start spending time together again and Donal is devastated, he responds to the situation with more silence and a new-born hatred towards his father, which escalates when Sam proposed to Rose. Donal realizes he cannot take it anymore and decides to go to Spain to fight against fascism. He told Mouse:

If I stayed what would I do? Stay in that house where everything is intimidated, nothing ever said. Wait for that wedding which neither of them will mention. ... You know I can't live here...<sup>122</sup>

Sam wants to persuade Donal to stay: "You don't choose conflict, war and hate and all that, it chooses you" (18), but it is just another unfinished conversation between them with Donal walking off. His father sees the real reason behind Donal's intention to leave:

You are leaving because you hate me, not because of any nebulous political ideas. ... And you think you hate me because of her, but in fact you hate me because I am simply me, your father. Please, get your hatreds in perspective otherwise you'll never – and he stopped there, as if he couldn't finish. Never what? I asked. But he said nothing else, so I went.<sup>123</sup>

Donal consequently leaves, but the reader does not find out much about what he did in Spain except the fact that he ended up in prison and was close to death when every day one of his fellow prisoners was shot. When he is offered a way out, he

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<sup>122</sup> *Sunrise* 19.

<sup>123</sup> *Sunrise* 57-8.

automatically presumes it is his father who tries to get him out (only to find out later it was Rose) and refuses his help. He gets out anyway, with help of a German officer called Hans.

Donal comes back and to his utmost shock finds his father paralyzed and unable to speak. He is told that Sam had a stroke the same week when Donal left for Spain, meaning he was probably the cause. Donal says he does not know what he did and that he hopes his leaving had nothing to do with Sam's condition<sup>124</sup> but it is obvious he is lying to himself. He tells Sam that he was thinking about him often in Spain<sup>125</sup> but really in Spain he was still full of hatred towards him. It is the sight of his father in the wheelchair that brings the regret for all these years when they could share a unique father and son relationship but did not.

Neil Jordan has commented on his father's death and what it meant for him: "My father died in 1984 and the shocking thing to me about the experience of death was the conversation that was ended, that wasn't concluded, but just stopped".<sup>126</sup> The conversations between Donal and his father were always one sided, interrupted and left unfinished. There was always the possibility though that one day they would get over this awkward stage which lasted for so many years, that Donal would mature into a man and make an effort to understand his father's actions and they would find an intimacy appropriate for a father and son. When Donal returned home, even though his father was still alive the possibility of a better future for them died.

Donal takes his father for walks along the beach and talks to him for the first time in his life, even though he knows he

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<sup>124</sup> see *Sunrise* 84-5.

<sup>125</sup> see *Sunrise* 84.

<sup>126</sup> Brace par. 8.

cannot answer, but that is exactly what makes it easy for Donal to express himself: "... it was only his infirmity that allowed me approach him without embarrassment, circumspection, and all of those awkwardnesses that made us what we were".<sup>127</sup> He even contemplates that maybe Sam is able to speak, but does not want to: "Maybe he has chosen silence ... The world being so unspeakable, he would rather be mute. This condition was a blessing he would have desired".<sup>128</sup>

Donal and Rose gradually rekindle their relationship, this time as adults, and they in a way take on the role of the parents for Sam, who needs to be taken care of. Donal makes money from fishing and their situation is almost idyllic, especially given the fact that the Second World War rages in England and Europe. As Donal puts it, they were "outside of time, of the ferocious time that waged round the continent beyond us".<sup>129</sup> Rose once again became the connecting element between the father and the son: "She was between us like a glue, it seemed, like the fringe of mist that sat on the horizon, merging the sea with the sky, merging the present and past into a continuous wave".<sup>130</sup>

Donal says he feels no guilt whatsoever about having an intimate relationship with his father's wife in front of his father's eyes<sup>131</sup> but it seems to be because he really starts mistaking his father for a child who does not know or understand what is going on. One day he finds out that nothing is the way it seems to be. In an extremely intense and memorable scene his father comes out of his lethargy and with utmost effort spells the words "kill me" into the sugar spilled on the table. Donal realizes then that

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<sup>127</sup> *Sunrise* 99.

<sup>128</sup> *Sunrise* 99.

<sup>129</sup> *Sunrise* 109.

<sup>130</sup> *Sunrise* 123.

<sup>131</sup> see *Sunrise* 125.

his father sees everything that is going on and how much pain it must be causing him. However, he cannot bring himself to regret what happened between him and Rose. Rose, to his surprise, is now filled with the hatred Donal once felt for his father and cannot bear the situation anymore and simply says to obey his wish.

After this event the peacefulness that temporarily filled the house vanishes and a quiet desperation descends upon it again. Donal gets involved in a conspiracy and has to go to the west coast to meet his old acquaintance Hans. To be less suspicious he decides to take his “family” with him. Rose gets very excited at the prospect of breaking the routine and they both have some vague hope that this trip might somehow help Sam. The west of Ireland has always been considered somehow purer than the rest of the country and this is not the only time in Jordan’s work where the characters head west to escape the fate that is prepared for them in the east. Their destination is Lisdoonvarna, a town that appears in *The Past* as well. They take Sam into a mystical place where a blind boy washes him with supposedly healing water but it does not seem to work.

That same night Donal has to fulfil his mission and meet Hans on the local beach. He takes Sam with him, has to leave him alone for a while and when he comes back the wheelchair is empty. His disappearance created a silence between Donal and Rose that was absolute. Even though Rose felt before that Sam was a burden she could not go on living with Donal knowing that she somehow failed Sam. Donal seems to be at peace with the situation. As a boy he pictured his mother leaving to the sea after her death and now he is convinced that Sam just got off his wheelchair and walked in the sea to join his wife. The sea, the

only peaceful place in the novel and the symbol of the eternal, brings peace to Sam for the first time in years. Jordan has elaborated on the recurrence of the sea in his fiction:

[often in my fiction] I could only ever come to a conclusion if I somehow managed to get the characters into water, an element that was bigger than themselves. I thought it was a beautiful thing. The line of the horizon is one of the few lines in nature which seems perfectly straight. And the sea is a kind of place which unites memory with the present.<sup>132</sup>

In *Sunrise with Sea Monster* the sea has to help one more time to reunite Donal with his father. Donal lacks the feeling of closure and decides to take out the nightlines one more time hoping the father will once again be at the other end of the line. It first seems that the sea is out of reach this time as he walks further and further from the promenade and the tide seems to retreat with his every step. “I have fallen out of time, I thought, where distances have lost all depth and this walk could continue forever”.<sup>133</sup> At last Donal plants the nightlines and when he looks around he experiences the magic of that night – the moon high up in the sky, his childhood house in the distance and he realizes that that particular place would always be part of him.

In the morning he goes to collect his catch. When he checks the nightlines, he finds much more than he expected:

... I saw something else emerge from the water behind it ... The trousers on this figure were rolled up around the calves, the

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<sup>132</sup> Brace par. 18.

<sup>133</sup> *Sunrise* 173.

bony, ancient feet splashing the water, the head bent down as if looking for periwinkles. Then he looked up at me and walked forwards, the beard and the grey hair fringed by the sun behind him.<sup>134</sup>

The sea gives Donal and Sam the opportunity to connect one more time as they used to in its presence. As always, they pull out the nightlines in silence and walk towards the house.

There was an unfamiliar fish on the line, a mystical creature with a curved horn on its forehead. Donal decides to cook this one for himself and Sam. They had not spoken until they tasted the meat of the fish, and they ate it together with one fork, as if it was some ancient ritual. Neil Murphy suggests that this fish is the symbolical fish of knowledge/wisdom known from the Irish pagan mythology that enables those who eat it to understand the past and the future.<sup>135</sup> It enables Sam and Donal to finally communicate. Sam explains that he has been walking through the sea and talking to Donal, since the sea was the element that gave voice to all they never said.<sup>136</sup> He talks about Donal's mother and about Rose, about his good intentions that were misunderstood.

Again the idea of the individual perception of time is highlighted: "We were there in a continual present, until there were no mysteries left".<sup>137</sup> The novel reaches its philosophical climax when Sam tries to articulate how people make their own lives unnecessarily difficult:

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<sup>134</sup> *Sunrise* 175.

<sup>135</sup> see Murphy 221.

<sup>136</sup> see *Sunrise* 178.

<sup>137</sup> see *Sunrise* 181.

We are born out of accident and out of accident we imagine is created the necessary, the indomitable self, which, if we only knew it, could change in a minute with our intervention. But we fill our years with the business of that self, with the way it walks down the promenade, takes a black car to work, the way it sits at the green baize table, fills the world with what it thinks is purpose, till the range of possibilities has narrowed to the ones just that self wants. And death is the realization of all those lost possibilities in the life we have left. You see each of them as you walk, you see how if any one of them had been grasped, things could have been different.<sup>138</sup>

Jordan suggests that we invent a self for ourselves and we get enslaved by it because it brings with itself many limitations. We create a fictional self and it is precisely this that leads to our problems with communication and to the isolation of private selves. Murphy thinks that Jordan implies that the solution to this problem is to achieve a “fluidity of self”.<sup>139</sup> The idea thus formulated is interesting and seems to recur in Jordan’s fiction, I pointed out earlier that in *The Past* at certain moments the characters of Luke and his father are interchangeable, and the same concept occurs to a degree in *Shade*, where the characters even have similar names, George and Gregory, and again the central female character, Nina, is in love with them both, as if they were two reflections of the same person.

When Sam says everything he has to say they get the nightlines again and walk towards the beach, and Sam disappears again into the sea, followed by Donal’s mother.

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<sup>138</sup> *Sunrise* 181.

<sup>139</sup> Murphy 223.

Jordan comes to the conclusion of his novel with the help of the ever changeable yet eternal element of water and some use of magic. Murphy offers his view on why Jordan used this twist from reality:

The magic in *Sunrise and Sea Monster* serves not only to act as a metaphor for how the imagination creates its own meaning but also facilitates Jordan's attempt to articulate the inaudible, almost mystical, union between Donal and his father because of their love of the sea.<sup>140</sup>

Murphy fails to mention the fact that this magical imagination of Donal's might have been stimulated by the whiskey he got used to drinking during his lonely evenings, so even though the ending is as peaceful as can be for those already gone from the physical world, Donal's life is not quite as happy. Jordan is definitely not one to favour happy endings, so even though Donal's parents supposedly inhabit the sea outside his windows in Bray thus staying close to him forever, his only love is living on the other side of the country in Sligo and what remains for him is the doomed house, as silent as ever.

In this chapter I looked at Jordan's novel *Sunrise with Sea Monster*. I paid special attention to the father-son relationship explored there and the love triangle which made the relationship even more difficult. I hope I demonstrated how Jordan uses the sea as a connecting element between the father and the son and also as a source of mystery.

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<sup>140</sup> Murphy 217.

## 7. *Shade*

In this chapter I will discuss *Shade*. I will, once again, pay special attention to topics which connect this novel to the rest of Jordan's work, in *Shade* it is the nature of acting, forbidden love and the intricacy of the concept of linear time. I also want to find out what sets *Shade* apart from Jordan's other fiction.

*Shade* is Neil Jordan's latest novel, published in 2004. There was an eleven-year gap between *The Dream of a Beast* and *Sunrise with Sea Monster*, and a ten-year gap between that and *Shade*. Jordan has commented on this in an interview, saying it took him about eighteen months to write the novel and his answer to the question why he returned to fiction after making films that had been so successful was as follows: "I wrote the book because I had been promising to myself to write a book for a long time".<sup>141</sup> This again proves that fiction for Jordan is something personal, something he does not do for commercial success or critical acclaim but rather for himself.

*Shade* certainly has some personal aspects to it – the setting is the Boyne River estuary, near Mornington, where Jordan's mother grew up, and the protagonist's father is a painter who earns his living as a fisherman, as Jordan's grandfather was. Jordan gives these facts in the acknowledgements at the end of the book saying they provided him with "some kind of an imaginative template".<sup>142</sup> He also provides a list of books which he used while writing the novel – they range from geographical studies about the Boyne River

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<sup>141</sup> Hannah Eaves, "The Chameleon's Journey: An Interview with Neil Jordan", 15 Feb. 2008 <<http://www.popmatters.com/film/interviews/jordan-neil-060119.shtml>>

<sup>142</sup> Neil Jordan, *Shade* (Dublin: Hoddler Headline Ireland, 2005) 319.

estuary area and books of reminiscence by people who lived in the area to documentary books about the Irish involved in the Great War (two of the characters are involved too). It seems that he studied meticulously to ensure the accuracy of used facts, but *Shade* is not a historical book, it is once again filled with Jordan's imagination and fantastic elements.

The sense of place is very strong throughout the novel, the Boyne River estuary is described to the smallest details, such as sea shells crunching beneath the children's feet. Jordan explained why he used this specific setting: "[an estuary] is like a graveyard: it becomes a repository of remains and shells and bones and fish bones".<sup>143</sup> The river, or its immediate vicinity, indeed becomes a graveyard for many throughout the book.

The time period in which the action takes place is roughly the first fifty years of the twentieth century, ending in 1950, the year Jordan was born. Thus *The Dream of a Beast* remains the only book that is set in contemporary Ireland (not at all realistic contemporary Ireland though), the rest of them all take place in the past. The main story line is recounted more or less chronologically, but there is again more than one timeline. One timeline is the life story of the protagonist, Nina Hardy. The other is the events leading up to her funeral after she was murdered, which interrupt the main narrative.

The book opens and closes with the same passage, a passage describing Nina's murder. At the beginning of the book she recounts this event herself, at the end it is told in third person singular, but apart from the different pronouns the paragraph is the same word for word. Thus from the beginning of

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<sup>143</sup> Geraldine Bedell, "Back to His Old Haunts", *The Observer* 9 May 2004, 26 Apr. 2008 < <http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/generalfiction/story/0,,1212343,00.html>>.

the book the reader is aware that the protagonist is dead and how she died, even who killed her, yet why she was killed remains undisclosed until the very end of the book.

Typically for Jordan there are multiple points of view. Most of the book is narrated by Nina herself, or rather by her ghost, her shade, yet there are parts narrated by Nina's childhood friend, Janie and her half brother, Gregory, when they reminisce after finding out that Nina is dead. These passages enable the reader further understanding of the relationships existing between the characters because they fill in facts that Nina chose to ignore in her narrative, such as Janie being in love with Gregory.

After being killed, Nina, or rather Nina's ghost, introduces herself as the narrator:

Time ended for me then, but nothing else did. I can't explain that fact, merely marvel at the narrative that unravels, the most impossible and yet the commonest in the books I read in that house as a child. The narrator for whom past, present and to some extent the future are the same, who flips between them with inhuman ease.<sup>144</sup>

It is apparent from this quote that Jordan will once again deal with the concept of time in this novel, will question how to define the past. What Nina means by "the most impossible and yet the commonest" becomes clear after finishing the book – the novel is a story of forbidden love, of unrequited love, of passion that has a disastrous effect. Jordan's conception of these common themes is far from common though.

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<sup>144</sup> *Shade* 4.

The first part of the book starts when Nina is seven years old. She lives in a big mansion with her parents whose marriage is once again unhappy and the house is filled with loneliness. She realizes how lonely the house is when she visits her much poorer friends, Jeanie and her mentally challenged brother George, in their humble home, and feels it is filled with love and happiness.<sup>145</sup> She is so lonely that her parents think that she invented an imaginary friend, but Jordan wants the reader to believe that this friend is no one else but Nina's ghost, Nina herself in adult age dressed in the clothes she wore just before she was murdered. The ghost is always there, and it seems only Nina can see her, even though she is not aware of the fact that it is herself at an older age.

The parents hire a governess to keep Nina company, a Miss Shawcross. Jordan uses her as yet another example of people wearing masks for the society to accept them. When with Nina, Miss Shawcross is very strict, telling her horrible stories of what happens to little girls who refuse to give up their imaginary friends and whose behaviour is in general unacceptable. When she goes out in her free time though she changes completely, gets extremely drunk and has sex with a strange man, and in the end accidentally drowns. Jordan shows how society forces people to be someone they are not and thereby destroys their lives.

Nina's loneliness is finally dispelled by the arrival of her half brother Gregory, her father's son from a previous relationship. He comes to the house when Nina is nine years old, he is ten. Nina's parents' marriage seems to be doomed since her mother sees an intruder in Gregory and refuses to accept him. Thus Gregory is another of the series of motherless boys

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<sup>145</sup> see *Shade* 66.

appearing in Jordan's fiction, but the *Shade* is not another father-son relationship story.

Nina's relationship with Gregory is pathological from the start. She has been alone for so long that she immediately accepts him as her other half, as something that has been missing all along. She soon includes him in their seemingly childish games including kisses, which have been up till then the privilege of George, who has feelings for Nina. As the four children grow up this love triangle, or rather love square, develops. Nina is in love with Gregory, so is Janie, and George is in love with Nina. Gregory's feelings are less clear. Although he seems to reciprocate Nina's feelings, he also says he would never be able to give her the love George can. It is unclear at first what he means by that but at the time of Nina's funeral he is in a homosexual relationship, and throughout the book there are hints that maybe he had feelings for George, especially when he tries so desperately to save him when they fight together in World War One.

In 1914 they all graduate from high school and Nina desperately clings to the remains of her childhood, knowing that becoming an adult would only complicate matters further: "If any of us grows up it will be irrevocably tragic".<sup>146</sup> She is trying to resist her feelings for Gregory, scolding him when he calls her "love", saying "it is not allowed".<sup>147</sup> When they organise a performance of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, Nina is Rosalind, Gregory Orlando and George Touchstone. When Gregory tells Nina that George is "smitten" by her, she refuses to accept it, saying "a Touchstone smitten by a Rosalind is a dramatic

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<sup>146</sup> *Shade* 171.

<sup>147</sup> *Shade* 176.

absurdity”<sup>148</sup> to which Gregory replies: “In a comedy. Maybe not in a tragedy”<sup>149</sup> and the sense of foreboding is only strengthened by that. Especially when Nina retorts: “Tragedy or comedy, Rosalind still loves Orlando”.<sup>150</sup>

Even after openly admitting her feelings for Gregory, Nina fights this forbidden love by starting a sexual relationship with George. The inevitable happens though. One night Gregory comes instead of George to the barn where Nina and George normally meet up. Nina pretends that Gregory is George: “This other George walked towards me... Gregory needed to be George tonight, needed to be all George has been”<sup>151</sup> and Gregory accepts her game. She tells him she does not want to see his face so that she can imagine he is Gregory.

Shortly after this both Gregory and George leave for the continent to fight in World War One and Nina finds out that she is pregnant. Her mother tells her she cannot keep the child, she assumes it is Gregory’s, even though it is unlikely, and is therefore even more outraged. In a truly memorable and haunting scene Nina buries the body of the foetus by the river and leaves the family home and never sees her parents again.

Jordan again returns to the idea that acting enables people to take on a different identity, to live as somebody else without having to deal with the pain and memories of the real person inside. Nina becomes an actress, both in theatre and the early films, and truly enjoys it. She feels that when acting she can abandon who she is and forget what happened. She describes the process in detail:

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<sup>148</sup> *Shade* 177.

<sup>149</sup> *Shade* 177.

<sup>150</sup> *Shade* 178.

<sup>151</sup> *Shade* 185.

I came to understand those primitive peoples who believed the camera ate the soul, and I wanted it to eat mine whole and entire. ... I wanted it to take my set of memories ... And the camera took them gladly, drew them into its plane of vision and demanded other memories of me, memories that left me quite unburdened, like a marionette twirling in an artificial clock, free but for the mechanism that moved her, and quite, quite empty.<sup>152</sup>

Thus Nina joins the other Jordan's characters whom art enables to escape from reality, Dil in *The Crying Game* and Rene in *The Past*. She is content to observe: "The real Nina Hardy was known to very few".<sup>153</sup> Jordan has always been pointing out that we all put on an act, we all pretend to be someone we are not, but only the actors brought this illusion to perfection.

Nina is reunited with Gregory, he becomes her manager. Their mutual feelings are still there, but Gregory starts getting involved in homosexual relationships and Nina shares her bed with her directors.

Jordan once again brings a real life figure into his fictional world. This time he chose George Bernard Shaw, who supposedly fell in love with Nina, kept sending her love letters and they even met. The boundaries between fiction and real world have always posed temptation to Jordan, Eamon de Valera was usually the one historical figure involved (as I mentioned earlier in *The Past* he had an affair with Rene's mother) and here Jordan wants the

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<sup>152</sup> *Shade* 257-8.

<sup>153</sup> *Shade* 291.

reader to believe that Nina was a real life actress whose life has been so unusually dramatic.

After the death of her parents Nina decides to return to her childhood home and gives George, whose mental condition worsened during the war, he returned to a child-like state and was in the end confined to a mental institution, the post of a gardener. This decision proves to be fatal. George, while gardening, discovers the bones of the foetus in the ground. She knows Nina buried it there because it is wrapped in a shawl with a pearl sewn into it, a pearl George gave her before going to war. The motivation for the murder is finally revealed, and the murder scene is repeated when George kills Nina with the gardening shears and buries her in the septic tank next to the river. Her body is never found.

Nina is a character with a horrible fate, Jordan, however, does not like to paint the world as black and white. Nina as a child and young adult was not a positive character. She was very manipulative, especially with George who she knew did not have the mental capacity to see through her games. She was the rich girl who thought it natural to be the leader of the group. She wished that Miss Shawcross would die and she did.

On the other hand, like most children in Jordan's fiction she was deprived of her parents' love. Her mother never showed her any affection, it is not explained why, possibly because after having her she could not have more children. When Nina was pregnant it was her husband's side her mother took, not her daughters, she made Nina get rid of the baby to save Nina's father from shame, even though she still hated him for bringing another woman's child into the house.

Nina's life is marked by several falls, both literal and metaphorical. She falls from the Maiden Tower by the river, and even though the fall itself did not cause any injuries, George, who jumps after her in a nonsensical attempt to save her does all the damage when he crushes her body. It is the first time when Jordan shows the tragic connection between those two. Another fall occurs when Nina and Gregory ride a horse together and when they fall from it and end up in each others arms the sense of the inevitability of their love affair is very strong. The last fall is the metaphorical fall from grace when Nina and Gregory yield to their passion in the barn.

Jordan makes extensive use of metaphor throughout the novel. When George loses a finger during the war and decides to bury it in the ground, it seems that he is burying the last remainder of his sanity with it. This scene is paralleled by Nina burying the foetus, thus both of them lose a part of themselves which they will not be able to recover.

Jordan also uses the local legends to enhance the atmosphere of foreboding. Nina's father tells the story of the birth of the river, about a beautiful girl named Boinn being drowned and it is paralleled with the corpse of Miss Shawcross floating in the river. Nina's accidental fall from the tower is also compared to a legend – the maiden who the tower is named after threw herself from the top of it when she realized her beloved is not coming back from a battle.

*Shade* is much darker than Jordan's other fiction, the reviewers even labelled it as a gothic novel, and indeed – there is an isolated house haunted by a ghost, there is incest and a dark

secret. Jordan mentioned the American South as an influence on this novel<sup>154</sup> with its big mansions and hidden secrets.

For those who would consider the book too dark and cruel to be “true” there is the option of accepting Jordan’s hints which lead to reader to the assumption that it is all somebody’s dream, similarly to *The Dream of a Beast* being a dream. At one point in the story Nina and Gregory see a sleeping abbot in a field and there is the idea that the two of them and the whole story might be merely his dream. The book even ends with the words “the bearded abbot, still sleeping, dreaming of them”.<sup>155</sup>Jordan does not, however, develop this idea consistently like he did in *The Dream of a Beast*, which makes the book even more devoid of hope than *Beast* was.

In this chapter I have explored the novel *Shade*. I hope I have demonstrated that Jordan revisits some of his familiar topics, the escape from real life that art offers and love affairs which are destined to remain unfulfilled, but he also fully developed the darker aspect that has always been present in his work.

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<sup>154</sup> See Eamon Delaney, “Irish Dreamer“, *Publishers Weekly* 22 Nov. 2004: 33. *Proquest 5000*. Palacký University, Olomouc, CZ. 8 Feb. 2008  
<<http://www.proquest.com/pqdauto>>

<sup>155</sup> *Shade* 317.

## **Conclusion**

The theme of this thesis has been the fictional works of Neil Jordan. My main aim has been to prove that Jordan's fictional achievement is no less significant than his films and that it would be a negligence to label him as solely a film director, because he indeed is a noteworthy writer. His low prolificity in the literary field should be no reason for dismissing him as a film director who writes in his spare time.

I included a chapter discussing the situation in contemporary Irish literature at the beginning of my thesis because I wanted to provide a general introduction into the problematic of Irish literature at the end of the twentieth century. I pointed out that the contemporary literary criticism does not pay enough attention to the prose works and Neil Jordan, who has not published any dramas or poems, might be affected by this. Furthermore I focused on the themes and tendencies present in the Irish literature in the 1980s and 1990s. I established that the most significant phenomenon is the emergence of voices that have been silenced before due to censorship. These marginalized voices open up previously taboo themes such as homosexuality, incest and child abuse. Other topics the contemporary authors deal with is the nations past but also life in the modernised Ireland of today.

Chapter 2 constitutes an outline of Jordan's life and career up to date. I concentrated on those biographical elements which can be said to appear in his fiction, be it the places he knew in his childhood which he later used as a background to his stories, or the relationship with his father, which haunts his work in many instances of fathers and sons who are unable to

communicate. I also included a chronological overview of his films and books to provide a time line of his career and to hint at the themes which he deals with in his films.

The subsequent chapters discuss Jordan's fiction, chronologically, book by book. I chose this approach because I wanted to follow the development of Jordan's ideas and their artistic expression. I have paid special attention to the themes that recur in Jordan's work but I have always tried to highlight the individual qualities of each book.

I started with Jordan's only short story collection, *Night in Tunisia*. I discovered a pattern within the collection and I divided the stories into two groups, coming-of-age stories and stories about people whose ordinary eventless lives drive them to desperation or ultimately suicide. This collection, however poetic at times, is also a dark pessimistic work, its darkness is, nonetheless, of a different kind than the one Jordan introduces the reader to in his last novel, *Shade*. It is more subtle, less obvious.

This is, in my opinion, a general tendency in Jordan's fiction. His early novels, *The Past* and *The Dream of a Beast*, are complicated, almost philosophical works, exploring the concepts of identity, human existence and the nature of time. His two latest novels, published in the last fifteen years, *Sunrise with Sea Monster* and *Shade*, are much simpler in style and more straightforward regarding the message that Jordan tries to get across. The theme of *Sunrise with Sea Monster* is a father and son relationship and a love triangle, and even though in the last pages of the book Jordan includes a monologue about the nature of self and the arbitrariness of human existence, he is not consistent about asserting this idea throughout the book.

*Shade*, despite spanning a period of fifty years similarly to *The Past*, does not possess Jordan's first novel's complicated structure, but I would not consider that a deficiency. It is, however, in a way a novel written seemingly to satisfy popular taste, it is a thriller of sorts, a story of a murder and forbidden love. I would not dismiss it as merely another crime story though because Jordan is a master of the English language and his literary style is of a very high standard, some reviews even criticised the novel for being "overwritten". He includes many references to other literary works for the more demanding reader and does remain faithful to one of his familiar themes when he muses about the nature of acting, putting on another identity.

What seems to be evident is that the straightforward style in which the film director Jordan communicates his ideas through the screen to the viewers has influenced the way in which the writer Jordan addresses the literary themes in his fiction. Whether that is a positive development or not is a matter for discussion, but his latest novel would definitely appeal to more readers than his first.

It has been my aim throughout the thesis to introduce Neil Jordan's fictional work in its complexity, to point out the themes that recur and their various treatments. I hope I have proved that Neil Jordan the writer deserves no less attention than Neil Jordan the film director and that scholars should amend the lack of critical studies dealing with his fiction.

## ***Czech Summary***

Tématem této diplomové práce je literární tvorba irského autora Neila Jordana. Vzhledem k tomu, že Jordan je známý především jako úspěšný filmový režisér a scénárista, hlavním úkolem práce je dokázat, že si jeho povídky a romány zaslouží přinejmenším stejnou pozornost jako jeho filmy, protože Jordan zdaleka není spisovatelem na poloviční úvazek, jak se mnozí domnívají.

Do své práce jsem se rozhodla zahrnout kapitolu o současné irské literatuře, přesněji irské literatuře osmdesátých a devadesátých let dvacátého století, tedy doby, kdy vycházela i Jordanova díla. Mým záměrem přitom nebylo poskytnout seznam významných autorů a děl, neboť k tomuto chybí dostatečný historický odstup. Mým cílem bylo nastínit situaci v irské próze, soustředit se především na všeobecné tendence spojené s koncem dvacátého století, identifikovat témata, kterými se současní autoři zabývají.

Irští autoři konce dvacátého století získali poprvé možnost psát otevřeně o všem, co bylo dříve tabuizováno, objevují se tedy náměty z oblasti sexuální, ale autoři, nebo spíše autorky, se také zabývají postavením ženy a tématem domácího násilí. Bouřlivá irská minulost, především Velikonoční povstání 1916, následující občanská válka a počáteční roky existence Irské republiky, je také častým tématem objevujícím se v dílech současných autorů, kteří na ni často nahlíží se značným skepticismem. Na druhou stranu současná situace v Irsku je také zobrazována s jistými rozpaky, autoři často poukazují na krizi identity a maskulinity.

Jak jsem se snažila upozornit, Jordan se některými z těchto témat zabývá také.

V následující kapitole jsem se zabývala životem Neila Jordana, a chtěla jsem také poskytnout chronologický přehled jeho díla, jak literárního, tak filmového. Jordan se narodil roku 1950 v hrabství Sligo na západním pobřeží Irska. Rodina se však přestěhovala do Dublinu, když byly Neilovi teprve dva roky. Neil pochází z umělecké rodiny, matka byla malířka a otec hudebník, ale také akademik. Otec byl přísný, nepřál si, aby se Neil stal spisovatelem, jako pravověrný katolík považoval živou představivost, která je pro spisovatele nezbytná, za něco nebezpečného. Jordanův komplikovaný vztah k otci byl inspirací pro mnoho postav otců a synů, kteří k sobě nejsou schopni najít cestu, objevujících se v jeho dílech.

Vzhledem k tomu, že byl Jordanův otec učitelem, trávil s ním Neil všechny letní prázdniny svých školních let v přímořských městečkách v okolí Dublinu. Tyto pobyty byly inspirací především pro Jordanovu povídkovou tvorbu, ve které se mimo jiné zabývá chlapci v pubertálním věku, kteří podobně jako on tráví léto u moře a zjišťují, že jejich dětství se pomalu vytrácí, ačkoliv oni ještě nejsou připraveni vstoupit do světa dospělých. Jordanův život byl vždy svázaný s mořem, v dospělosti si koupil dům v Bray, jedním z oněch přímořských městeček nedaleko Dublinu, které se stalo dějištěm dvou ze čtyř jeho románů.

Jordan studoval britskou literaturu a ranou irskou křesťanskou historii na University College v Dublinu. Studium literatury byl velmi zklamán, považoval za nemožné analyzovat literární díla pomocí všeobecných měřítek. Měl pocit, že vyučující nedávají studentům žádný prostor pro vyjádření pocitů, které

v nich dílo vyvolává, a právě toto Jordan vždy považoval za nejdůležitější. Naopak ranou irskou historií byl fascinován, neboť o tomto období existuje velice málo dokumentace, a tak byl Jordanově fantazii poskytnut téměř neomezený prostor. V rozhovorech poukazoval na to, že tak stará historie je vlastně určitou formou fikce, a tento koncept se často objevuje v jeho dílech, kde tvrdí, že minulost je invencí každého z nás a vzpomínky nejsou uchopitelné.

Po absolvování univerzity přesídlil za prací s novomanželkou do Londýna, kde se živil jako dělník. Toto období se stalo inspirací pro jeho povídku „Last Rites“ o dělníkovi, který spáchá sebevraždu. Po návratu z Londýna nějakou dobu pečoval doma o děti, zatímco manželka pracovala, což mu dalo dostatek času na psaní, a tak roku 1976 vyšla jeho první ale také jediná sbírka povídek, *Night in Tunisia (Noc v Tunisku)*. Sběrka vyšla v nakladatelství Writer's Co-op, které Jordan sám založil, s pomocí několika dalších autorů, kterým se nedařilo najít vydavatele pro svá díla.

Sběrkou na sebe upozornil režiséra Johna Boormana, který mu poskytl první filmařskou příležitost, Jordan připravil dokument o natáčení Boormanova filmu *Excalibur*. Poté pracoval na svém prvním románu, který vyšel roku 1980 pod názvem *The Past (Minulost)*, ale také na svém prvním scénáři, *The Travellers*, který zfilmoval John Comerford. Jordan ale nebyl s výsledkem spokojený a zařekl se, že svůj další scénář již převede na plátno osobně.

Jeho debutem se stal roku 1980 film *Angel (Anděl)*, který má kriminální zápletku a typicky pro Jordana zkoumá temné stránky lidské psychiky. V Jordanově filmové tvorbě se velice často objevují lidé s neobvyklou identitou, lépe řečeno lidé, kteří

se odmítají podřídit diktátu většinové společnosti a skrývat své pravé já. Tento motiv Jordan rozvinul ve svých fantasy dílech, kde se objevují lidé měnící se ve vlkodlaky v *The Company of Wolves* (*Společenstvo vlků*, 1984) na motivy povídek Angely Carter, nebo v upíry v *Interview with the Vampire* (*Interview s upírem*, 1994) na motivy románu Anne Rice, ale také ve filmu *The Crying Game* (*Hra na pláč*, 1992), za který Jordan získal Oskara za původní scénář. Tento film pojednává o transsexuálovi Dil, který je ženou v mužském těle. K tomuto motivu se Jordan vrátil ve filmovém zpracování románu Patricka McCabea *Breakfast on Pluto* (*Snídaně na Plutu*, 2005). S Patrickem McCabem Jordan spolupracoval také na scénáři k filmu *The Butcher Boy* (*Malý řezník*, 1997), kde podkopává tradiční vnímání dětí jako nevinných bytostí. Ne všechny Jordanovi filmy byly úspěšné, avšak zbývá ještě jeden, který je třeba zmínit, historický film *Michael Collins* (1996), ve kterém se Jordan jako mnoho současných autorů vrací k událostem irské občanské války.

Jordanův filmový přínos je nesporný, což může být jedním z důvodů, proč jsou jeho literární díla často opomíjena. Následujících pět kapitol této diplomové práce bylo proto věnováno Jordanově literatuře, a to v historickém sledu. Zvolila jsem tento přístup proto, že jsem chtěla sledovat Jordanův myšlenkový vývoj, pozorovat, jak se některá témata objevují stále znovu, ačkoliv třeba z jiného úhlu pohledu.

Jak jsem zjistila, povídky ve sbírce *Night in Tunisia* by se daly rozdělit do dvou skupin – v první jsou povídky, které pojednávají, jak jsem již zmínila, o dospívání, a zobrazují jej jako období nejistoty a určitého smutku spojeného s koncem dětství. Ve druhé skupině jsou povídky, jejichž protagonisty jsou lidé, kteří si připadají uvězněni ve svých obyčejných životech a jsou

ubíjení stereotypem. Celkový tón všech těchto povídek je převážně pesimistický, Jordan nedává svým postavám téměř žádnou naději na zlepšení jejich situace.

V jeho prvotině se také objevuje téma, kterým se Jordan zabýval celý život, a to narušený vztah mezi otcem a synem v rodinách, kde chybí matka. Toto téma se téměř ve všech případech rozšiřuje o milostný trojúhelník, kdy do života otce a syna vstoupí žena, do které se oba zamilují. Tento motiv se nejprve objevuje v povídce „A Love“, a Jordan se k němu vrátil ve svém prvním románu *The Past*, ale plně ho rozvinul až v románu *Sunrise with Sea Monster* (1994).

Román *The Past* se dotýká irské minulosti, jednou z vedlejších postav je i první irský prezident Eamon de Valera, ale především pojednává o minulosti která je mnohem osobnější. Protagonista bez jména pátrá po identitě svého otce, a to za pomoci starých fotografií, několika pohledů poslaných z prodloužené svatební cesty jeho prarodičů, a také vyprávění kamarádky jeho matky. Jordan se snaží ukázat, že minulost je relativní, a že na vzpomínky se není možné spolehnout, protože si nejen často pamatujeme jen to, co si pamatovat chceme, ale také s odstupem času vše přehodnocujeme a s novými událostmi se vzpomínky mění. Jordan je také skeptický k lineárnímu pojetí času, objevuje se zde myšlenka, že minulost, přítomnost a budoucnost se do jisté míry prolínají.

Jordanův druhý román, *The Dream of a Beast (Zvířecí sen)*, vyšel roku 1983. Je to dílo téměř surrealistické, odehrává se sice v Dublinu, ale tento Dublin je dílem Jordanovi fantazie. Hlavní postavou je nejmenovaný muž, který se proměňuje v blíže neidentifikované zvíře. Tuto proměnu lze chápat metaforicky, neboť protagonista prožívá krizi identity, má pocit, že nezapadá

do většinové společnosti a že jsou mu odpírána potěšení, která by měla být součástí života každého z nás. Jeho smysly se postupně více a více rozvíjejí a on si uvědomuje, že mu doposud mnoho podnětů unikalo. Jordan v tomto románu navazuje na filozofii romantického básníka Williama Blakea, který odmítal, aby byla lidská radost a touha svázána církevními či společenskými pravidly.

V románu *Sunrise with Sea Monster*, který vyšel po jedenáctileté pauze ve které se Jordan věnoval filmu, se vztah otce a syna, jak jsem již zmínila, stává hlavním tématem. Román pojednává o Donalovi, který není schopen komunikovat se svým otcem, Samem, ačkoliv není jasné, kde je prapříčina tohoto problému. Jediné, co je spojuje, je moře, chvíle, kdy společně rybaří a kdy není třeba slov. Když však do jejich života vstoupí půvabná Rose, situace se ještě více komplikuje. Donal najde cestu k otci až po jeho smrti, kdy se ve fantaskní pasáži Sam vynoří z moře a ve svém monologu poskytne Jordanovi možnost vyjádřit hlavní myšlenku díla. Tvrdí, že lidé se příliš snaží nějak vymezit své já, definovat svoji osobnost v kontrastu k ostatním, a to poté vede k problémům s komunikací a k pocitům osamělosti. Jordan tvrdí, že marníme čas tím, že žijeme podle řádu té osobnosti, kterou jsme si vytvořili, a zříkáme se mnohého jen proto, že nám to podle nás nepřísluší.

Od vydání *Sunrise with Sea Monster* uběhlo dalších deset let, než se Jordan vrátil k literatuře románem *Shade* (2004). V tomto díle se Jordan vrací ke svému oblíbenému tématu zakázané lásky, když se Nina zamiluje do svého nevlastního bratra Gregoryho. Již od začátku románu však víme, že Nina byla zavražděna a že vrahem je mentálně zaostalý George, který měl pro Ninu slabost již od dětství, ale motiv činu zůstává skryt až do

posledních stránek. Vypravěčem románu je duch Niny, jehož přítomnost Nina cítila ve svém životě již od dětství. Jordan tedy znovu spojuje minulost s přítomností, jako by neexistovaly žádné hranice. Znovu se také vrací k tématu, které se objevilo jak v románu *The Past*, tak také například ve filmu *The Crying Game*, a to způsob, jakým herci, případně hudebníci, unikají své identitě. Nina je schopná zbavit se svých tíživých vzpomínek, svého já, pouze když stojí před kamerou a vžívá se do své postavy.

Jordanova literární tvorba není nijak rozsáhlá, ale to by samo o sobě nemělo být důvodem k jeho nedostatečnému ocenění. Jordan dokonale ovládá anglický jazyk a jeho romány jsou jak vizuálně, tak myšlenkově, bohaté. Je sice pravda, že s postupem času a narůstajícími filmovými zkušenostmi se zdá, že volí jednodušší metodu, jak předat své myšlenky čtenářům, jako by ho práce režiséra naučila přímočařejšímu vyjadřování, ale to nemusí nutně znamenat, že jeho díla tím ztrácí hodnotu. *Shade* sice neobsahuje myšlenky filozofického rázu které se objevily především v *Dream of a Beast*, na druhou stranu málokdo dokáže zachytit duch místa tak, jako se to podařilo Jordanovi v případě delty řeky Boyne, a málokdo by byl schopen vystavět poutavý, částečně kriminální, příběh, když vrah byl odhalen již na první straně.

Spisovatel Neil Jordan si zaslouží mnohem více pozornosti, než je mu v současné době dopřáno. Snad jednoho dne vystoupí ze stínu režiséra Jordana a literární vědci si uvědomí, že Neil Jordan nejenže jako spisovatel začínal, on jím nikdy nepřestal být.

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## **Anotace**

Autorka: Jitka Svědihrová

Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky, Filozofická fakulta

Název práce: Neil Jordan and the Irish Impatience with Realism:  
Introducing the Fictional Works of the  
Writer/Director (Neil Jordan a irská netrpělivost  
s realismem: představení prózy spisovatele a  
režiséra)

Vedoucí práce: Mgr. David Livingstone

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Klíčová slova: Neil Jordan, současná irská literatura, identita,  
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Key Words: Neil Jordan, contemporary irish fiction, identity,  
father, son, dreams, memories, film

Tématem práce je irský spisovatel a režisér Neil Jordan. Úvodní kapitola obsahuje shrnutí situace v současné irské literatuře, kapitoly následující se zabývají povídkami a jednotlivými romány Neila Jordana. Práce se soustředí na témata, která se v Jordanově tvorbě objevují opakovaně, především vztah otce a syna, pojetí identity, únik před realitou do světa umění a povaha času.

The theme of this thesis is the Irish writer and director Neil Jordan. The introductory chapter deals with the situation in contemporary Irish fiction, subsequent chapters analyse Jordan's short stories and novels. The thesis concentrates on themes which appear in Jordan's fiction repeatedly, above all the father-son relationship, the concept of identity, escape from reality to the world of art and the nature of time.