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**Northern Ireland and Its Socio-Political Situation Reflected in the  
Theatre Plays of Stewart Parker**

*Severní Irsko a jeho sociopolitické klima v divadelních hrách Stewart Parkera*

Diplomová práce

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## **Anotace**

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**Abstrakt:** Tato diplomová práce analyzuje sedm divadelních her severoirského dramatika Stewarta Parkera (1941–1988), zejména co se týká zpodobnění severoirské politické situace. Nachází metaforická znázornění Severního Irsku mezi postavami i kulisami, rozebírá vliv přepolitizovanosti na partnerské vztahy a pojednává i o vlivu konfliktu v Severním Irsku na Parkera jako spisovatele a jako člověka. Práce rovněž obsahuje kapitoly o irské historii a irském socio-politickém klimatu v příslušném časovém úseku a také životopisnou kapitolu o autorovi.

**Klíčová slova:** Severní Irsko, konflikt v Severním Irsku, severoirské drama, Stewart Parker, Spokesong, Catchpenny Twist, Nightshade, Pratt's Fall, Northern Star, Heavenly Bodies, Pentecost

## **Annotation**

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### **Abstract:**

The thesis analyzes seven theatre plays by the Northern Irish playwright Stewart Parker (1941–1988) in terms of how the Northern Irish political situation is reflected in them. Metaphorical representations of Northern Ireland are identified among characters and settings; the influence of overpoliticization on partnerships is discussed as well as how the Troubles influenced Parker as a writer and person. The thesis includes chapters on Irish history and socio-political climate of the relevant period and a biographical chapter about the writer.

**Key words:** Northern Ireland, Troubles, Northern Irish drama, Stewart Parker, Spokesong, Catchpenny Twist, Nightshade, Pratt's Fall, Northern Star, Heavenly Bodies, Pentecost

### **Prohlášení**

Místopřísežně prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci na téma: „Northern Ireland and Its Socio-Political Situation Reflected in the Theatre Plays of Stewart Parker ” vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

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Podpis.....

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*“Writing about and from within this particular place and time is an enterprise full of traps and snares. The raw material of drama is over-abundant here, easy pickings. Domestic bickering, street wit, tension in the shadows, patrolling soldiers, a fight, an explosion, a shot, a tragic death: another Ulster Play written. What statement has it made? That the situation is grim, that Catholics and Protestants hate each other, that it’s all shocking and terribly sad, but that the human spirit is remarkably resilient to all that. Such a play certainly reflects aspects of life here. But it fails to reflect adequately upon them . . . A play which reinforces complacent assumptions, which confirms lazy perceptions, which fails to combine emotional honesty with coherent analysis, which goes in short for the easy answer, is in my view actually harmful.”*

— STEWART PARKER, “DRAMATIS PERSONAE”

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## List of Abbreviations

DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
IRA	Irish Republican Army
MP	Member of Parliament
NICRA	Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association
NILP	Northern Ireland Labour Party
NIO	Northern Ireland Office
PIRA	Provisional Irish Republican Army
PM	Prime Minister
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary
SDLP	Social Democratic Labour Party
SOSNI	Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
UDA	Ulster Defence Association
UUC	Ulster Unionist Council
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party
UUUC	United Ulster Unionist Council
UVF	Ulster Volunteer Force
UWC	Ulster Workers' Council

# 1 Introduction

Stewart Parker (1941–1988) was a Belfast-born Northern Irish playwright, radio and television screenwriter, theatre critic, and music journalist. During his tragically short life, Parker wrote dozens of scripts for television and radio, dealing mostly with Northern Ireland, the Troubles during which he lived, and what it was like to be a human being in the midst of this ubiquitous violence. The most significant and most artistic works, however, are the plays he wrote for the theatre stage, and these are the subject of this thesis.

In Parker’s biography, *Stewart Parker: A Life* (2012), Marilyn Richterik says about Parker that towards the end of his life “being called a ‘Belfast playwright’ was the only description of his person that made sense to him.”<sup>1</sup> “It is in the implied audience for his plays,” Richterik explains, “that Parker is most quintessentially a ‘Belfast playwright’” because early on in his career he “determined to address himself to the city instead of continuing to try to escape or transcend it.”<sup>2</sup> His treatment of and relationship with Belfast can easily be compared to James Joyce’s relationship with Dublin.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of the fact that Parker was a twentieth-century playwright and dealt mainly (although not exclusively) with twentieth-century topics, I wholly share his biographer’s opinion that some knowledge of history is essential in order to understand Parker’s work.<sup>4</sup> “Almost everything he wrote,” Richterik says, “could be read as commenting on the political and social upheavals he had witnessed in Belfast.”<sup>5</sup> It is no wonder, therefore that Parker’s plays often elicited mixed to negative reviews from English and Irish critics. These men and women frequently did not seem to have sufficient knowledge of Northern Irish history or its political and social climate in order to decipher the allusions of the play in question or they were simply too ready to dismiss it as “yet another Troubles play” with which they were profoundly bored;<sup>6</sup> indeed, Parker himself regarded the Troubles as “the biggest switch-off subject in British television.”<sup>7</sup> Only the rare critic understood

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<sup>1</sup> Marilyn Richterik, *Stewart Parker: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), vii.

<sup>2</sup> Richterik, *Life*, viii.

<sup>3</sup> Richterik, *Life*, viii–ix.

<sup>4</sup> Richterik, *Life*, 103.

<sup>5</sup> Richterik, *Life*, 127.

<sup>6</sup> Richterik, *Life*, 180.

<sup>7</sup> Richterik, *Life*, 317.

that Parker used the Troubles as an environment rather than a subject.<sup>8</sup> In order to avoid such misunderstandings, I decided to devote a substantial portion of this thesis to (Northern) Irish history. In order to understand Northern Ireland in the late twentieth century, I argue, one needs to go deep into its history, as far, in fact, as the twelfth century. In Chapter 2, therefore, I provide a historical overview from then until the period of Parker's death. Events taking place after his death are out of the scope of the chapter as they could not have any real influence on his writing.

In Chapter 3, I pay more attention to the other dimension of the Northern Irish Troubles, besides history. Understanding the significance of factors such as religion or political persuasion is an integral part of making sense of the whole of the Troubles. Chapter 4 is based primarily on Marilynn Richtarik's exhaustive biography of Parker, and sums up those important events in Parker's private and working life, which influenced the writing of the seven theatre plays which are the subject of further analyses. Chapter 5 then proposes a short analysis of Parker's playwriting methods compared to the analysis of Northern Irish theatre in general in Tom Maguire's *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland* (2006). Chapter 6 provides summaries of all analyzed plays, and Chapters 7–9 contain the analyses.

In Chapter 7, I analyze two kinds of representation of Northern Ireland which can be found across most of Parker's plays. I propose two characters and three houses (or settings) as metaphorical representations of Northern Ireland with its Troubles and divisions. In Chapter 8, I look at two aspects of heterosexual love relationships in Parker's plays. Firstly, I discovered that those partners with stronger political opinions assume the leading role in the relationship and that political idealism and/or extremism inevitably negatively influences the relationships. Secondly, I argue that Parker intentionally portrays endogamy (i.e. finding a love partner inside of one's tribe) negatively as opposed to exogamy. Endogamy, he seems to suggest, leads to barren relationships and stalls change, while exogamy produces offspring. Finally, in Chapter 9, I offer an experimental analysis of important decisions in Parker's life as an artist, compared and contrasted with those aspects of his personality that are shared by some of his characters. These include choosing his audience, discovering his calling to write about Northern Ireland, selecting his writing strategies, and the risks they posed for him in terms of audience appreciation.

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<sup>8</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 235.

This thesis was unintentionally begun in the year 2018, the thirtieth anniversary of Stewart Parker's death, and in the year of writing, 2019, Parker would have been 78 years old. Today, his plays might read like entertaining history lessons, but I hope to show in this thesis that these "history lessons" are incredibly deep and artistic, and that Parker still has a lot to say to a modern-day audience, even thirty years after his death.

## 2 An Overview of Irish and Northern Irish History

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the portion of Irish and Northern Irish history, which is necessary to facilitate an appreciation of Stewart Parker's plays as well as an understanding of the literary analyses below. The overview somewhat abruptly ends with the year 1988, the year of Parker's death, as telling Northern Irish history until the present day would be irrelevant for the purposes of the present thesis.

The chapter is divided into two main subchapters, pre- and post-partition Ireland, and these are further subdivided into sections based on the most important events of the periods in question. Where necessary, extra attention is paid to the historical events explicitly treated by Parker in his plays. For the purpose of better orientation, Northern Irish socio-political situation will be further discussed in a separate chapter following this one.

The two main sources of historical information in this chapter are Paul State's 2009 *A Brief History of Northern Ireland* (from beginning until 1922) and *Making Sense of the Troubles: A History of the Northern Ireland Conflict* (2012) by David McKittrick and David McVea (from 1922 onwards).

### 2.1 Pre-partition Ireland (1169–1922)

#### 2.1.1 Norman Invasion (1169–1534)

The Normans arrived to Ireland in 1169, having conquered England in the previous century. They slowly started to change the Irish society and impose government from outside the island.<sup>9</sup> In 1172, King Henry II of England was for the first time given the title of Lord of Ireland by Pope Alexander III; he was also the first English king who personally visited the country.<sup>10</sup> Native Irish rulers were not willing to give up their power easily, and neither was the Norman takeover structured or centralized. Busy with wars on the continent, English kings intervened only when the Irish lords were causing too much

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<sup>9</sup> Paul State, *A Brief History of Ireland* (New York: Facts on File, 2009), 63.

<sup>10</sup> State, *History*, 66.

trouble.<sup>11</sup> Since the early period after the invasion, Englishmen were being appointed as servants of both the church and the state.<sup>12</sup>

By the fourteenth century, there were three recognizable groups fighting for power in Ireland. Firstly, there were the oldest inhabitants of the island, the Gaelic Irish, who still wished to be ruled only by their own kings. Secondly, in direct opposition to these, stood the English-born servants of the Crown (also called the New English), ruling the country from Dublin. Thirdly, there was the mongrel group of the Anglo-Irish, the early Norman settlers' descendants.<sup>13</sup>

Following the mid-century plague epidemic, Gaelic power was steadily rising, and in the fifteenth century came a Gaelic revival,<sup>14</sup> the Gaelic lords taking back about 75 per cent of the land.<sup>15</sup>

### **2.1.2 Protestant Plantation (1534–1690)**

After Henry VIII's break with Rome in 1534, the Anglo-Irish suddenly found themselves to be the enemies of the Crown, on par with the Gaelic Irish. It is important to bear in mind that Reformation teachings were not nearly as popular in Ireland as in England or mainland Europe—Reformation was merely imposed by the monarch,<sup>16</sup> and therefore the status difference between the Gaelic Irish and the Anglo-Irish proved an easier gap to bridge than the new religious divide between the Anglo-Irish and the ruling class. In 1642 the Anglo-Irish allied with the Gaelic Irish in the Catholic Confederacy and rebelled. Their rebellion was defeated by the army of Puritan Oliver Cromwell in 1650,<sup>17</sup> and from then on, religion would never cease to be a cause of inequalities and conflicts between Ireland and England.<sup>18</sup>

Based on its religion, the entire population of Ireland was now considered disloyal to the monarch, and ruling the island became more precarious than ever. Adding fuel to the fire, England developed strong nationalist sensibilities based on its economic

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<sup>11</sup> State, *History*, 69.

<sup>12</sup> State, *History*, 70.

<sup>13</sup> State, *History*, 77.

<sup>14</sup> State, *History*, 80.

<sup>15</sup> State, *History*, 85.

<sup>16</sup> State, *History*, 99.

<sup>17</sup> State, *History*, 112–113.

<sup>18</sup> State, *History*, 94.

expansion and the Puritan Protestant belief in its cultural superiority. These factors contributed to the introduction of an iron first rule over Ireland,<sup>19</sup> as well as the policy of so-called plantation, whereby Catholic landowners' property was confiscated and granted to new English Protestant settlers.<sup>20</sup> Especially in the province of Ulster, this was done so systematically that its demographic was soon significantly different from the other three provinces, and the dispossessed Catholics could but wait for the right moment to take revenge.<sup>21</sup>

The brief return to Catholicism under king James II (ruled 1685–1688) provoked Protestant backlash. James's son-in-law, William of Orange, was invited to take the English crown instead, and James fled to France where he gathered an army and financial support for his last armed resistance. The Battle of the Boyne, which took place near Dublin in early July 1690, ended in James II's perpetual defeat.<sup>22</sup>

### **2.1.3 Protestant Ascendancy and the United Irishmen (1691–1800)**

Following William III's victory at the Boyne, Ireland was composed of two distinct societies: the oppressed Catholic majority and the privileged Protestant minority, the stability of whose rule strongly depended on the system of Penal Laws.<sup>23</sup> Starting in 1695, Catholics were banned from most public affairs, the army, and the navy unless they denounced the Pope and the Eucharist; in 1703 their access to land was diminished and in 1729 they were denied the vote.<sup>24</sup>

In the 1760s, as a reaction both to the continued oppression of Catholics and to the happenings in Northern American, Ireland also started seeking independence on Great Britain.<sup>25</sup> Revolutionary sentiments erupted with the Storming of the Bastille in 1789 and the establishment of the French Republic. Theobald Wolfe Tone (1763–1798), a Protestant barrister from Dublin, brought more militant sentiments to Ulster and founded

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<sup>19</sup> State, *History*, 101.

<sup>20</sup> State, *History*, 104.

<sup>21</sup> State, *History*, 108.

<sup>22</sup> State, *History*, 118–119.

<sup>23</sup> State, *History*, 127.

<sup>24</sup> State, *History*, 131.

<sup>25</sup> S.J. Connolly, ed., *Belfast 400: People, Place and History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), 181.



the Society of United Irishmen.<sup>26</sup> The Society's Belfast newspaper, the *Northern Star*, was established in 1792. A specificity of this movement was that it harnessed support from both the Catholic Defenders and the Protestant Peep O'Day (later Orange) Boys,<sup>27</sup> and that its main goal was the creation of an Irish republic on the French model. Even though many on both sides of the religious divide were dissatisfied with the state Ireland was in, for most the republic and the means to achieve it were simply too radical. Catholics did not have much to lose, but Protestants would be forced to become a minority in a Catholic-ruled state, a situation they never ceased to fear.<sup>28</sup>

The reaction of the British government to the French Revolution was panic and the United Irish movement went underground, training its own army and seeking support in France. When only bad weather prevented a French invasion in 1797, the British army's response was brutal; houses of known United Irishmen were ransacked as well as the headquarters of the *Northern Star*. People were arrested without trial under emergency legislation and taken to Newgate Prison in Dublin, Henry Joy McCracken (1767–1798) among them.<sup>29</sup> He was later the leader of the Antrim attack in 1798. In the same year, United Irishmen clashed with the British army multiple times, the most success being achieved at Wexford. In spite of this one battle won, the United Irishmen did not succeed in winning the war and many of their leaders, including McCracken and Tone, were hanged. The Irish parliament was dissolved and the Acts of Union were imposed on January 1, 1801.<sup>30</sup>

Apart from the immediate consequences, the United Irishmen and especially the victory at Wexford became a symbol of success for the following nationalist generations. It is remembered simply as the Ninety-Eight and immortalized in many folk songs, most notably "The Wearin o' the Green,"<sup>31</sup> and more recently on Belfast republican murals.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Connolly, *Belfast*, 184.

<sup>27</sup> State, *History*, 156.

<sup>28</sup> Connolly, *Belfast*, 184.

<sup>29</sup> Connolly, *Belfast*, 185.

<sup>30</sup> State, *History*, 160.

<sup>31</sup> State, *History*, 128.

<sup>32</sup> Connolly, *Belfast*, 340.

#### 2.1.4 From Union to Famine (1801–1849)

As a result of the union with Britain, all Irish affairs would from then on be decided outside of Ireland, by people who never set foot in the country. Ireland's role in the British parliament was minimal. This was a disaster for the Catholic majority, but not even all Protestants supported the union. The higher classes of landlords, civil officers, and Anglican clergy were generally in favor of it, but rural and urban working-class Protestants, especially Ulster Presbyterians, opposed it, since they were afraid that the British administration was more likely to grant Catholics equality. Those in opposition of the union gained a new cause to fight for: the repeal of the union, which quickly became one of the most important issues in the nineteenth century.<sup>33</sup> However, the repeal of the union did not remain a cross-religious cause for long, and already in mid-century most Protestants were content within the union, and the religious divide was as deep as ever.<sup>34</sup> In Ulster, sectarian fights were especially prominent due to rapid industrialization, which forced both Catholics and Protestants into the working class, competing for the same jobs,<sup>35</sup> but at the same time, the support for the union was always high in Ulster because industrial production made it dependent on British financing.<sup>36</sup>

Under Daniel O'Connell (1775–1847) Catholics somewhat united to fight for emancipation from the Penal Laws in 1823.<sup>37</sup> An emancipation bill came in 1829, allowing Catholics to control town boards, and in 1841, O'Connell himself was elected mayor of Dublin.<sup>38</sup> The more radical nationalists of both religions formed the Young Ireland movement in 1842.<sup>39</sup>

With the exception of Ulster, the survival of Irish population depended on potatoes. In 1845, a fungus from Northern America destroyed up to 40 per cent of the crop. Government relief measures were effective, and workhouses were created. The following year the blight returned and destroyed nearly all the crop nationwide. The new Westminster Whig administration was not as helpful as the previous Conservative one

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<sup>33</sup> State, *History*, 163–164.

<sup>34</sup> State, *History*, 166.

<sup>35</sup> State, *History*, 170.

<sup>36</sup> State, *History*, 183.

<sup>37</sup> State, *History*, 176.

<sup>38</sup> State, *History*, 180.

<sup>39</sup> State, *History*, 163.

and originally intended to leave Ireland to its own devices, but in the end, action was taken.<sup>40</sup> The disease subsided in 1847, but returned in 1848 and 1849. People resorted to eating anything they could lay their hands on, and those who did not die of starvation succumbed to epidemics of typhus and dysentery. Many of those who were still strong or had money decided to emigrate, some staying in Britain, those who could afford it moved on to Northern America. Approximately 2.1 million people left the country during the decade between 1845 and 1855, which amounts to one quarter of the Irish population of the time.<sup>41</sup> It is difficult to say what hit harder, whether the famine itself and the subsequent emigration or the disinterest of the British government. Nationalists added both to their lore of heroic and anti-British symbolism.<sup>42</sup>

### **2.1.5 Land War and Home Rule (1849–1916)**

During the 1840s and 1850s, commercial production was on the rise, and for its sake many landlords either evicted their tenants or raised the rents so that they became unaffordable. Attempts of the Irish Tenant League to secure realistic rents via legislation failed, and nationalist sentiments were reawakened.<sup>43</sup> This situation led to the establishment of the Fenians, a republican movement founded in Dublin in 1858 and one year later also in New York City, where many Irish emigrated after the famine.<sup>44</sup> The Fenians put up a violent resistance and were suppressed; their voices, however, were heard in Westminster, and in 1869, all religions were emancipated. The Land Act followed in 1870, but in practice it did not accomplish much for the tenants.<sup>45</sup> The landlord-tenant relationships deteriorated again soon after the Act due to bad harvests and the resulting agricultural depression.<sup>46</sup> The leader of the Fenians, Michael Davitt (1846–1906), and a promising young politician, Charles Stewart Parnell (1846–1891), co-founded the Irish National Land League in 1879.<sup>47</sup> The resulting Land War, lasting for four years between 1879 and 1882, was the greatest mass movement in Irish history.

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<sup>40</sup> State, *History*, 185–186.

<sup>41</sup> State, *History*, 188–189.

<sup>42</sup> State, *History*, 164.

<sup>43</sup> State, *History*, 199.

<sup>44</sup> State, *History*, 198.

<sup>45</sup> State, *History*, 200–201.

<sup>46</sup> State, *History*, 205.

<sup>47</sup> State, *History*, 206–207.

Demonstrations were staged wherever tenant evictions were taking place, and the dispossessed tenants were provided for. Westminster passed further legislation but the League still was not satisfied, and its leaders, including Parnell, were arrested.<sup>48</sup>

In 1882, the Land League was replaced by the Irish National League whose main objective was Home Rule (i.e. self-government) for Ireland. William Gladstone's Liberal government committed to the issue in 1886 while the nationalist movement split in 1891 into Parnellites and Anti-Parnellites following Charles Parnell's scandal after he was implicated as a co-respondent in his lover's divorce.<sup>49</sup> By 1900, nationalists had further splintered into advocates of violent means and constitutionalists (i.e. those who wanted to bring about change through legal processes), and between republicans, who wanted complete independence on Great Britain, and parliamentarians, who would be satisfied with a devolved government.<sup>50</sup>

Sinn Féin ("we ourselves" in Irish) was launched by Arthur Griffith first as a newspaper, then as an organization in 1907. Members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (a republican fraternal organization created by members of the abovementioned Young Irelanders) joined in large numbers, and even though the policy of the movement was non-violent, many of them remained militant.<sup>51</sup>

The problems with high rents and tenant eviction largely disappeared with continuing industrialization and its logical consequence, urbanization. New social problems appeared in the booming cities, namely the fights for workers' rights, which, especially in Belfast, were complicated by deep sectarian differences. While in other parts of Europe the pre-World War I social climate pitted workers against employees, in places like Belfast's shipyards, Protestant workers and Catholic workers were fighting each other.<sup>52</sup>

Even though multiple Home Rule bills were defeated in the British parliament, the Irish Parliamentary Party (also known as the Home Rule Party) regained faith in the constitutional process. Unionists, on the other hand, were alarmed and in 1905 organized themselves in the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP); thoughts of some kind of partition of

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<sup>48</sup> State, *History*, 210.

<sup>49</sup> State, *History*, 212–213.

<sup>50</sup> State, *History*, 223.

<sup>51</sup> State, *History*, 223–224.

<sup>52</sup> State, *History*, 224–225.

Ulster from the rest of Ireland thereby emerged.<sup>53</sup> Not all unionists and nationalist, however, believed in constitutional reform and two militias were created first the unionist Ulster Volunteers in 1912, and the nationalist Irish Volunteers followed suit a year later.<sup>54</sup>

Between 1912 and 1914, the Home Rule bill was twice defeated but passed for the third time. Six Ulster counties were to be “temporarily excluded” from it, but before any significant changes could take place, the legislation was put on hold for the length of World War I.<sup>55</sup> The War, however, eroded the support for Home Rule, and republicanism came to the fore.<sup>56</sup>

### **2.1.6 Towards Partition and the Irish Free State (1916–1921)**

Even though both unionists and nationalist joined the British army, dedicated republicans saw the war as an opportunity to strike.<sup>57</sup> Since the public overall did not support the rebellion, the Irish Republican Brotherhood decided to attract its attention to the republican cause with violence. They set out to occupy not Dublin Castle but buildings in the city center to get maximum exposure.<sup>58</sup> The armed insurrection, known as the Easter Rising of 1916, began on Easter Monday morning, April 24. 1,600 militant republicans set up their headquarters in the General Post Office building and read a proclamation of the Irish Republic from its steps. Six days of carnage later, the British troops subdued the rebels and their leaders were executed.<sup>59</sup>

By 1917, Sinn Féin started mobilizing popular support under the leadership of Éamon de Valera (1882–1975), while Michael Collins (1890–1922) reconstituted the Irish Republican Brotherhood.<sup>60</sup> Sinn Féin won the majority of Irish parliamentary seats in the 1918 general election but pledged not to take them, instead establishing themselves as an Irish parliament, the Dáil Éireann, and in 1919 de Valera was elected President of the Irish Republic. Protestants, especially in Ulster, were meanwhile increasingly in

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<sup>53</sup> State, *History*, 226.

<sup>54</sup> State, *History*, 227.

<sup>55</sup> State, *History*, 228.

<sup>56</sup> David McKittrick and David McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles: A History of the Northern Irish Conflict* (London:Viking, 2012), 4.

<sup>57</sup> State, *History*, 229.

<sup>58</sup> State, *History*, 232.

<sup>59</sup> State, *History*, 234.

<sup>60</sup> State, *History*, 236.

support of partition, unwilling to become a minority in the prevalently Catholic republic.<sup>61</sup> Ulster Protestants, aware of the strong industrial connection to Great Britain, mobilized in organizations such as the Ulster Unionist Council (UUC), founded in 1905, and the then long-established Orange Order.<sup>62</sup>

The Government of Ireland Act was passed in 1920 as an attempt to at least partially satisfy the two opposing demands of the North and the South.<sup>63</sup> Two devolved parliaments were created, one in Belfast (also known as Stormont) and one in Dublin. Northern Ireland was established in 1921 as the parliamentary counties of Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry, and Tyrone and the two parliamentary boroughs of Londonderry and Belfast.<sup>64</sup> In the same year, the Irish Volunteers became the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Collins, as the leader of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, which comprised both IRA members and Dáil representatives, began a guerrilla and espionage campaign against Britain, starting with armed attacks on the Royal Irish Constabulary (the Irish police force). Suspected British spies were assassinated by the IRA and the security forces responded with killing IRA sympathizers.<sup>65</sup> In this violent atmosphere, elections to the devolved parliaments took place. In the North, the election returned forty UUP members and six from both the Nationalist Party and Sinn Féin. In the South, Sinn Féin ran unopposed, but boycotted the Dublin devolved parliament as an illegal body and did not assemble.<sup>66</sup>

Negotiations for Irish independence led in London by Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins resulted in the Irish Free State of 1921. This constitution was still a constitutional monarchy but with independent powers in domestic and foreign affairs. It required an oath of allegiance to the monarch to be taken by all members of parliament, and this became an important issue on which the South was still bitterly divided.<sup>67</sup> The full separation of the Republic of Ireland from the Commonwealth took place in 1948.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> State, *History*, 237–238.

<sup>62</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 3.

<sup>63</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 4.

<sup>64</sup> State, *History*, 240.

<sup>65</sup> State, *History*, 241–242.

<sup>66</sup> State, *History*, 242–243.

<sup>67</sup> State, *History*, 244.

<sup>68</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 26.

### **2.1.7 Conclusion**

This subchapter has been in no way exhaustive, but I have tried to summarize in it the most relevant events of pre-twentieth-century Irish history. Even from this short overview, four important conclusions can easily be made. Firstly, that Ireland has been socially and religiously divided from as early as the sixteenth century. Secondly, that its position within the United Kingdom was always problematic, especially in the sense that it was never paid sufficient attention to, and its Catholic natives were for centuries being exploited, which they never allow themselves to forget. Thirdly, that violence has always been considered an available solution to serious issues, and lastly that these issues became very early on deeply ingrained, and for most Irishmen compromise simply was not an option.

By presenting events from as early as the twelfth century, this subchapter has attempted to introduce the very roots of the twentieth-century violent incidents known popularly as the Troubles. I argue that it is essential to go several centuries back in order to fully understand the complex historical background of Northern Ireland in the twentieth century. In Chapter 3 I shall discuss the Troubles and its causes in greater detail as social phenomena.

## **2.2 Northern Ireland After Partition (1921–1988)**

### **2.2.1 Early Northern Ireland (1921–1963)**

As mentioned in the previous subchapter, Northern Ireland comprised six counties. Unionists used the word “Ulster” to refer to the new country, but this is not historically accurate, as Ulster, one of the four historical provinces of Ireland, consisted of nine counties in total. The Northern Irish border was drawn by Westminster and the Ulster Unionist Party, the main criterion being that the new country should have a Protestant majority. County Donegal to the north-west and counties Monaghan and Cavan to the east therefore remained part of what then was the Irish Free State.<sup>69</sup>

As McKittrick and McVea aptly write, “Northern Ireland was born in violence.” The IRA often attacked the new state from across the border, and Belfast especially saw

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<sup>69</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 5.

frequent outbreaks of sectarian violence.<sup>70</sup> Even though they now made up a majority in their own state, Northern Irish Protestants still did not feel secure. There were two reasons for this; firstly, London seemed to be much less committed to the union than they were, and secondly, there still were around a half a million Catholics who involuntarily became Northern Irish citizens. The majority Protestant government therefore did their best to render Catholics politically powerless and in the following fifty years discriminated against them in all possible areas, including the allocation of jobs and public housing.<sup>71</sup>

The fate of Northern Ireland was uncertain at the beginning. Many of its inhabitants, Catholics and Protestants alike, did not believe it would survive. As opposed as the Irish Free State was to the loss of land, it attempted no major invasion and instead concentrated on building up its own country. The Northern Irish Catholic majority was subdued and even though there was sectarian tension, it was relatively under control. Catholic representatives at that time had no hope for being able to share power with Protestants, and instead boycotted the new institutions, waiting for the country's collapse. In a short period of time, however, Northern Ireland settled down into stability.<sup>72</sup>

The system of government, which was put in place in the 1920s and which lasted for the next half-century, was a key issue for the later Troubles.<sup>73</sup> Northern Ireland's first Prime Minister, James Craig (1871–1940), changed the parliament voting system from proportional representation to first-past-the-post and local government boundaries were redrawn in order to bring as much power as possible to the UUP. Due to this process, even cities like Londonderry would fall under unionist control even though their majority population was clearly Catholic nationalist.<sup>74</sup> The same method was soon applied to the parliamentary voting districts and even though Craig's UUP had a majority in the parliament, his objective was to get it completely rid of the small number of non-UUP unionists. The general election of 1929 returned thirty-seven UUP seats versus only fifteen nationalists. The UUP majority was so overwhelming that nationalist politicians lost faith in the parliament and many ceased to attend it. Four years later, the general election itself became a formality as a large portion of the seats was uncontested by non-

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<sup>70</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 4.

<sup>71</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 5.

<sup>72</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 5–6.

<sup>73</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 7.

<sup>74</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 8–9.



unionists.<sup>75</sup> Westminster obviously was not blind to Craig's gerrymandering tactics and asked him not to proceed with them. When Craig's cabinet threatened with resignation, Westminster left the situation in his hands and promptly passed a convention which prohibited matters of the Belfast parliament to be discussed in London.<sup>76</sup>

Unionists, however, did not control only the legislature. Judges and magistrates were overwhelmingly Protestant, most of them associated with the UUP. The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC, Northern Ireland's police force) was at least 90 per cent Protestant and the Ulster Special Constabulary (later infamously known as the B Specials) was exclusively so. Moreover, the police forces answered directly to ministers, and they could use the Special Powers Act to arrest and search without warrant and intern without trial. Effectively, "one community governed, judged and policed the other."<sup>77</sup>

As mentioned above, Catholics were discriminated against also in the areas of jobs and housing. Places such as the Belfast shipyards had mainly male Protestant workforces. Catholics frequently found themselves attacked at work, let go, or not employed at all because the employers were notoriously worried about tension in the workplace. The post-World War II public housing programs placed new public housing under control of overwhelmingly Protestant local councils. Male homeowners and their spouses had local government voting rights, subtenants or lodgers did not, and therefore the allocation of housing was practically a double discrimination as it denied Catholics a new roof over their heads as well as the vote.<sup>78</sup> In spite of being regarded as second-class citizens, Catholics, except for active republicans, were not actively persecuted or interned without trial. They were free to voice their sentiments in print and frequently did so, especially in the Belfast-based *Irish News*.<sup>79</sup>

The ill success of Catholic politicians had more causes than just their minority status in the government and their resulting absence from it because they considered it "a humiliating travesty of parliamentary practice."<sup>80</sup> The Catholic middle class was very small, and before the United Kingdom education reforms of the 1940s, upward mobility

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<sup>75</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 10.

<sup>76</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 11–12.

<sup>77</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 12.

<sup>78</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 13.

<sup>79</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 18.

<sup>80</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 19.

was impossible for the members of the working class, Catholic and Protestant alike.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, the Catholic cause was not able to attract much sympathy from outsiders. Catholics came across as “negative, backward-looking and incessantly complaining,” and nationalist politicians “tended not to be held in high esteem, even by their own voters.”<sup>82</sup> This Catholic nationalist political paralysis facilitated the unbroken rule of the UUP and its prime ministers. The first Prime Minister, James Craig held the post from 1921 to 1940, and the third, Basil Brooke (1888–1973) from 1943 to 1963.

As regards paramilitarism, the IRA remained in existence, but overall at the time, Protestants were the ones who were more ready to use violent means in order to achieve political ends. The only bigger violent action taken by the IRA was in the 1950s but was defeated with the help of internment without trial.<sup>83</sup>

### **2.2.1.1 The Orange Order**

The Orange Order was founded in 1795 in reaction to the County Armagh clash of Protestants with Catholics, known as the Battle of the Diamond. The Order regards two other incidents, both from the seventeenth century, as central to its existence and Protestant pride. These are the Siege of Derry in 1689 and the abovementioned Battle of the Boyne in which William of Orange won the English throne from James II. William of Orange is one of the Protestants’ major heroes, and the Order takes its name from him. Likewise, the Battle of the Boyne is commemorated every year during the marching season, peaking on July 12, which is known for its ceremonial processions and loud usage of the lambeg drums.

Orange lodges were instrumental in the creation of the paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and were firmly linked to the UUP as their members occupied a substantial number of the party’s ruling body, the Ulster Unionist Council. “The Twelfth of July” or simply “The Twelfth” then basically had the status of a state ritual.

Protestants perceive the Order as the guardian of their heritage, while Catholics see it as a bigoted, violently anti-Catholic organization.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 20.

<sup>82</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 21.

<sup>83</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 22.

<sup>84</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 15–16.

### 2.2.2 The O'Neill Ministry (1963–1969)

The fourth Northern Irish Prime Minister, Captain Terrence O'Neill (1914–1990), was a thoroughly different unionist leader. His main objectives were seeking reconciliation between Protestants and Catholics and attracting foreign investment to the country to replace the failing local industries.<sup>85</sup> O'Neill's desire for reform was not unparalleled in world politics. The 1960s were the decade when John F. Kennedy became American president, Harold Wilson and the Labour Party came to power in Britain, and even Pope John XXIII was a reformer.

O'Neill's election as UUP leader and Northern Irish Prime Minister was not without controversy. Businessman Brian Faulkner was widely considered a more capable politician and he felt O'Neill was chosen over him because, unlike Faulkner, O'Neill was a member of the landed gentry. As a result, the two became rivals and Faulkner took every opportunity to undermine O'Neill's already uncertain position.<sup>86</sup> Another one of O'Neill's perceived shortcomings was his unconditional unionism, a full identification with Britain, as most unionists were loyal first to Northern Ireland and to Britain second.<sup>87</sup>

The sharp decline in industrial activity and the resulting lack of jobs, which O'Neill sought to soften, brought to power another political party. This was the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP), which, unionist at heart, attracted mainly Protestant support. O'Neill was afraid it would erode UUP's votes, especially since at the time Labour came to power in Westminster as well, in spite of the fact that Harold Wilson himself was fairly anti-unionist.<sup>88</sup>

During the 1965 meeting of the Northern Irish Prime Minister and the Republic of Ireland Taoiseach (or Prime Minister), Seán Lemass urged the Nationalist Party to reassume their seats in Stormont and act as an opposition to the UUP. Since unionist fears never lay too deep, this was all it took to reawaken them and prepare the ground for figures such as the Reverend Ian Paisley (1926–1914) whose tactic it was to appeal to the worst of unionist fears and stir the people into violent action.<sup>89</sup> Paisley's venture into politics was unexpectedly successful, his Protestant Unionist Party and later Democratic

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<sup>85</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 30–31.

<sup>86</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 31.

<sup>87</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 36.

<sup>88</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 32–33.

<sup>89</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 34–35.

Unionist Party (DUP) took its support mainly from the working class, and during the Troubles replaced the UUP as the biggest Protestant political party.<sup>90</sup>

By 1967, large sections of the Orange Order were openly unsupportive of the O'Neill administration.<sup>91</sup> Nationalist politics, on the other hand, was on the rise. Thanks to the education reforms, Catholic middle class grew bigger and more capable. This new generation of nationalists regarded the Nationalist Party, the IRA, and Sinn Féin as outdated and deeply ineffectual.<sup>92</sup>

### **2.2.3 The Civil Rights Movement**

The civil rights movement took its initial inspiration from the United States, but essentially comprised all of Northern Ireland's anti-unionists, such as Nationalist Party supporters, IRA supporters, communists and other left-wingers, students and more generally members of the middle class. The Northern Irish Civil Rights Association (NICRA) had a long list of demands, including the reform of local government election ("one man – one vote"), reversal of the 1920s gerrymandering, a reform in the allocation of housing, the repeal of the Special Powers Act, and the complete disbanding of the heavily armed B Specials. In spite of the fact that O'Neill voiced his desire to reconcile Catholics and Protestants, most of his action ended there.<sup>93</sup>

The main way the civil rights movement operated was by organizing peaceful marches in order to gain media coverage.<sup>94</sup> In the summer of 1968, however, the marchers started to be met by counter-demonstrators in the form of Ian Paisley's Ulster Protestant Volunteers. In October of the same year, a march was first banned but when it proceeded peacefully, the RUC used overly brutal means to stop it and was filmed by a Dublin journalist. Adding insult to injury, several members of the British parliament were present at the march and a Northern Irish MP was injured.<sup>95</sup> Several UUP politicians, most markedly William Craig, insisted that the whole civil rights movement was orchestrated by the IRA which, having moved politically to the left, gave up on violence and concerned

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<sup>90</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 39.

<sup>91</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 41.

<sup>92</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 42.

<sup>93</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 44–45.

<sup>94</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 45.

<sup>95</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 47–48.

itself with left-wing issues such as housing.<sup>96</sup> Under Harold Wilson's pressure, limited reforms were introduced which would satisfy Westminster but at the same time would not alarm Protestants too much.<sup>97</sup>

Another clash which proved a political disaster for O'Neill's government happened during a march from Belfast to Londonderry. The marchers met loyalists (a term used for more radical and usually working-class unionists) at Burntollet Bridge on January 4, 1969.<sup>98</sup> In a last attempt to save his position, O'Neill called a general election in which he gained a bare majority as his own party split into his supporters and opponents. A number of Nationalist Party MPs were replaced by young civil rights activists, notably John Hume.<sup>99</sup> Before his resignation, O'Neill at least managed to push through the "one man – one vote" local government reform.

McKittrick and McVea conclude their chapter on O'Neill with a reflection on his abilities in the light of the period during which he was in power. The public opinion on O'Neill after his resignation was that he did not have the right character for the task and someone else might have fared better. In reality, however, O'Neill's position was never an easy one. From his very election as Prime Minister, he was meeting an opposition in his own party in the form of Brian Faulkner and his supporters. The growing nationalist intelligentsia brought about the civil rights movement while Ian Paisley was doing his best in radicalizing loyalists by his incessant fearmongering. Not even in Westminster did O'Neill gain sympathy, as Harold Wilson was never personally sympathetic to the Stormont government.<sup>100</sup>

#### **2.2.4 The Troubles Begin (1969–1971)**

In May 1969, James Chichester-Clark (1923–2002) took over from O'Neill as the Prime Minister. Two months later, skirmishes in Londonderry escalated into what became known as the Battle of the Bogside, and the fighting spread to Belfast, especially the areas where Catholics and Protestants lived next to each other. Belfast already had a history of street fighting in working-class districts such as the Protestant Shankill or the Catholic

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<sup>96</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 50.

<sup>97</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 51.

<sup>98</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 55–56.

<sup>99</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 57.

<sup>100</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 58–60.

Falls, and little was needed to spark conflict. With the RUC exhausted but the fighting still going on, Chichester-Clark asked Westminster to send in the army.<sup>101</sup> The period that was to be euphemistically referred to as “the Troubles” fully started.

The presence of the British army calmed the situation down for a while. Permanent “Peacelines” were built in strategic places to prevent outbursts of violence, but the community divisions were deeper than before. The RUC and the B Specials frequently acted on behalf of loyalist rioters and fought alongside them against Catholics. Any Catholics, who still had faith in the national police, lost it, and the B Specials were quickly disbanded.<sup>102</sup> The majority of the damaged areas were Catholic. The IRA was reproached for not fulfilling its function in defending Catholic neighborhoods, but in reality, it had very little public support, except in such moments of crisis.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, the current policy of the IRA was a left-wing attempt to forge a non-sectarian working-class community and the whole organization was steered from the Republic. In late 1969, it split into the Official (Marxist) IRA and the Provisional (republican traditionalist) IRA, sometimes abbreviated PIRA. The Provisional wing quickly became more numerous and established a Provisional Sinn Féin. Likewise, on the Protestant side, paramilitary groups were forming and recruiting.<sup>104</sup>

In July 1970, a confrontation between the British soldiers and locals in the Lower Falls district resulted in it being sealed off, house searches without warrants were carried out and three men were shot by the troops. This brutal intervention turned the Catholic opinion against the British army, but was in line with the new Conservative government of Edward Heath and his Home Secretary (i.e. the minister of the interior) Reginald Maudling, for whom certain level of violence was perfectly acceptable. Chichester-Clark soon found himself in the same trap as his predecessor: from one side he was being pushed by Westminster to introduce reform, from the other side the radicalized loyalists pressed him to change nothing.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 62–63.

<sup>102</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 64–65.

<sup>103</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 68.

<sup>104</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 69.

<sup>105</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 71–72.

As the civil rights movement faded in importance, a new grouping became the principal voice of nationalism, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) with John Hume as its main strategist.<sup>106</sup>

Having lost faith that the troops were there to help, the (Provisional) IRA started attacking the soldiers on and off duty. Chichester-Clarke demanded harder military action, and when Westminster merely offered more troops, he resigned to be replaced by Brian Faulkner.<sup>107</sup>

### **2.2.5 The End of Stormont (1971–1972)**

Brian Faulkner (1921–1971) was a well-established politician who made his name in the 1950s by defeating the IRA with the help of internment. His government comprised both strands of unionism (that is unionism and loyalism), and, unlike Chichester-Clark, he was able to win British approval of tougher military action, soldiers now being able to shoot anyone who “acts suspiciously.”<sup>108</sup> As a result, two Catholics were shot in Londonderry. The SDLP threatened to leave Stormont unless an independent inquiry is held. The inquiry wasn’t granted, and the party withdrew from the parliament.<sup>109</sup>

Faulkner put a lot of faith into internment without trial, which had worked for him in the past; other unionists, however, were skeptical because introducing internment meant stepping outside the rule of law and it was bound to attract international attention, especially from human rights organizations.<sup>110</sup> In August 1971, the troops together with the police attempted to round up IRA members in a large-scale operation. Their documentation, however, was years old and most of the actual IRA members were warned ahead of time. Many were arrested and then released, more radicalized than before. They were said to have been subject to torture by sensory deprivation, such as the denial of sleep, being forced to stand spread-eagled against a wall for extended periods of time and being incessantly played loud “white noise.”<sup>111</sup> Not only did this operation have the exact opposite effect than intended—it resulted in more enraged Catholics ready to join the

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<sup>106</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 73.

<sup>107</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 74.

<sup>108</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 75–76.

<sup>109</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 77.

<sup>110</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 77.

<sup>111</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 78.

IRA—it was overall suspicious since no Protestant paramilitaries were arrested during it.<sup>112</sup>

The Anglo-Irish relations significantly worsened. The current Taoiseach, Jack Lynch, was strongly opposed to internment.<sup>113</sup> Dublin demanded Stormont be abolished, a bigger nationalist involvement in government, and new North-South administrative links. British Prime Minister Edward Heath insisted on keeping Stormont but at the same time was willing to consider power-sharing.<sup>114</sup>

The worst year of the Troubles was 1972 during which there occurred about 2,000 explosions and over 10,000 shooting incidents in which almost 500 were killed and 5,000 wounded.<sup>115</sup> The most infamous of the year's events entered history as Bloody Sunday. On January 30 in Londonderry, the British parachute regiment opened fire on an illegal civil rights march, claiming the marchers had weapons and nail bombs, but none were ever found. An iconic photograph was taken of Father (later Bishop) Edward Daly, waving a white handkerchief, trying to get a fatally wounded boy out of the combat zone. Nationalists, both Northern and Southern, were outraged and in Dublin, the British embassy was set fire to.<sup>116</sup> Five days after Bloody Sunday, Brian Faulkner was summoned to Downing Street where he categorically refused to share parliamentary power with Catholics, and one month later, Stormont was abolished.<sup>117</sup> A direct rule from London was established originally as a temporary solution.<sup>118</sup>

In spite of being an accomplished politician, McKittrick and McVea argue, Brian Faulkner still made several mistakes during his short term as Prime Minister. Firstly, he fully relied on internment without trial, which, as stated above, did not result in the IRA being weakened but rather strengthened and radicalized. On the whole, Faulkner underestimated the IRA and tragically overestimated the abilities of the RUC. Last but

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<sup>112</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 80.

<sup>113</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 83.

<sup>114</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 87.

<sup>115</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 96.

<sup>116</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 88–89.

<sup>117</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 91–93.

<sup>118</sup> Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd, *The Dynamics of Conflict in Northern Ireland: Power, Conflict and Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 131.



not least, he did not take Edward Heath seriously when he said he would abolish the devolved Northern Irish parliament.<sup>119</sup>

### **2.2.6 Towards the Sunningdale Agreement (1972–1973)**

Without Stormont, the responsibility for Northern Irish affairs was transferred from the Home Office to the new Northern Ireland Office (NIO), the first Secretary of State (SOSNI) being Tory William Whitelaw. In an attempt to encourage the SDLP to communicate with the NIO, Whitelaw released some IRA internees and introduced the “special category status” for prisoners associated with paramilitary activities to defuse a hunger strike. He also negotiated with the IRA which strongly alarmed unionists.<sup>120</sup> As the IRA stepped up its violence, so did the loyalists who, having lost faith in the security forces, started to organize vigilante groups. The Ulster Defence Association (UDA), which came to existence in 1971, organized parades wearing semi-military uniforms.<sup>121</sup>

On July 21, the IRA detonated twenty devices in Belfast, claiming nine lives. This day, known as Bloody Friday, significantly damaged the IRA’s reputation, since, as they would many times in the future, they attacked and killed civilian targets.<sup>122</sup>

The year 1973 brought about important changes. The United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland became members of the European Economic Community. Loyalist paramilitaries started being arrested, and the IRA changed its strategy from random car bombs to more carefully targeted attacks, including bombings in England.<sup>123</sup>

William Whitelaw came up with a plan to elect a new devolved parliament. He also introduces the concept of the Council of Ireland, which appalled most unionists. Elections into the new Assembly were held, prior to which Faulkner advertised he would not share the government with anyone who wanted to break the link with the United Kingdom, but in the end showed willingness to collaborate with the SDLP. The SDLP harvested most of the Catholic vote as republicans boycotted the election.<sup>124</sup> The first meeting of the Assembly was unruly and much of the moderate party negotiations took

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<sup>119</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 94.

<sup>120</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 97–98.

<sup>121</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 99–100.

<sup>122</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 100–101.

<sup>123</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 104–105.

<sup>124</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 106–107.

place outside of it. As a result, an eleven-man executive was compiled, and the parties (SDLP, UUP and Alliance) met with the representatives of the London and Dublin administrations in Sunningdale in late 1973, Whitelaw having been replaced as SOSNI by the much less experienced Francis Pym, to negotiate the final shape of the Council of Ireland.<sup>125</sup> Even though the negotiations were inherently difficult due to the Northern Irish political parties' differences, it succeeded in bringing all of the sides of the debate to one table, even though the power-sharing executive, as drawn out in the Sunningdale Agreement, ultimately did more bad than good.<sup>126</sup>

### **2.2.7 The Ulster Workers' Council Strike (1974)**

The new administration with Faulkner as chief minister and SDLP's Gerry Fitt as his deputy was opposed by the IRA as well as the majority of Protestant population, which especially disliked the idea of the Council of Ireland. The fact that Faulkner insisted on it made him lose his own party's support and UUP as well as Paisley's DUP and William Craig's Vanguard were now all in opposition to the Sunningdale Agreement and organized the United Ulster Unionist Council (UUUC). Paramilitaries on both sides intensified their action, loyalists especially, in an attempt to bring the new executive down.<sup>127</sup> Meanwhile in London, a new general election is held, returning Labourist Harold Wilson to the position of Prime Minister and Merlyn Rees becomes the new SOSNI.<sup>128</sup>

The Ulster Workers' Council (UWC), consisting of trade unionists and others based in key industries with overwhelmingly Protestant workforce, such as heavy engineering and most importantly electricity generation, decided to stage a workers' strike. On day one, May 15, 1974, most workers came to work as usual, and the UDA set out to intimidate them into leaving. The production of electricity dropped critically, and many industries simply could not function rather than being on strike, but all of Northern Ireland came to a standstill nevertheless.<sup>129</sup> Harold Wilson broadcast an angry speech, known later as "the spongers speech," in which he condemned the strikers' behavior as

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<sup>125</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 109–110.

<sup>126</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 112.

<sup>127</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 114–115.

<sup>128</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 117.

<sup>129</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 119–120.

undemocratic, called Northern Irelanders “spongers” living off of other British taxpayers’ money, and posed the famously rhetorical question, “Who do they think they are?”<sup>130</sup>

With no control over the strike and without the support of his own party, William Faulkner resigned and Merlyn Rees decided to wind up Whitelaw’s executive.<sup>131</sup>

The strike ended on May 28. Previously, a collective nationalist action brought down Stormont, and now the UWC strike proved that when Protestants get together, they too can bring down any system they oppose: they were the majority in the population and held key jobs. Many politicians concluded that the Northern Irish problem had no solution.<sup>132</sup> Both sides were able to bring executives down but never created anything new that would last and instead stubbornly insisted on their irreconcilable demands.<sup>133</sup> Protestants might have won this battle, but they did not gain any international support as many of them still advocated the return to the undemocratic majority rule.<sup>134</sup>

## **2.2.8 Temporary Ceasefires (1975)**

In 1974, Merlyn Rees legalized both Sinn Féin, the IRA’s political wing, and the UVF in an attempt to negotiate with them. The IRA demanded a promise of British army’s withdrawal, and Rees responded by signing no new internment orders. The IRA announced a ceasefire, which lasted almost the entire year 1975.<sup>135</sup> At the same time, however, 1975 was fraught with IRA internal conflict between the Official and Provisional wings, and the ceasefire reduced its morale as well as the number of new recruits.<sup>136</sup>

Merlyn Rees introduced a new Northern Irish body, the Northern Ireland Constitutional Convention and called an election in which the UUUC won 55 per cent of the seats. William Craig showed willingness to share administration with the SDLP and was promptly disposed of by his own Vanguard party. Instead, unionists compiled a list of demands, which included that the U.K. promise there would never be any more plans for a Council of Ireland, that the U.K. grant a new Stormont parliament with even greater

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<sup>130</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 122.

<sup>131</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 123.

<sup>132</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 125–126.

<sup>133</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 133.

<sup>134</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 139.

<sup>135</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 127–128.

<sup>136</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 128–129.

devolved powers than it previously had, and that the amount of Westminster seats for Northern Ireland be doubled. None of these were obviously acceptable for the British government and Rees abandoned the convention.<sup>137</sup>

New SOSNI, Roy Mason, turned away from finding a political agreement to the questions of security and economy.<sup>138</sup> The UVF and the UDA on one side and the IRA on the other all continued to attack enemy civilians, pubs and bars being frequent targets. During the late 1976 and early 1977, however, the violence was to calm down.<sup>139</sup>

### **2.2.9 Castlereagh (1975–1979)**

Having previously served as minister of defense, Roy Mason thought in military terms. While Rees negotiated and maintained contact with republican paramilitaries, Mason set out to defeat them by the use of military action and job creation.<sup>140</sup> He introduced two new security measures, known as “criminalization” and “Ulsterization.” Criminalization meant that all paramilitary action would be stripped of their political label. Ulsterization was a plan to decrease the number of British soldiers in Northern Ireland and replace them with newly trained locals in the RUC and an expanded Ulster Defence Regiment.<sup>141</sup> Mason also ended internment in 1975, but introduced new teams of interrogators and specialized interrogation centers, most important (an infamous) of which was Castlereagh in east Belfast. Both republicans and loyalists complained of these investigators’ brutality.<sup>142</sup>

On the Northern Irish party-political scene, moderate unionism virtually disappeared with the death of Brian Faulkner in 1977, and the only unionism now was that of the brand of Ian Paisley and others like him.<sup>143</sup> Meanwhile, the republican movement was taken over by young Northerners (as opposed to the former South-based leadership). This new generation considered the mid-1970s ceasefire a complete disaster and was alarmed by the Castlereagh interrogation system. They started a long-term war, which included attacks in Britain, in order to provoke international pressure and to make

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<sup>137</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 131.

<sup>138</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 133.

<sup>139</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 136.

<sup>140</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 138–139.

<sup>141</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 143.

<sup>142</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 144–145.

<sup>143</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 146.

it too expensive for Great Britain to maintain its control over Northern Ireland.<sup>144</sup> The IRA reorganized into a cell structure which made its members harder to track for the investigators as well as potential inside informers. It also widened its range of targets to all the parts of the “British machine,” which included for example businessmen or prison staff, but it suffered multiple setbacks, especially in the case of the attack on La Mon house, a small hotel they bombed, causing many deaths after giving an inadequate warning.<sup>145</sup> On August 27, 1979 the IRA assassinated the Queen’s cousin, Lord Mountbatten in County Sligo, and in Warrenpoint, County Down they killed eighteen British soldiers.<sup>146</sup>

In short, the Castlereagh system did not amount to much, except for further arousing the IRA’s violent sentiments. During his time in office, Roy Mason underestimated the development of good political relationships; it was becoming clear that a solely military solution without politics would never work.<sup>147</sup>

### **2.2.10 Hunger Strikes (1980–1981)**

With Margaret Thatcher becoming Prime Minister in the general election of 1979, Roy Mason was replaced as SOSNI by Humphrey Atkins. Like his predecessors, Atkins immediately introduced his version of the solution of the Northern Irish question. He planned a conference of major parties on devolution. He promised there would not be a second Sunningdale or a second Stormont and that any sort of Irish dimension was out of the question. The SDLP boycotted the conference and so did the UUP, which still hoped for the return of a majority government.<sup>148</sup>

In 1981, all eyes turned to the Maze prison. In the era of internment, the prison grew significantly. The special category status of political prisoners granted to paramilitaries by William Whitelaw meant that these prisoners were allowed to freely associate, wear civilian clothes, and receive extra mail from the outside world; they were also exempt from prison work. Roy Mason’s criminalization did not take this status away from the current prisoners, but newcomers would no longer receive it and would be placed

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<sup>144</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 148–149.

<sup>145</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 150.

<sup>146</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 154.

<sup>147</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 155.

<sup>148</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 156–158.

together with “normal criminals” in the newly built H-blocks. Loyalist paramilitaries accepted the new rules relatively calmly, but republicans decided to put up a fight.<sup>149</sup> Starting in the fall of 1976, they refused to put on prison clothes and were punished by being kept in their cells wrapped only in a blanket. While the IRA carried out attacks on prison personnel, they discouraged the prisoners from protesting because by 1978, three years had passed and the protests had no wider public support. The prisoners stepped up their protests regardless. As part of the “no wash” protest, they refused to leave their cells to shower or clean their chamber pots. They also started using their excrements as a weapon and smeared them on the walls after which the prison became infested with parasites and had to be steam-cleaned.<sup>150</sup>

Going on a hunger strike was always regarded by republicans as something close to martyrdom, but in the 1980s, the republican leadership was against the strategy. Other forms of protests were abandoned, and seven men went on a hunger strike in October 1980. They demanded back the special category rights and all other freedoms taken away due to the previous protests. Even though they gained nothing, the strike was called off in December.<sup>151</sup>

The second hunger strike was started by Bobby Sands on March 1, 1981. He was joined by another prisoner every week in order to create constant pressure on the British government; once mourning was over, there would be another funeral. Sands had been arrested for gun possession rather than murder, he was good-looking and attracted great attention from the media. While on strike, he was elected a Westminster MP, Margaret Thatcher refused to release him, and he died of starvation on May 5.<sup>152</sup>

By August 1981, a total of ten strikers had died. Multiple world humanitarian organizations tried to intervene, but the most successful force proved to be the prison chaplain, Father Denis Faul who persuaded the strikers’ families to make them stop.<sup>153</sup> In the eyes of the public, republicans gained tremendously by the strikes. Criminalization was canceled, and even though the special category status was not fully reintroduced, paramilitaries gained back their label of political prisoners, as being able to die for their

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<sup>149</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 160.

<sup>150</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 161–163.

<sup>151</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 164–165.

<sup>152</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 165–167.

<sup>153</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 169.

cause clearly differentiated them from common criminals. Radicalized new recruits flooded into the IRA as well as Sinn Féin.<sup>154</sup>

### **2.2.11 The Anglo-Irish Agreement (1982–1987)**

The IRA was stepping up their bombing attacks in England. In July 1982, they killed eleven soldiers in two places in London, and in December 1983 their bomb exploded in front of Harrods, packed full with Christmas shoppers. Loyalists meanwhile lay low.<sup>155</sup> The police started using supergrasses from both camps, who testified against their former associates in exchange for a new life outside of Northern Ireland. The practice took large numbers of paramilitaries off the streets, but it was widely criticized, as people were regularly arrested by testimony of a single person with a paramilitary past, often guilty of the most serious crimes.<sup>156</sup>

The new SOSNI, James Prior, made an attempt to organize an elected assembly to which some powers could be devolved, but the Northern Irish political scene was so embittered by the time, that almost no-one was enthusiastic to take part in it. Meanwhile, Margaret Thatcher was trying to establish a political relationship with Taoiseach Charles Haughey.<sup>157</sup> Both London and Dublin were alarmed by the rapid rise of Sinn Féin activity after the hunger strikes. Sinn Féin became a political party, averaging 12 per cent of the total vote in the first half of the 1980s and 40 per cent of nationalist vote, and therefore became the fourth largest party in Northern Ireland. In the Republic, the republican Fianna Fáil was replaced by the more moderate Fine Gael and the new Taoiseach, Garret FitzGerald, was likewise terrified should Sinn Féin take over SDLP votes.<sup>158</sup>

Fitzgerald and SDLP leader John Hume created a New Ireland Forum whose report offered three options: united Ireland, federal Ireland, and a joint London-Dublin authority, which became the basis for the Anglo-Irish Agreement of November 1985.<sup>159</sup> The Agreement vowed to change nothing about Northern Ireland's political status and the role of the Republic was to be only advisory. Unionists, however, were appalled, as the

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<sup>154</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 170.

<sup>155</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 173–174.

<sup>156</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 179.

<sup>157</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 181–182

<sup>158</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 183–185.

<sup>159</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 185–188.

tone of the Agreement was obviously nationalist. Moreover, they did not believe it would ever be signed and UUP leader James Molyneaux did not even take part in the negotiations in the belief that boycotting them would prevent the Agreement from coming to existence.<sup>160</sup>

In reaction to the Agreement, unionists started rallying and harassing the RUC personnel. Fifteen unionist MPs resigned their seats, losing one of them in a by-election to the SDLP, but the Agreement survived.<sup>161</sup> What republicans were most afraid of in the Agreement was the security aspect. Watchtowers were erected around the border against the IRA, and Dublin's friendliness with London might result in the marginalization of republicanism and the erosion of Sinn Féin vote. In November 1986, the party changed its policy about not taking their seats in the Dáil.<sup>162</sup> Nationalists were at first satisfied with the Agreement, but they soon became disillusioned, when, instead of bringing about the promised reform, Westminster set out to soothe the Protestants' dismay.<sup>163</sup>

The fact that Sinn Féin fully entered the political scene did not mean that the republicans gave up on violence. In the 1970s, the IRA struck a deal with Libyan ruler Muammar Gaddafi and when Libyan-British relations worsened in the 1984, Gaddafi secretly sent them heavy weapons with which the IRA conducted attacks on the British army in Britain as well as in mainland Europe. Several of their attacks were more over the top than usual, namely the bombing in Enniskillen, Count Fermanagh, killing eleven people on Remembrance Day, a peaceful day by definition. In 1987, a member of the INLA (Irish National Liberation Army; a republican paramilitary group formed by the IRA's rejects) kidnapped and mutilated a Dublin dentist. His actions hindered Sinn Féin's political expansion in the Republic for years and contributed to Margaret Thatcher's decision to ban republican media broadcasts.

## **2.2.12 Conclusion**

As I have done at the end of the previous subchapter, I would like to close this one by pointing out two patterns that clearly emerge from the historical overview above. Firstly, unionist politics comes across as absolutely unforgiving. In essence, every Prime Minister

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<sup>160</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 190.

<sup>161</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 192–193.

<sup>162</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 195.

<sup>163</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 196–197.



and/or UUP leader who showed willingness to compromise and cooperate with nationalists more or less immediately lost the support of his own party, and as a result was forced to resign his position. This sequence of events can be observed in the case of Terence O'Neill in the 1960s and his great rival Brian Faulkner in the 1970s. Even the Vanguard Ulster Unionist Party expelled its founder and leader, William Craig, the moment he started considering it possible to make a deal with the SDLP, though here it is important to note that Vanguard was based in loyalism rather than mere unionism, and Craig's change of heart must have come as an extremely unpleasant shock to his fellow party members.

As this entire chapter on multiple occasions describes, Protestants had always been scared for their position in Ireland since the time their predecessors set foot on Irish soil in the era of the plantation. They were scared of their Catholic tenants and subjects due to the sheer number of them, they were scared of the Home Rule debates should they themselves become a minority in a state run by Catholics, and they were no less scared after partition in a country purposefully designed in order for them to be the majority citizens. The fact that some members of the UUP, the least "radical" unionist party, still refused to take part in the 1980 Atkins conference simply because it categorically ruled out the possibility to return to the majority rule of the Stormont is mindboggling. In accordance with McKittrick and McVea, I arrived to the conclusion that the end-of-1980s unionism was equally or maybe even more undemocratic than the 1920s unionism of James Craig, who gerrymandered voting districts and ruthlessly weeded out all non-UUP politicians from his parliament.<sup>164</sup> All the rights and liberties nationalists (and by extension Catholics) gained in those six decades were pushed through only upon Westminster's constant insistence and without exception protested against by crowds of Protestants rallied by people like Ian Paisley.

The second point I would like to make ties in with my previous argument regarding the inflexibility of unionism. Not only unionists but all the parties dealing with the Northern Irish question proved to be inflexible on multiple occasions. One only needs to look at the solutions proposed by almost every newly elected Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the reactions they received. I have discussed five of the SOSNI in some detail above, but I will briefly recapitulate their attempts here.

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<sup>164</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 7.

Shortly after the abolishment of Stormont, the first SOSNI, William Whitelaw, proposed a new devolved Assembly and the infamous Council of Ireland which resulted in the Sunningdale Agreement. Elections for the Assembly took place, but it was an incoherent body from the start and collapsed within the first half a year of its existence. Republicans refused to take part in the election. The third SOSNI, Merlyn Rees, introduced the Constitutional Convention which unionists used to place demands the British government found intolerable and the Convention was quickly abandoned as well. The fifth SOSNI, Humphrey Atkins, attempted to organize another conference on devolution which was boycotted by both the UUP and the SDLP. Finally, when James Prior introduced the idea for an assembly which would be granted devolved powers upon unionist and nationalist agreement, the SDLP opted out.

As violence escalated, both nationalists and unionists noticeably radicalized. McKittrick and McVea place the end of moderate unionism in the year 1977,<sup>165</sup> and co-founder and leader of the SDLP, Gerry Fitt, resigned his function in 1979, citing the party's increasing nationalism as his reason.<sup>166</sup> It is therefore quite understandable that, being increasingly politically farther apart, the parties first attempted to find common ground half-heartedly at best, and in the end they did not attempt at all. Both sides clearly had to see that the situation cannot change unless compromises are attempted, but Catholic nationalists were deeply offended and angered by centuries of oppression, and Protestant unionists were, as always, afraid of making any concessions at all. Unionists even went so far as to incorporate their inflexibility and fear of change into their slogans, such as "What we have we hold," "No surrender," or "Not an inch," thereby making them sources of their Protestant pride.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 146.

<sup>166</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 156.

<sup>167</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 7.

### 3 The Troubles and Its Causes

This chapter revisits the topic of the Troubles in more detail and employs a different approach. Knowing the historical sequence of events is only one of the prerequisites to fully understanding the workings of the Northern Irish society because it paints only a partial picture of the various communal divisions that exist in the country, and seemingly overemphasizes the factor of religion. As is my intention to show in this chapter, religion is only one of many aspects of the conflict. My major source for this chapter was Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd's *The Dynamics of Conflict in Northern Ireland*, originally published in 1996, and all statistics and percentages therefore date back to the late 1980s and early 1990s. As I have stated above, the historical scope of this thesis ends with Stewart Parker's death in 1988, and Ruane and Todd's book was purposefully chosen as a basis for this chapter because it captures Northern Irish society as Parker knew it.

In the following three subchapters I am going to introduce Ruane and Todd's observations on Northern Irish communities and the identities people associated with them hold. I will also briefly address what I refer to as the "international dimension" of the Troubles as well as the problematic perception of Northern Ireland and its citizens the Troubles brought about.

#### 3.1 Communities: An Introduction

As Ruane and Todd put forward in the introductory chapter of their *The Dynamics of Conflict in Northern Ireland*, the "ethno-nationalist" and "settler-colonial" aspects of the Troubles are definitely important, but at the same time it is dangerous to classify the conflict solely using these two dimensions.<sup>168</sup> Various writers on Northern Ireland frequently choose a single aspect of the Troubles and attempt to explain the entire conflict through it; Ruane and Todd cite conflicting nationalisms or political and economic inequalities as most frequent examples, but their own argument is that these are in no way exclusive. All these aspects are present and they amplify each other.<sup>169</sup> "Communities," they write, "are emergent entities . . . which . . . possess some general properties including a level of self-consciousness, integrating organisational networks and a capacity for

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<sup>168</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 4.

<sup>169</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 5.

boundary maintenance.”<sup>170</sup> In their view, however, this does not exclude a definition of communities as fluid groupings which often mutually overlap and which allow people to be members of several communities at once. Speaking of Northern Ireland as divided into two monolithic communities is therefore a gross oversimplification.<sup>171</sup>

“Socio-cultural and ideological difference alone would not have produced oppositional communities or intense communal conflict. Difference became conflictual and lasting because it was the basis of access to resources and power,” Ruane and Todd write.<sup>172</sup> They see the following as the main, mutually co-dependent, dimensions of the Northern Irish conflict: ethnicity (Gaelic Irish, Irish-English, New English, Scottish), religion (Catholicism vs. multiple brands of Protestantism), colonialism (settler vs. native), and political persuasion (unionist vs. nationalist).<sup>173</sup> I would like to add another complicated dimension to the list: class.

### **3.1.1 Ethnicity**

Before Reformation and the subsequent Protestant plantation, there were two ethnic groups living in Ireland—the Gaelic Irish and the English-speaking Anglo-Irish. Plantation brought two more ethnic groups—Lowland Scots (who settled especially in Ulster) and the English. The Gaelic Irish and the Anglo-Irish slowly but surely coalesced into one group, and from the eighteenth century on, it is possible to speak of a Catholic Irish community.<sup>174</sup>

### **3.1.2 Religion**

Since Reformation and following Counterreformation, there were significant differences within both the Protestant and Catholic community. Protestants split into Presbyterians and those belonging to the Church of Ireland, and Counterreformation Catholicism of the middle and upper classes was much more orthodox than the “old” Catholicism of the rural population. Protestants and Catholics, of course, dismissed each other’s faith completely. For Catholics, all Protestants were heretics and betrayers of the true church, while

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<sup>170</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 9.

<sup>171</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 9–10.

<sup>172</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 12.

<sup>173</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 10–11.

<sup>174</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 24.

Protestants saw Catholics as ignorant, superstitious and completely under control of their clergy.<sup>175</sup> The accession of William of Orange to the throne brought with it the legal limitations of Catholics' rights, which they fully gained back as late as 1829.<sup>176</sup>

### **3.1.3 Settler vs. Native**

In the case of the settler vs. native aspect, Ruane and Todd stress the importance of not reducing it to a mere religious or ethnical conflict.<sup>177</sup> An incomplete reformation, which, however would be indigenous (i.e. by decision of the people as opposed to by decision of the king only) would leave behind the legacy of religious conflict, but Protestants would not be perceived as “foreigners.” A non-religiously motivated immigration, on the other hand, would leave a legacy of ethnic conflict, but would not have produced “the psychology of dispossession and reciprocal fear of expulsion.”<sup>178</sup>

### **3.1.4 Political Persuasion**

Ireland has been ethnically (and religiously) divided since the sixteenth century; the emergence of the nationalist-unionist division dates back only to the early nineteenth century.<sup>179</sup> As I already mentioned in section 2.1.3, the idea of nationalism as represented by Wolfe Tone, was originally a late-eighteenth-century Protestant enterprise. This fact alone significantly complicates the perception of nationalism as something associated to Catholics alone. Unionism, as its name suggests, came to being with the 1801 Acts of Union with Great Britain. Ruane and Todd stress the importance of the newly emerged British identity with which unionists happily identified because it was not spatially delimited, and instead it put emphasis on Anglo-Saxon ethnicity and Protestant religion.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 22.

<sup>176</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 23.

<sup>177</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 24.

<sup>178</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 25.

<sup>179</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 28.

<sup>180</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 28–29.

### **3.1.5 Class**

The nineteenth-century industrialization and economic expansion brought class distinctions to the fore. Catholic middle class grew in number, and under its leadership, religious emancipation was achieved, giving Catholics a distinct political identity for the first time.<sup>181</sup> As I already mentioned in some detail in section 2.1.5, in spite of the fact that Protestant and Catholic workers were facing the same struggles, their memberships in the religiously and politically opposed communities never allowed them to fight for their workers' rights as successfully as in other countries.

### **3.1.6 A Note on Tendencies to Violence**

During the seventeenth century, in Catholic-Protestant battles and skirmishes, Catholics were overwhelmingly on the losing side. They carried these feelings of defeat into the eighteenth century, at the end of which “intimidation, tradition of conspirational insurrection, . . . threats, intimidation, property destruction, [and] assassination” became essential parts of their fighting style.<sup>182</sup> These violent guerilla tactics were widely used due to the Catholics' previous ill success in conventional military action. Of course these means were not completely foreign to the Protestant part of the population, but they put much more faith into traditional British-like warfare, were comparatively securely in power and hand stronger bonds due to institutions such as the Orange Order, discussed in more detail in section 2.2.1.1.<sup>183</sup>

### **3.1.7 Summary**

The goal of this subchapter was to show how the listed dimensions of conflict overlap. These overlaps have two crucial consequences. Firstly, the developments along one of these dimensions always influenced and in turn depended on all the other dimension. Secondly, “the fact that the communities were divided on multiple dimensions did not mean that each individual drew on all the dimension constructing his or her opposition to the members of the other community,” and from individual to individual, the memberships in the various communities had different degrees of importance.<sup>184</sup> As an

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<sup>181</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 35.

<sup>182</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 46.

<sup>183</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 47.

<sup>184</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 29.

example I would like to once again return to the United Irishmen movement of the late eighteenth century. The movement indeed had Protestant origins, but to be more specific, these were mostly radical Presbyterians, not Church of Ireland supporters. The two Protestant Churches obviously shared many aspects of religion, but when it came to nationalism the ethnically Scottish Presbyterians' interests were much closer to those of Catholics.<sup>185</sup>

## 3.2 Post-partition Changes in Communal Division

### 3.2.1 Protestant Identity and Unionism

Ulster Protestants always regarded themselves as different from those living in the other provinces and were recognized as such. Ulster Protestantism was heavily influenced by Scottish Presbyterianism, by Ulster's more advanced industrialization, by the fact that in Ulster, Protestants made up the majority of the population, and by their strong religious fundamentalism. With partition, the Ulster (or more specifically Northern Irish) Protestant identity further crystalized, as the country's borders were designed to create an overwhelmingly Protestant new state.<sup>186</sup> There are many strands of Protestantism, the largest three being Church of Ireland, Presbyterians, and Methodists. Each of these groups is internally divided on a spectrum from fundamentalists to liberals, and even though their origins lie in Reformation, they can hardly be considered a homogeneous group.<sup>187</sup>

Ruane and Todd consider the cultural differences within the Protestant community more marked than their political differences. They differentiate between at least four cultural identities:<sup>188</sup> British, Ulster, Northern Irish, and Irish. The British and Irish identities are quite obvious; the difference between identifying as Ulster or Northern Irelander lies in the different conceptions of Ulster, i.e. the Northern Irish Protestant community, and Northern Ireland with both its Catholic and Protestant citizens.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 34.

<sup>186</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 49–50.

<sup>187</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 54–55.

<sup>188</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 57.

<sup>189</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 59.

Politically, the majority of all Protestants supports unionist parties such as the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) or the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).<sup>190</sup> Ideologically, however, they are split into two major clusters, loyalists and unionists, and two minor ones, bridge-builders and dissenters. Loyalists tend to be mostly working-class, more religiously fundamentalist, have a primarily Ulster identity, and are the most opposed to reform and compromise. Most of them vote for the DUP. The more mainstream Protestants, pure unionists, usually support the UUP.<sup>191</sup> Bridge-builders, as their name suggests, are usually pro-compromise and think of themselves as Northern Irelanders, and the group Ruane and Todd refer to as dissenters is the smallest of the four whose members have an Irish identity and are not opposed to the idea of a united Ireland.<sup>192</sup> The historical origins of dissent lies with Presbyterians, who were the minority settler group and sought to defend their rights against the Church of England/Ireland majority.<sup>193</sup>

### **3.2.2 Catholic Identity and Nationalism**

Before partition, Irish Catholicism was much better organized than Irish Protestantism. In the late nineteenth century, the Catholic Church centralized its structure, standardized its rites, and had significant amount of control over its supporters. Alongside being the most Presbyterian province, Ulster was also the most Gaelic of the four. After partition, Northern Irish Catholics lost Dublin as their “geographical centre of identity;” Belfast was thoroughly Protestant, and even though they constituted the majority in Londonderry, O’Neill’s administration immediately marginalized them.<sup>194</sup> Within the Catholic community, splintering and differences are rare and most attend church weekly.<sup>195</sup> Politically, about 80 per cent of Catholic support the idea of a united Ireland in the not-so-near future. At the time of writing, Ruane and Todd recorded that around two thirds of Catholics supported the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) and the rest supported some minor parties and Sinn Féin.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 55–57.

<sup>191</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 60–61.

<sup>192</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 61.

<sup>193</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 86.

<sup>194</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 51–52.

<sup>195</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 66.

<sup>196</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 67.



The cultural unity of Catholics is stronger than their political unity. Unlike Protestants who have four basic identities, Catholics only have three: Irish, Northern Irish, and British. They understandably very rarely self-identify with the Ulster (Protestant) community. About 60 per cent identify as Irish, about 25 per cent, especially the higher social classes, tend to identify as Northern Irish, and only about 8 per cent considers themselves British.<sup>197</sup>

Ruane and Todd identify four basic ideological clusters: nationalists, republicans, bridge-builders and Catholic unionists. Republicans are usually less religious and more devoted to the reunification of Ireland by any means possible, self-identify as Irish, and they vote for Sinn Féin. Orthodox Catholics are much more often found among nationalists who do support the option of united Ireland, but at the same time are content with power sharing and an “Irish dimension” in Northern Ireland’s government. They vote for the SDLP and identify as Irish. Bridge-builders vote for neutral parties such as Alliance, and their attitude in matters of religion are likewise neutral. They usually identify as Northern Irish.<sup>198</sup>

### **3.2.3 Class and Political Preferences**

Protestants tend to underplay the class division and instead concentrate on the creation of a uniform Protestant community in traditional institutions such as the Orange Order. The DUP and the UUP use the same symbolism, even though the former is clearly more radical and loyalist than the latter.<sup>199</sup> As mentioned above, DUP supporters and loyalists in general are overwhelmingly working-class individuals. A similar division of voting preferences influenced by class can also be seen among Catholics. In the case of Catholics, however, since their middle class was small for a long time and their upper class de facto non-existent, the class differences are less pronounced. The SDLP draws its supporters from all social classes, but its core voters are middle class. Alliance supporters are even more likely to be middle- and upper-class citizens, while Sinn Féin voters tend to be working class.<sup>200</sup> Catholics do not have any secular organization of the

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<sup>197</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 70.

<sup>198</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 71–72.

<sup>199</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 63–64.

<sup>200</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 73.

size of the Protestant Orange Order; for them, the largest grouping still remains the Church which permeates all aspects of their lives.<sup>201</sup>

### 3.3 International Dimensions and Implications

#### 3.3.1 The British Dimension

Ruane and Todd cite two prevalent opinions on the role of Britain in the Troubles. Firstly, that the conflict originated in the Irish or Northern Irish dimension and Britain merely offers “a progressive modern political arena with which it can be resolved.” Secondly, that the conflict originated in the British dimension and that British presence therefore only prolongs it.<sup>202</sup>

Even though the United Kingdom does not have a written constitution, two different constitutional spheres exist in practice: one for domestic affairs and another for the imperial/colonial affairs. Ireland is fully part of neither of these spheres.<sup>203</sup> With the Acts of Union in 1801, it became part of the domestic sphere and since then it has been oscillating back and forth between the two; there was devolution, partition, and then Stormont was abolished.<sup>204</sup> Ireland, in short, has always been “a half-way house. It experienced much of the ruthless instrumentality of the colonial process elsewhere . . . . But Irish differences always appeared—to the British at least—less inevitable and more reconcilable than those of the other colonies.”<sup>205</sup>

#### 3.3.2 The Irish Dimension

Even though the Irish Free State was worried about abandoning the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland, the young country had much more pressing matters to attend to, namely that its economy suddenly lost the best-developed parts of its industrial sector. Regardless of what was happening in the North, the Southern society was rid of pretty much all sectarian fights.<sup>206</sup> The outbreak of the Troubles was of course disturbing for the

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<sup>201</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 74.

<sup>202</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 204.

<sup>203</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 204–205.

<sup>204</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 207.

<sup>205</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 213.

<sup>206</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 250–251.

Republic, but any attempt of involvement in it only added fuel to the fire.<sup>207</sup> The South did play a role in arming the Catholic community in order for it to be capable of self-defense, but the Republic was horrified at the IRA violence as well as the rapid rise of support for Sinn Féin.<sup>208</sup>

### 3.3.3 The American Dimension

The United States of America likewise played a role in the history of (Northern) Ireland. The post-famine immigrants went on feeding their hatred for the British who, as they saw it, gave them no other choice but to leave their home country. Irish Americans were instrumental in the birth of Fenianism, they sent large sums of money to support forces fighting for Irish independence on Britain, including the IRA,<sup>209</sup> and the American government discontinued selling guns to the RUC, arguing that human rights were being abused.

## 3.4 Conclusion: Is There a Single Community?

The question posed in the title of this section is a difficult one, as there are arguments supporting both the positive and the negative answer. An important argument to say that there is not a single Northern Irish community is the fact that over 80 per cent of the population still vote for political parties which only appeal to one segment of it.<sup>210</sup> Neutral parties such as Alliance appear overwhelmingly to the professional, university educated (upper) middle class.<sup>211</sup>

Ruane and Todd answer the proposed question in the affirmative. There is a single Northern Irish community, they claim, but it is a divided one. The simplest reason is that over the years, “Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland [started to] have more in common with each other than either community has with their wider British or Irish societies,” especially because these two societies can be extremely dismissive to Northern Irelanders.<sup>212</sup> Around a half of British citizens think that Northern Ireland should leave

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<sup>207</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 252.

<sup>208</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 261.

<sup>209</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 273.

<sup>210</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 76–77.

<sup>211</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 63, 75.

<sup>212</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 77.

the United Kingdom, and its violence is not considered the matter of common British interest.<sup>213</sup> By the 1980s, the people of the Republic of Ireland ceased to be interested in the Troubles, and, as was the case in the United Kingdom, Northern Irelanders started to be seen as undesirable potential terrorists.<sup>214</sup> The heavy censorship in the past likewise did not help to create an informed public opinion on the matter.<sup>215</sup>

Not even the American public was better informed than the Irish or British one. Even the Irish Americans continued to see the Troubles simply in terms of colonialism, which explains their support for the IRA, since they perceived them as freedom-fighters, and they consider the existence of the Northern Irish Protestant community only infrequently.<sup>216</sup>

### **3.4.1 Stewart Parker's World**

Bearing in mind all of Northern Ireland's communities and their preoccupations, it comes as no surprise that Stewart Parker, who decided to devote his creative energies to writing almost exclusively on Northern Ireland, could never be sure how his work would be accepted. His thoughtful and often symbolist treatment of everyday life in Northern Ireland was often alienating even to those who lived in it and understood it very well, and outside of Northern Ireland his plays were frequently received with mixed because especially the British and the Irish public were disgusted with everything Northern Irish and prejudiced against every work of fiction where the Troubles were all but mentioned.<sup>217</sup> The following chapters attempt to discuss Parker's work in a way sufficiently historically informed and rid of typical British and Irish prejudices because, as Parker himself says, "the danger remains that the audience may simply take the fun and leave the message on the plate."<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 225.

<sup>214</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 252.

<sup>215</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics*, 255.

<sup>216</sup> McKittrick and McVea, *Troubles*, 145.

<sup>217</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, xi–xii.

<sup>218</sup> Stewart Parker, *Dramatic Personae & Other Writings*, eds. Gerald Dawe, Maria Johnston and Clare Wallace (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2008), 21.

## 4 The Life of Stewart Parker

This chapter offers a shortened biography of Stewart Parker. Attention is paid especially to the experiences, which formed him as an artist; to his reactions to the political situation in Northern Ireland and how it reflected in his work; and to his struggles with the writing and staging of his theater plays.

### 4.1 Childhood

James Stewart Parker was born in east Belfast on October 20, 1941, into an “average Unionist family,”<sup>219</sup> which belonged to the Church of Ireland. Neither the political nor religious persuasion of his parents was particularly strong, and only his maternal grandfather actively participated in the Orange marches. Even though Parker grew up in an exclusively Protestant neighborhood, he did not remember ever being told to “hate papists.”<sup>220</sup> Parker’s family was always interested in music and Parker himself started playing the guitar in his teenage years.<sup>221</sup> Music would never cease to be important for him, songs and musical numbers would frequently appear in his plays, and he even wrote a popular music column for the *Irish Times* for several years.

When he was seven years old, Parker suffered of pleurisy and as a result missed an entire year of school. Later in life, he evaluated this experience as one of those instrumental in the development of the passive, stoic, and reflective side of his personality.<sup>222</sup>

As a child of working-class parents, Parker massively benefited from the post-World War II education reforms. Even though he was talented enough to pass the Eleven Plus exam and continue studying at a grammar school, he was not offered the option because of his prolonged illness and instead went on to Ashfield Boys’ Secondary School. There his English teacher was John Malone, who first introduced Parker to the theater by giving him the title role in a school performance of the fifteenth-century play *Everyman*.<sup>223</sup> He also encouraged Parker to perform magic tricks in front of the class, and

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<sup>219</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 2.

<sup>220</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 3.

<sup>221</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 4.

<sup>222</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 5–6.

<sup>223</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 8.

did his best to help him transfer to the Sullivan Upper School. Parker, however, did not like Sullivan much, and Sullivan did not seem to like him either because he could not play rugby and was not adequately snobbish for it, as evidenced by his refusal to modify his east Belfast accent.<sup>224</sup> Parker started exhibiting literary tendencies around the age of thirteen, and by age fifteen, he had decided to become a writer in the future.<sup>225</sup>

## 4.2 Queen's University, Amputation, and Marriage

Marginalized at Sullivan, upon entering Queen's University in 1959 Parker blossomed because he was finally meeting people with similar interests. He soon became a well-known and well-liked figure.<sup>226</sup> Queen's did not force him to deny his working-class origins, and, indeed, many of his school-mates shared it. Moreover, the local Dramatic Society idolized artists from such backgrounds, especially Sam Thompson, a Belfast playwright and author of the controversial 1960 play, *Over the Bridge*.<sup>227</sup> During his undergraduate years, Parker studied diverse subjects such as Spanish, Modern History, and Philosophy alongside various English courses,<sup>228</sup> and he and students like him looked for literary inspiration to the American Beats and the British Angry Young Men.<sup>229</sup> Thompson being a shining exception, Parker did not think much of the weak Northern Irish/Belfast literary scene, lamenting all the Northern Irish artists worth mentioning were living and creating elsewhere.<sup>230</sup>

At age nineteen, Parker started experiencing sharp pains in his left leg. He was diagnosed with bone cancer, and the only way to save his life at that time was to amputate the leg mid-thigh. This incident of course changed Parker's life profoundly, both its physical and mental aspects, and he later recorded the experience in his only novel, the autobiographical *Hopdance*<sup>231</sup> (published posthumously).<sup>232</sup> Parker's artistic sentiments

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<sup>224</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 9.

<sup>225</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 11.

<sup>226</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 15.

<sup>227</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 17.

<sup>228</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 18.

<sup>229</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 19.

<sup>230</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 21.

<sup>231</sup> Stewart Parker, *Hopdance* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2007).

<sup>232</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 29.

at the time of amputation were still quite far removed from who he would become in the future. For example, he still regarded poetry as his medium of choice,<sup>233</sup> even though he was already writing, directing, and acting in plays put on by the Dramatic Society.<sup>234</sup>

Parker met his future wife, Kate Ireland, an English literature student, during his time at Queen's.<sup>235</sup> He also met the young Stephen Rea, who would go on to become an important actor.<sup>236</sup> Parker finished both his undergraduate and graduate degrees at the university, hoping he would find a teaching job in the United States,<sup>237</sup> and in 1964 he accepted an offer from Hamilton College in Clinton, New York. He and Kate Ireland were married, and the couple moved to the United States.<sup>238</sup>

### 4.3 Teaching in the United States

Hamilton College proved to be much more conservative than Parker had expected,<sup>239</sup> but drama played an important role there, and he very soon started to participate.<sup>240</sup> At the same time, however, he was often frustrated by the lack of time for his own creative work, but he did manage to get his first solo publication in print; a short collection of poetry titled *The Casualty's Meditation* was published in Belfast in 1966.<sup>241</sup>

In early 1967, Parker and his wife briefly returned to Belfast. Parker started freelancing for the BBC as a reporter and also got recommended as a writer to the BBC Schools Department, which produced semi-dramatic radio broadcasts for schoolchildren. In that year, the BBC also produced Parker's first ever radio play, *Speaking of Red Indians*.<sup>242</sup>

Between 1967 and 1979, Parker held a creative writing teaching position at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. These were the turbulent times when the anti-Vietnam war protests and the civil rights movement were in full swing. Parker joined with

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<sup>233</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 35.

<sup>234</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 28.

<sup>235</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 40.

<sup>236</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 45.

<sup>237</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 41.

<sup>238</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 48.

<sup>239</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 49.

<sup>240</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 50–51.

<sup>241</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 55.

<sup>242</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 60–62.

other Cornell professors and together they taught classes in the Allenwood Prison Camp, which had a significant population of draft resisters.<sup>243</sup> He likewise witnessed the Cornell civil rights fight in the form of Black students demanding that classes be created dealing with the African-American experience. Parker joined the faculty members who supported this idea and later mentioned the experience in his play *Pentecost*.<sup>244</sup>

#### 4.4 Return to Belfast

The Parkers permanently moved back to Northern Ireland in August 1969, Parker writing in his diary, “May never teach again, unless out of financial desperation.” They arrived to Belfast shortly after the riots in Londonderry and the subsequent deployment of British troops. Inspired by the social upheavals he witnessed in the United States, Parker decided to commit to writing as a form of political action, his primary goal being making Belfast a better place to live. As an unknown artist, however, he found it extremely difficult to support himself by writing alone and often had several projects in journalism, broadcasting or editing going on at once.<sup>245</sup>

As the sectarian fights became more serious, Parker felt that the inflexible Protestant unionists were to blame for most of what was happening. He started to investigate his hometown as a detached observer and became interested in learning the Irish language.<sup>246</sup> In “Buntus Belfast,” an *Irish Times* article on the topic, he confessed to having “an almost Oedipal obsession with Belfast,” but also characterized Northern Ireland as “No Man’s Land” because its Protestant inhabitants look to London, its Catholic inhabitants look to Dublin, and both groups are unwilling to make Northern Ireland feel like home.<sup>247</sup> In terms of his own Northern Irish identity, Parker was painfully aware of the feelings of animosity as well as the prejudices harbored by both the people of the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom towards the Northern Irish. His working-class origins, moreover, alienated him from the main Protestant ideology of unionism, and, as a result, he felt like he was indeed inhabiting a No Man’s Land.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 75–76.

<sup>244</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 77–78.

<sup>245</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 81.

<sup>246</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 83–84.

<sup>247</sup> Parker, *Dramatis Personae*, 33.

<sup>248</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 86.



In late 1969, Parker offered his help in arranging the untidy papers of the late Sam Thompson. The immersion in his idol's private documents might have little influence on his writing but a lot of influence on him as a person, especially in the sense that it made him keep his own papers organized. His most important output from this project was preparing Thompson's *Over the Bridge* for publication in 1970 and the creation of a Sam Thompson archive for the Belfast Central Library.<sup>249</sup> In the same year Parker started writing his *High Pop* columns for the *Irish Times* twice a month as well as reviewing books for various other newspapers, offering himself as an "intellectual for hire" for local BBC television art discussions,<sup>250</sup> and in the summers throughout the early 1970s he and Kate returned to the United States where he taught summer classes on modern drama and Irish literature at Cornell.<sup>251</sup>

#### 4.5 Accommodation and BUS

In the early 1970s, Parker recognized the need for a Troubles literature because the crisis had lasted for a long time and showed no signs of stopping. At the same time, however, he saw that it was still too early to expect artists to be able to detach themselves enough from the situation in order to properly write about it<sup>252</sup> because he also believed that realism was not the right mode to discuss the Troubles, and he expected the development of "some kind of a surrealist form."<sup>253</sup> Between 1972 and 1974, Parker himself did not have a lot of creative output, barely kept his journal, and most of the time was busy doing odd jobs and gathering impressions, which, once he detached himself enough, he used as a backdrop in his mature work.<sup>254</sup>

Kate Parker was not satisfied with staying in the United States only during the summer. She wanted to move there permanently, while Parker himself still preferred living in Belfast in spite of the Troubles.<sup>255</sup> Like other Belfast citizens, he developed a degree of tolerance to the ever-present violence. Richtarik cites a journal entry from

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<sup>249</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 88.

<sup>250</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 94.

<sup>251</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 101.

<sup>252</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 102.

<sup>253</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 126.

<sup>254</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 102.

<sup>255</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 108.

October 1971 in which Parker wrote, “Lunched in lounge of pub blown up some weeks ago & woman killed—McGlades. V. congenial lounge, excellent sandwiches.” What Parker could not ignore, however, was the fact that Belfast’s social life came to a standstill. People stopped going out, and instead invited their friends over to their houses and entertained at home.<sup>256</sup> The situation clearly was not favorable to start a career in popular entertainment.

In 1973, Parker and his friend John Gilbert founded the Belfast Urban Study Group (BUS). They were both passionately opposed to the planned Belfast Urban Motorway and city redevelopment. Instead of the motorway, their group advocated the expansion of Belfast’s public transport system.<sup>257</sup> This passion of Parker’s was later voiced in his first successful theater play, *Spokesong*, except the protagonists advocates the use of bicycles instead of buses. In the same year, Parker again volunteered to teach prison classes, this time at Long Kesh prison, now better known as the Maze and made infamous during the 1981 hunger strikes. Among his students was for example the then twenty-five-year-old IRA leader Gerry Adams, who later became the leader of Sinn Féin.<sup>258</sup>

#### **4.6 Concentrating on Playwriting, *Spokesong*, and Television**

Between 1974 and 1975, Parker finally decided to fully commit to drama writing. He was equally dedicated to explore the Troubles as his main subject. After the Ulster Workers’ Council strike in May 1974, he, like many others, became disillusioned with Belfast, and even though he would always write for an imagined Belfast audience, he started considering moving out.<sup>259</sup> The strike also had other implications for him, namely it reinforced his opinion that writers should not be blind to the social issues around them, and he considered drama the genre with the most political potential.<sup>260</sup>

In early January 1975, the BBC Radio 3 broadcast his play *The Iceberg*, in which two ghosts of Protestant shipyard workers, who died during the construction of the Titanic, comment on the ship’s 1912 maiden voyage and its untimely demise. “Parker

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<sup>256</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 109.

<sup>257</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 121.

<sup>258</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 123.

<sup>259</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 127.

<sup>260</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 133.

also noted,” Richtarik writes, “the coincidence in time between the shipwreck and the debate in the House of Commons on the Third Irish Home Rule Bill. Organized unionist resistance to the idea of Home Rule for the whole of Ireland would result directly in partition and indirectly in the Troubles . . . In *The Iceberg*, Parker makes the doomed ship a metaphor for the equally ill-fated statelet of Northern Ireland.”<sup>261</sup>

While working on the production of *The Iceberg*, Parker befriended its producent, Michael Heffernan, who had good connections with Northern Irish actors residing in London and frequently brought them over to record in Belfast. Through him, Parker again got in touch with Stephen Rea, with whom in mind he would later write many of his leading male characters.<sup>262</sup>

There could not possibly be a worse place for a young playwright than the mid-1970s Belfast. With people not daring to leave their houses after dark, all Belfast’s theaters had closed for security reasons or simply due to small attendance. The Lyric Players Theater was the only one that remained open.<sup>263</sup> The theater was run by enthusiast Mary O’Malley and put on mostly Irish Revival plays, Shakespeare, world classics, and here and there a contemporary play from Dublin. In 1967, Parker published a negative review of one of its performances of Yeats, whereby he managed to make the manager of the only open Belfast theater his enemy.<sup>264</sup> He nicknamed O’Malley “Hail Mary, full of Yeats” and considered any possibility of his play being performed in Belfast doomed, especially since O’Malley hardly ever put on a Northern Irish play at all.<sup>265</sup>

In 1975, Parker and Heffernan were trying to get on stage Parker’s “Bicycle play,”<sup>266</sup> *Spokesong; or the Common Wheel*.<sup>267</sup> Heffernan was to direct the play and Stephen Rea agreed to play the protagonist, Frank Stock.<sup>268</sup> They applied for various grants but were mostly unsuccessful, and Parker was especially frustrated when he saw the Lyric’s production of a play not dissimilar in tone to *Spokesong*, except he regarded

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<sup>261</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 134–135.

<sup>262</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 136–137.

<sup>263</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 139.

<sup>264</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 140–141.

<sup>265</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 142–143.

<sup>266</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 138.

<sup>267</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 143.

<sup>268</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 144.

it as “stale,” “vulgar,” and “cheap.”<sup>269</sup> Luckily he soon got an offer from the Dublin Theatre Festival.<sup>270</sup>

As its title suggests, *Spokesong*, was conceived as a play with musical numbers. Parker provided the lyrics, and asked a well-known Northern Irish composer, Jimmy Kennedy, to provide the music.<sup>271</sup> Kennedy obliged, originally without demanding a percentage from the play’s profits. When *Spokesong* succeeded, however, he regretted his decision and demanded his share of the earnings.<sup>272</sup> The rehearsals also were not without problems: Stephen Rea was not available, Allan McClelland, who played the character of Francis, was difficult to work with, Heffernan had little experience with theatre directing and the group was chronically short for money.<sup>273</sup>

On opening night, the Dublin Theatre Festival audience’s reaction to *Spokesong* seemed lukewarm to Parker. Both the *Irish Times* and *Irish Independent* published negative reviews, while *Evening Press* and *Evening Herald* were positive and so was the overall opinions of other English critics who saw the play later, and *Hibernia* called it “insightful.”<sup>274</sup> After this success, Parker decided not to pursue the originally intended Belfast staging, and when Mary O’Malley offered him the position of writer-in-residence for the Lyric, he (maybe arrogantly) declined.

One successful play, however, did not mean that Parker could from then on concentrate solely on his work for the theater. He still wrote his *High Pop* column and worked for the Arts Programmes Department of the BBC. He also wrote his first television piece, *Private Grounds* (1975).<sup>275</sup> The film presented a story of a three-piece family on a picnic. They meet a man in a wheelchair, and the teenage daughter asks him whether he is in a wheelchair because he was wounded during the Troubles. The man lets her believe it, but in the end, it turns out he is instead suffering of pleurisy. When the girl wants to know why he lied to her, he says he merely told her what she, and everyone else, wanted to hear, echoing Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World*. From the very beginning of the production, however, Parker was ambivalent about the screenplay. When

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<sup>269</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 146.

<sup>270</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 147.

<sup>271</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 152

<sup>272</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 175.

<sup>273</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 153.

<sup>274</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 153.

<sup>275</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 155.

his parents disliked the film, mostly due to the similarities of the lame man to Parker himself, he completely disowned it.<sup>276</sup>

#### 4.7 Rising to Fame and *Catchpenny Twist*

The success of *Spokesong* was international, and Parker started spending long periods of time away from home. This put a strain on his marriage, as Kate was always mentally fragile and prone to depression, and she had no intellectual work to occupy her in the same way that playwriting occupied her husband.<sup>277</sup>

Still in 1975, the BBC Radio Drama Department commissioned Parker to write a radio play, and he delivered *I'm a Dreamer Montreal*. The title is a garbled version of a commercial jingle "I'm a Dreamer, Aren't We All." The play's protagonist, Nelson Glover, is a showband singer who frequently misremembers song lyrics and is not in the least bothered by the fact. Parker uses this "talent" of Nelson's to underline his political naivety. Nelson and his band take an offer for a concert that they do not know is organized by the IRA, and after it, Nelson is picked up by the police. From them he finds out that his secret love, a girl named Sandra, has been shot dead in a street fight. Profoundly changed by this experience, Nelson wises up, and, symbolically, suddenly acquires the ability to render song lyrics correctly.<sup>278</sup>

Writing radio drama did not satisfy Parker, and he dreamed about putting on a play in London. He started making notes towards what would become *Catchpenny Twist* (1977).<sup>279</sup> In September 1976, the Kings Head Theatre, a famous fringe theater in London, staged *Spokesong* to overall positive reviews. Upon reading the reviews, however, Parker sadly noted in his diary that the critics did not understand the whole of the play and treated it simply as a "lighthearted frolic."<sup>280</sup> Even though *Spokesong* was not fully understood in Parker's eyes, the Kings Head production marked the rise of London's interest in Parker. Most significantly, the BBC wanted to produce *Catchpenny Twist* for television

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<sup>276</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 156.

<sup>277</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 159.

<sup>278</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 161–162.

<sup>279</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 163.

<sup>280</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 170.

in its prestigious slot titled Play for Today,<sup>281</sup> and he also received the *Evening Standard's* Most Promising Playwright award for 1976.<sup>282</sup>

In early 1977, Parker started saving money towards the family's move to Edinburgh, Scotland.<sup>283</sup> *Spokesong* opened in the West End, but critics, Parker himself included, thought that the Kings Head stage suited the play much better.<sup>284</sup> The television version of *Catchpenny Twist* was underway, and Dublin's Abbey Theater staged it that summer to ambivalent reviews, a particularly harsh one coming from the Irish *Sunday Independent*, whose critic voiced his weariness with Northern Irish Troubles plays. In spite of lukewarm reviews, *Catchpenny Twist* ran during the period of the Dublin Theatre Festival and some performances drew big crowds; none of them was unfortunately seen by critics from London.<sup>285</sup>

#### **4.8 Kingdom Come and the Move to Edinburgh**

In the summer of 1977, Parker's main writing project was a musical entitled *Kingdom Come* (1978). A second collaboration with composer Shaun Davey, who also provided the music for *Catchpenny Twist*, the play portrays the life on the fictional Caribbean island called Macalla (meaning "echo" in Irish). Parker's intention was to transpose the Northern Irish political conflict into the atmosphere of the Caribbean, fraught with postcolonial racial conflict.<sup>286</sup> The early 1978 Kings Head premiere went great according to Parker, but audiences did not seem overly enthusiastic, and the London critics were confused. Parker noted in his journal about *Kingdom Come*, "I think people are mystified by it."<sup>287</sup> The play seemed to require spectators to have more imagination than they actually had. The parallels between Macalla and Northern Ireland went undiscovered, and the fact that the central conflict in the Caribbean was for some reason political and not racial therefore made no sense to the audience.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 171.

<sup>282</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 174.

<sup>283</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 174.

<sup>284</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 175.

<sup>285</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 180.

<sup>286</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 179.

<sup>287</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 185.

<sup>288</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 186.

The plans for moving were stressing Kate Parker to the point of mental breakdown. She was apprehensive about the move itself, but she also struggled with the pressure from her family. Her mother had fallen seriously ill, and Kate was expected to take care of her.<sup>289</sup> House hunting in Edinburgh, proved very difficult, and even though Kate was offered a part time job in a friend's bookshop, she broke down during their short stay in Scotland.<sup>290</sup> *Nightshade* (1980), the play Parker was writing at the time, and arguably the most personal play of his, captures his anxieties around his marriage, his career, the moving, the placement of his mother-in-law into a Belfast seniors' home,<sup>291</sup> and his own mother's bad state of mind and frequent illness.<sup>292</sup> Most likely recognizing all these personal aspects in the play, Kate's reaction to the *Nightshade* manuscript was very negative.<sup>293</sup>

Even though Kate felt constantly guilty for leaving her mother behind and often did not enjoy her new job at the bookstore,<sup>294</sup> Parker himself was excited about being finally able to live a normal life in a city where he did not have to fear for his life every time he left the house.<sup>295</sup> *Catchpenny Twist* captured the interests of a New York-based director and *I'm a Dreamer Montreal* was being turned into a television film.<sup>296</sup> Even though Parker was satisfied with it overall, he noted that television productions brought him a fair amount of money, but they both felt and looked only "second best" to theater.<sup>297</sup>

BBC Radio 3 commissioned yet another play from Parker in 1979. This was *The Kamikaze Ground Staff Reunion Dinner* (1979), a joking take on the staple World War II movies in which veterans exchange their war stories. The non-visual medium allowed Parker to make the Japanese characters ambiguous by having them sound very English, but only in the Northern Irish context does the play make complete sense. Parker's

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<sup>289</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 169.

<sup>290</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 182.

<sup>291</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 189.

<sup>292</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 209.

<sup>293</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 210.

<sup>294</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 191.

<sup>295</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 193.

<sup>296</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 195.

<sup>297</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 196.

references to the kamikaze pilots resounded with the “fanatical nationalism, hero worship, and the cult of blood sacrifice” ushered in by the Troubles.<sup>298</sup>

#### 4.9 The End of the Decade and *Nightshade*

The end of 1979 brought with it another offer from BBC television and in early 1980, the Dublin Peacock Theater became interested in staging *Nightshade*.<sup>299</sup> Because the play was so personal for Parker, and indeed remained his favorite until his death,<sup>300</sup> he was terrified of presenting it on stage and did not attend the premiere, afraid of the way it would be received.<sup>301</sup> Irish critics appreciated *Nightshade* more than their English counterparts, which Parker ascribed to the fact that the Irish are more accepting of a serious topic being treated humorously.<sup>302</sup>

A television adaptation of *The Kamikaze Ground Staff Reunion Dinner* was being produced and Parker set out to write the script for the film *Irish in the Traffic, Ruby in the Rain* (1981) about two Belfast women. Ruby is a social worker fed up with her job, and Iris is a young adult in search of one. On her way from work, Ruby meets Sadie, a woman who just set her own house on fire, and decides to stay and help her. Iris, who appears to be Sadie’s daughter, is grateful to Ruby and treats her with loving care. Parker compared their relationship to that of Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*.<sup>303</sup> Like in *Ulysses*, the city—in Parker’s case of course Belfast—and its atmosphere plays an important role in the story. Shooting the film in Belfast, however, was something not many London directors were willing to do. Parker persevered, and, in the end managed to find John Bruce, who was excited to take on the challenge.<sup>304</sup>

#### 4.10 *Pratt’s Fall* and Separation from Kate

In May 1980, Parker meditated in his journal upon the nineteenth anniversary of his amputation. “The same span led up to its loss—so I suppose I now being a third life.” In

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<sup>298</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 201.

<sup>299</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 212.

<sup>300</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 209.

<sup>301</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 216.

<sup>302</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 217.

<sup>303</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 219.

<sup>304</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 221.



a sense, he could not have been more correct. At the time, he fell in love with Lesley Bruce, a writer and the wife of *Irish in the Traffic*, *Ruby in the Rain* director John Bruce, and received an award for the radio version of *The Kamikaze Ground Staff Reunion Dinner*. The film version of the play did not fare as well because the identity of the Japanese/English soldiers was no longer ambiguous on screen.<sup>305</sup>

As a result of his new, yet still secret love for Lesley, Parker was becoming less and less hopeful that his marriage to Kate could be saved, but he kept on trying. Reinvigorated by Kate's sudden agreement with his plan to move to London, Parker finished his newest play, *Pratt's Fall* (1983), inspired partially by the life of the sixth-century Irish missionary, St. Brendan, and partially by the debate on the Vinland Map, going on during the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>306</sup>

The end of 1981 proved critical. Kate's mother passed away, and, in spite of having commissioned *Pratt's Fall*, the Hampstead Theater in London was unwilling to produce it and, ultimately, never did.<sup>307</sup>

The year 1982 marked one hundred years since the death of James Joyce, a writer Parker very much admired and frequently identified with, especially in terms of their obsessions with their respective hometowns. Michael Heffernan moved from radio production into television, and Parker offered him the script for *Joyce in June* (1982). The film was split into two parts, one depicting Joyce's own life in June 1904, the other is Parker's attempt to write a post-script to *Ulysses* about Molly Bloom's concert tour in Belfast.<sup>308</sup> Stephen Rea accepted a role in the film, and this again brought him and Parker together. Though saddened by Rea's multiple rejections of roles that he wrote with him in mind, Parker was reassured by this meeting and again started to create parts for Rea.<sup>309</sup>

Simultaneously with *Joyce in June*, Parker was writing another television script, *Blue Money* (1985), a comical story about a cab driver, Larry Gormley, who drives away with a drug dealer's briefcase full of money. He and his girlfriend escape with it to Ireland, but instead of enjoying it, they spend the money badly, mislay it or it gets stolen. When Larry is captured by the police, the investigator lets him walk free on the condition

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<sup>305</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 223.

<sup>306</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 226–227.

<sup>307</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 235.

<sup>308</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 237–238.

<sup>309</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 244.

that he donate the money to charity. “I hope it proves commercial,” Parker wrote about it in his journal, “because it certainly isn’t artistic.”<sup>310</sup>

*Pratt’s Fall* was finally rejected by the Hampstead, and Parker started being desperate. He believed that directors were unenthusiastic about the play because “the piece is set in London, the two main characters are English and Scots, and it has nothing whatsoever to do with the Northern Irish troubles.” Still bitter about the fact that *Nightshade* also hadn’t been performed outside Ireland, he added, “I can only assume that people want one kind of play and no other from me.”<sup>311</sup>

During the summer Parker confessed his feelings to Lesley who, to his surprise, reciprocated them, as her own marriage to John Bruce was coming to an end. Soon after, he told the same to Kate, and the decision was made the two should separate. This, however, did not mean Kate took the news well. She started spending time with their mutual friends, and Parker kept his distance from them because he was afraid they would share her opinion on the matter and blame the separation exclusively on him.<sup>312</sup> He was genuinely worried about Kate’s future, but at the same time he recognized that from then on her happiness was to become her own responsibility. Kate, meanwhile, did not seem to be finding the support from their friends that she had expected—none of them were willing to take her side against Parker—and when they re-established contact with him, she cut them off. She remained in touch with Parker for a little longer, but eventually cut him off, too.

#### **4.11 Last Theatre Commissions and *Northern Star***

Parker moved in with Lesley and her daughter Deborah at the beginning of 1983.<sup>313</sup> London was a great environment for him, he associated with other artists and playwrights, and his work for the radio and television was highly acclaimed. In October 1984, he commented on his new life in his journal, “This is the life I always wanted to live.”<sup>314</sup>

*Pratt’s Fall* was finally put on at the Tron Theatre in Glasgow in 1983. The budget was very small and the director, none else than John Bruce, had almost no experience

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<sup>310</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 240.

<sup>311</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 241.

<sup>312</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 245–246.

<sup>313</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 247.

<sup>314</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 248.

with theatre directing.<sup>315</sup> In spite of these shortcomings, however, the play was comparatively well received. In the same year, *Nightshade* received its premiere in England at the Birmingham Repertory, and the same theater commissioned a play from Parker, *Heavenly Bodies* (1986).<sup>316</sup>

Meanwhile in Belfast, a revolution took place at the Lyric. Mary O'Malley was no longer in charge, and the new leadership decided to mount one of Parker's plays. He recommended *Kingdom Come*, and the musical received its (Northern) Irish premiere. The Lyric's new artistic director also commissioned a play, and Parker promised to deliver *Northern Star* (1984).<sup>317</sup> His intention in writing *Northern Star* was to remind Belfast about the beginnings of nationalism as an originally Protestant undertaking,<sup>318</sup> but to avoid producing a preachy historical drama, he decided to employ some non-naturalistic devices. Most of the play is told in flashbacks and each is written in a style of a different recognizable Irish playwright.<sup>319</sup> Upon its opening in late 1984, *Northern Star* was lauded as his best play to date, and its topic was considered appropriate for his first ever play to receive its world premiere in Belfast.<sup>320</sup>

Parker's final play, *Pentecost* (1987) was commissioned by Field Day, a theater group of Stephen Rea and Brian Friel, and BBC Radio 3 had him write another radio play, *The Traveller* (1985).<sup>321</sup>

Like *Private Grounds* ten years earlier, the screenplay for *Eat the Peach* Parker was working on at that time, would become one that he would angrily disown. The main premise of this collaboration with the RTÉ was the story of Vinnie Galvin who, under the influence of the 1964 Elvis Presley movie *Roundabout*, sets out to build a Wall of Death with his friend.<sup>322</sup> As the production progressed, Parker felt his script was so heavily altered and he disliked the changes so much that he asked for his name to be removed

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<sup>315</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 251.

<sup>316</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 252.

<sup>317</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 253.

<sup>318</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 254.

<sup>319</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 256.

<sup>320</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 268.

<sup>321</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 260–261.

<sup>322</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 266.

from the credits.<sup>323</sup> The film was successful, but Parker dismissed it as “shallow” and “commercial.”<sup>324</sup>

#### 4.12 *Heavenly Bodies* and “Dramatis Personae”

Even though he felt he was at the height of his powers, as his ambitions grew, Parker was often frustrated by how much the success of his work depended on other people who were necessary to facilitate its staging or recording. He also struggled more than ever before with the gap between what he found worth his time and what the general public seemed to want to see. His play *Heavenly Bodies*, which he was working on during the mid-1980s, especially discusses the latter topic, as its protagonist, Irish Victorian-era dramatist Dion Boucicault, is the epitome of somebody who achieved popular success by giving up on artistic originality.<sup>325</sup>

In early 1985, Parker started working on the most ambitious and most expensive project of his life, the six-part television series, *Lost Belongings* (1987).<sup>326</sup> The series contains many ideas that Parker had had over a long period of time, but its core story is based on the tragic heroine of Irish myth, Deirdre of the Sorrows. The story takes place in mid-1980s Belfast and remains Parker’s most in-depth treatment of the Troubles.<sup>327</sup>

The Birmingham premiere of *Heavenly Bodies* was received with indifference. Parker raged, but when he saw the play himself, he admitted the script needed to be shortened and improved on the whole.<sup>328</sup>

In mid-1985, Parker was invited to give a lecture in the memory of his secondary school teacher and mentor, John Malone. The lecture, titled “Dramatis Personae,” is heavily influenced by Dutch philosopher Johan Huizinga’s book *Homo Ludens* (1938) and it is the most complete theoretical overview of Parker’s mature opinions and motivations as a dramatist.<sup>329</sup> *Homo Ludens* is Latin for “Man the Player” and Huizinga

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<sup>323</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 281.

<sup>324</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 282.

<sup>325</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 271.

<sup>326</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 271.

<sup>327</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 273–274.

<sup>328</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 296.

<sup>329</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 298.

proposes that the instinct to play is one of the most important ones in the human being.<sup>330</sup> In the lecture, Parker recalls how Malone encouraged him to play the role of *Everyman* and perform his card tricks, and defines his own drama as lying somewhere in the middle between these two activities—between “the poetry” and “the trickery.”<sup>331</sup> He also expresses his devotion to exploring in his writing the political and social values he cares about and to breaking down the false “official versions of reality;” “a playwright,” he says, “should aim to be a truth-teller, a sceptic in a credulous world,”<sup>332</sup> and his plays should then “aim for the greatest possible clarity and simplicity, but not at the expense of their own intellectual integrity and truthfulness.”<sup>333</sup>

### 4.13 *Pentecost* and Death

This consolidation of his opinions on what drama is and what it means to him, Parker was ready to embark on what would become his last finished creative task, his most mature theatre play, *Pentecost*. A production of the Field Day Theater Company, it was expected that Stephen Rea would play the leading male part, and Parker introduced the character of Lenny Harrigan, originally from *Lost Belongings* (where he was also played by Rea) into the play.<sup>334</sup> The 1985 loyalist reaction to the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement reminded Parker of the UWC Strike in reaction to the Sunningdale Agreement eleven years before, and he decided to set *Pentecost* during the latter disturbances but with a clear reference to the present situation.<sup>335</sup>

In early 1987, the young Rough Magic Theatre Company from Dublin staged *Nightshade* under the direction of Parker’s niece Lynne.<sup>336</sup> Lynne Parker was to become one of the most distinguished Irish theater directors, and she devoted herself to exposing her own generation to her uncle’s plays.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> Parker, *Dramatis Personae*, 12.

<sup>331</sup> Parker, *Dramatis Personae*, 24.

<sup>332</sup> Parker, *Dramatis Personae*, 24.

<sup>333</sup> Parker, *Dramatis Personae*, 25

<sup>334</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 305.

<sup>335</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 308–309.

<sup>336</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 316.

<sup>337</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 316.

The critical reactions to *Pentecost* were yet again mixed. The presence of Lily's ghost was referred to as a "hackneyed" device, and the ending was seen as the play's weakest part. Again and again, reviewers from Britain and the Republic stressed how tired they were of plays set in Northern Ireland, while Northern Irish critics thought the play "true to life, politically relevant, and moving."<sup>338</sup>

In mid-1988 Parker received an offer from the Birmingham publishing house Oberon Books to publish his three latest plays. He revised *Heavenly Bodies* heavily and prepared the plays for publication under the title *Three Plays for Ireland*. Working on the volume, Parker came to the conclusion that one phase of his creative career had come to an end. "He believed," Richtarik sums up, "he had been dealt the subject of Northern Ireland, like a hand of cards, and he had experienced it as both a burden and a gift. . . In dedicating the Oberon volume to his niece, Lynne, he symbolically passed the baton to the next generation of Northerners."<sup>339</sup>

In late summer of 1988, Parker started suffering of stomach problems. His doctor diagnosed an ulcer and prescribed medication, but it did not help. Parker visited a different doctor who subjected him to some tests, and in September diagnosed Parker with terminal stomach cancer. During an immediate operation, the cancer was found to be too advanced and therefore inoperable. Parker went home for ten days before he was scheduled to start his chemotherapy.<sup>340</sup> His condition deteriorated very quickly, and he died on November 2, 1988, at the age of forty-seven. He wished to be cremated and have his ashes dropped into the sea, mid-way between the islands of Ireland and Great Britain, in order, as he wrote, "to be laid to rest in the half-way house in which [he] was born."<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 321–322.

<sup>339</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 326.

<sup>340</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 327.

<sup>341</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 328.

## 5 Stewart Parker, an (A)typical Northern Irish Playwright

This chapter discusses some definitions of Northern Irish drama and how Stewart Parker does or does not fit into them. In the first subchapter I introduce and comment on several opinions on what Irish Drama is and (more often) is not, and how the definitions of Northern Irish drama often appear haphazard and reductive, especially when they come from non-Northern Irish commentators. In the second subchapter I discuss in more detail the observations on Northern Irish theatre made by Tom Maguire in *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland*.

### 5.1 Defining Northern Irish Drama

What is Northern Irish Drama? The question seems to be a straightforward one, but, in reality, answering it has been a struggle for reviewers and academics, as well as the general public. Take the example of these three respectable publications on Irish drama: Christopher Murray's *Twentieth Century Irish Drama* (first published in 1997), Anthony Roche's *Contemporary Irish Drama* (1994), and *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama* (2004), edited by Shaun Richards. Murray and Roche devote one chapter each to Northern Irish drama, and Richards's book has one chapter on the Field Day Theatre Company and a separate one on Brian Friel.<sup>342</sup> In his article on the topic, Colin Teevan criticizes especially Murray for drawing the line between what is an Irish play and what is a Northern Irish play based on their subject alone. When a play deals with the North, it is categorized as a Northern Irish play and, for some reason, automatically as a Troubles play; if it treats the human condition more generally, it is grouped with other Irish plays. To Teevan, this sends a clear message: the Troubles are excluded from the wider Irish context.<sup>343</sup>

In her chapter on the same topic in *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama, 1800–2005* (2006, ed. Mary Luckhurst), Helen Lojek comments on both the British and the Irish dimension of the problem. Her explanation why Northern Irish drama

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<sup>342</sup> Colin Teevan, "The Boards and the Border: Myths and Myhtakes in the Criticism of Northern Irish Drama," *The Irish Review*, no. 25 (Winter 1999/Spring 2000): 53, <http://doi.org/10.2307/29735961>. Tom Maguire, *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland: Through and Beyond the Troubles* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2006), 7.

<sup>343</sup> Teevan, "Boards," 54.

is so infrequently discussed is that it is “fully integrated neither into the Republic’s theatrical scene . . . nor into the British theatrical scene,” and that Northern Irish drama as a special “branch” came to being with the Troubles play, which could not be easily grouped with either Irish or British drama.<sup>344</sup> In *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland*, Tom Maguire agrees and emphasizes that, in spite of not being—as Lojek says—“fully integrated,” Northern Irish drama is both Irish and British, and the problem with its reception is Britons cannot understand its Irish aspects and the Irish cannot understand its British aspects.<sup>345</sup>

Lojek says that Troubles plays spread themselves out on a continuum “from direct engagement with specific political issues to assumption of a cultural real within Ireland but outside politics.”<sup>346</sup> Even though she says playwrights mostly avoided making political statements and portrayed characters from both sides of the conflict (which I agree with), she sees it as a conscious decision, as part of their “strategy . . . adopted to emphasize that they were not advocating any particular political position.”<sup>347</sup> On this second point, Lojek and I diverge. Firstly, her claim seems to imply the entire crowd of Northern Irish playwrights write plays they do not believe in, peopled with characters they do not find realistic simply because they are afraid of not having their plays performed and accepted. While this definitely is a factor for a number of them, I do not need to go too far to look for an example to the contrary: Stewart Parker himself. In *Pentecost*, for example, his portrayal of the Protestant characters is a lot less favorable than the portrayal of the Catholic characters; they are much more prejudiced, radical, and violent.<sup>348</sup> From a Protestant family himself, Parker always thought that the Protestant narrow-mindedness was to blame for the Troubles,<sup>349</sup> and he was not afraid to “bite the hand that feeds” just for the sake of not offending somebody. Granted, this might seem like a very subtle kind of rebellion on Parker’s part, but it also brings me to the second

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<sup>344</sup> Helen Lojek, “Troubling Perspectives: Northern Ireland, the ‘Troubles’ and Drama,” in *Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama: 1880 to the Present*, ed. Mary Luckhurst (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 329.

<sup>345</sup> Maguire, *Making Theatre*, 8.

<sup>346</sup> Lojek, “Perspectives,” 330.

<sup>347</sup> Lojek, “Perspectives,” 331.

<sup>348</sup> Patrick Grant, *Breaking Enmities: Religion, Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland, 1967–1997* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1999), 98

<sup>349</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 83.



reason why I disagree with Lojek's statement: it implies that every dramatist had stronger sectarian sentiments than it was advisable to publish. I do recognize that some definitely could favor one side or the other, but not Parker. He did believe that the Protestants were to blame and that the Troubles were a useless bloodshed, but his thinking was not in the least sectarian. His plays say what he thought or what he decided would work on stage. The conciliatory ideas and cross-sectarian relationships in *Spokesong*, *Catchpenny Twist*, and *Pentecost* are not "tactical," they are not "devices," they are simply the way how he himself genuinely viewed the world.

In "Northern Theatre: Whose Renaissance?" Jan Ashdown comments on the situation of Northern Irish drama during Parker's life. Northern Irish theaters, she says, are not "adventurous"—they do not want to risk their already insufficient funds by financing a play that is new and/or potentially controversial.<sup>350</sup> Audiences themselves, then, are also not very flexible. As Ashdown puts it, "they are most amused by . . . themselves"—they want to see what is already familiar to them.<sup>351</sup> Ashdown, just like Parker would, questions such drama. What else does it do, she wonders, besides making the audience laugh? What does it give them? Does the experience enlighten or change them in anyway, as she thinks drama should?<sup>352</sup> "If people only call 'successful' those shows which please in all respects, the mediocre and the bland will obviously prevail forever," she writes. As much as Parker always wanted to reach a larger audience and as much as he often felt jealous of other Northern Irish dramatists' exposure (when he perceived is as undeserved), he never "sold out" for success. At least in his theatre drama, there was no catchpenny twist. Among his work for television, some scripts reached mass popularity, for example *Blue Money*, but he was aware of them not being "artistic,"<sup>353</sup> and he used the money they brought to fund his more artistic efforts. In the case of *Eat the Peach*, he even gave up the entire film, which he must have sensed would be commercially successful, because he refused to be associated with something he considered "shallow" and "commercial."<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> Jan Ashdown, "Northern Theatre: Whose Renaissance?," *The Irish Review*, no. 7 (Autumn 1989): 53, 10.2307/29735469.

<sup>351</sup> Ashdown, "Renaissance," 54.

<sup>352</sup> Ashdown, "Renaissance," 55.

<sup>353</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 240.

<sup>354</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 282.

## 5.2 Staging the Troubles

In *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland*, Tom Maguire recognizes that staging the Troubles can prove problematic for two reasons: firstly, the audience members have their own experience of it, and secondly, there is the choice of the appropriate theatrical devices.<sup>355</sup> In other words, the audience is likely to be extremely sensitive to the accuracy of the portrayal of the Troubles, even more so than they would be were the play treating some other aspects of their daily lives. Maguire then defines two possible choices of theatrical form, but personally, I would rather see them as two ends of a continuum rather than set points. They are realism and self-conscious theatricality.<sup>356</sup> Realism, Maguire writes, is a device which brings the incidents on stage closer to the audience. It requires of them “an engagement in which [their] own judgments and sensibilities are placed into crisis.”<sup>357</sup> Realism is the dominant mode, and Parker’s *Pentecost*, for example, is classified by Maguire as magical realism.<sup>358</sup> The goal in using theatricality is to alienate the audience from reality,<sup>359</sup> and it is achieved for example through the employment of metatheatrical devices such as play-within-a-play, self-conscious roleplaying, and framing (for example using a narrator).<sup>360</sup> Discouraging the audience from perceiving the play as realistic, however, does not mean discouraging them from engaging with it or from passing judgment on what they are presented with, they are merely invited to do so in new ways.<sup>361</sup>

As can be clearly seen from the analyses below, even though most playwrights lean more towards realism, Parker overwhelmingly chooses the opposite strategy. *Pratt’s Fall* has a narrator-character in Godfrey Dudley; *Nightshade*, *Heavenly Bodies*, and *Northern Star* use the play-within-a-play technique; and all his plays, with the exception of *Pentecost*, have actors playing multiple characters, the most prominent one being *Spokesong’s* Trick Cyclist.

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<sup>355</sup> Maguire, *Making Theatre*, 21.

<sup>356</sup> Maguire, *Making Theatre*, 23–24.

<sup>357</sup> Maguire, *Making Theatre*, 38.

<sup>358</sup> Maguire, *Making Theatre*, 45.

<sup>359</sup> Maguire, *Making Theatre*, 25.

<sup>360</sup> Maguire, *Making Theatre*, 159.

<sup>361</sup> Maguire, *Making Theatre*, 25.

## 6 Summaries

This chapter provides summaries of all seven plays analyzed below. The plays appear here in the chronological order of their first performance.

### 6.1 *Spokesong; or the Common Wheel* (1975)

*Spokesong* is, like all Parker's plays, separated into two acts. Throughout the play, several genre songs are sung, usually by the character of the Trick Cyclist, who also plays all the minor part.

Frank Stock is a bicycle-shop owner and cycling enthusiast in early 1970s Belfast. He dislikes cars because their parts are hidden, an average person does not understand how they work, and therefore they are very easily abused for hiding bombs. Belfast is planning to build a new motorway, and Frank is passionately opposed to it, suggesting instead the city invest into bicycles that people could ride for free. A young schoolteacher, Daisy Bell, comes to his shop to have an old bike of hers repaired, and Frank falls in love with her.

The scenes of Frank and Daisy's budding romance alternate with those featuring Frank's grandparents, Francis and Kitty. Francis is quite a conservative man, but the young Kitty is a staunch nationalist and suffragette. She charms Francis by riding a bicycle in her bloomers, and the two are married in spite of her father's protests. Francis, the founder of the bike shop, was the first one to ever race on John Dunlop's pneumatic tires. He is very proud of it and tells the story frequently. Francis's great faith in the bicycle sees him join the Cyclist Corps in World War I. Kitty and Francis raised Frank and his adoptive brother Julian after their parents were killed in the 1941 German blitz.

Unannounced, Julian appears, having just arrived from London. He moved (or rather escaped) there five years ago, stealing everything from the bike shop's cash register. Now he works as a journalist, and he has come to Belfast to document the Troubles. He is cynical and treats Frank like an old joke; Frank, even though he does not go far for a bitter retort, keeps treating Julian like a brother. When Julian meets Daisy, he is flirty with her and she reciprocates his advances.

A pet shop down the street from Frank's is blown up. Daisy's father, Duncan Bell, is a local high-ranking unionist paramilitary. He wants to convince Frank to pay him for protection, but Frank refuses. Upon the death of their grandparents, Frank inherited the

shop but Julian got the house. Behind Frank's back, Julian sells the house to Duncan Bell and Daisy announces she would be leaving to London with him. Moreover, the house is visited by the British army and searched. Suspicious documents are found in Julian's possession and he is arrested. Frank is desperate about losing Daisy and gets drunk. Symbolically, he extinguishes the ghosts of Francis and Kitty with whom he has frequently interacted during the play. Julian is eventually released, but he has to leave Belfast as soon as possible. When he tries to urge Daisy to leave with him, she has already understood who he is and wants nothing to do with him. She decides to stay in Belfast with Frank, even though she does not want to have children with him and therefore is not planning on marrying him. She also forces her father to give her Frank's house by threatening him she would tell the police about his suspicious paramilitary activity. The play ends happily with Frank and Daisy riding off stage on a tandem bicycle, Julian, again, having escaped with the shop's takings.

## **6.2 *Catchpenny Twist: A Charade in Two Acts (1977)***

The play is made up of a sequence of short scenes which frequently overlap. Like *Spokesong*, it uses several songs, supposedly written by the two songwriter protagonists. The time when the play takes place is not specified, but it is clearly Parker's present at the time of writing.

Martyn Semple, Roy Fletcher, and Monagh Cahoon are school teachers. At the very beginning of the play, they are dismissed for drinking and performing a strip tease routine in a classroom at the end of a school year. Monagh moves to Ireland and makes a living as a not very successful cabaret singer, and Martyn and Roy are trying to get by as songwriters in Belfast. They get into trouble after writing ballads for the IRA as represented by Martyn's crush, Marie Kyle, as well as some numbers for a Protestant paramilitary band. After they receive two live bullets in the mail, they hurriedly leave Northern Ireland. They re-establish their connection with Monagh in Ireland and decide to work as a trio: Martyn and Roy will write songs and Monagh will sing them. Roy, who is in love with Monagh, begins an affair with her, but Monagh is in love with a British television producer, Playfair, who is married and refuses to divorce his wife.

The trio produce some songs together, but are still yet to make their breakthrough. The relationships with Monagh become strained, and Marie Kyle appears in Dublin to tell them the full story behind the bullets in their mail. The paramilitaries found out they

were working for both sides, and they are now considered British spies. Martyn and Roy understand this spells a death sentence and decide to move to London. In London, they find a producer who is interested in collaborating with them, but recommends them to part ways with Monagh. Roy is not fond of the idea, but Martyn is fed up with Monagh's lack of commitment. The two decide to continue without her, but first they are to perform at an international song contest in Luxembourg. They receive some media coverage and Monagh tells the press the whole story of Martyn and Roy's escape from Belfast.

Shortly before their departure to Luxembourg, Monagh gets the news that Playfair has been killed in a shooting incident in Belfast. She performs badly at the contest, and they lose to the inane "Zig Zag Song." Waiting for their plane home, Martyn and Roy open congratulatory letters and telegrams while the heavily medicated Monagh sleeps in the background. One of the letters contains a bomb, and the play closes with the surreal image of Martyn and Roy, tattered and covered in blood.

### **6.3 *Nightshade* (1980)**

Quinn is an owner of a funeral parlor and a magician. His teenage daughter, Delia, is a clever but problematic child. Her mother and Quinn's wife, Agnes, has run away from them to London and died in a car accident with her lover. Quinn is trying to keep this secret from Delia in order to protect her, but he is really protecting himself from having to deal with his loss. The funeral parlor has two prominent employees, Kane and Bell, and there is also the newly employed Vance, who is to take over a new subsidiary of the parlor. Kane and Bell are quite dissatisfied in their job because people treat funeral home employees disrespectfully and because their wages are low. It is easy for Vance to persuade them to go on a strike. Quinn considers his job an art, he is particular about his methods, but completely ignorant of what his employees (or his daughter) are doing or feeling.

Delia's behavior at school is problematic and her headmistress, Miss Gault, comes to have a talk about her with her father. Quinn is romantically interested in Miss Gault. Delia becomes captivated by the Bible, especially the story of Jacob's fight with the Angel. She talks about it with her uncle, the Dean, but he is dismissive about the Old Testament. Delia is trying to make Quinn tell her about Agnes, but he avoids giving her any explanations. He, however, tells the story to Miss Gault, Delia overhears it and is devastated.

Dr. Dempster, the family physician loses her father after a prolonged illness and is left nothing in his will. She took care of him for years, and their relationship was always strained. Soon after arranging her father's funeral with Quinn, she comes to order her own, as she is dying after years of heavy drinking. She wishes for a funeral with a simple coffin, no service, and no niceties.

Even though he should be on a strike, Bell is unable to ignore an unattended and uncovered body in the parlor, and by the union's rules, he has to be let go. Quinn himself is beginning to wither away. Speaking about his wife's death to Delia has unleashed his sorrow and he seems to be losing his mind. His workers are on a strike which he hasn't noticed, Dr. Dempster dies and he completely ignores her funeral instructions, speaking to her while he's putting on her make up, and she answers him, and Miss Gault has a short affair with Vance, her old student. Delia runs away from home to London in order to connect with her mother and trace her last steps. Seeing her in a coat and hat, Quinn thinks she is Agnes and gets a heart attack. The play ends with Delia and Vance, who now started flirting with her, standing over the motionless, most likely dead, body of Quinn.

#### **6.4 Pratt's Fall**

The play starts with Godfrey Dudley dressing himself for his wedding. He serves as a narrator, narrating the play in retrospect. The action (mostly) takes place in England, and plot-wise, the play is not associated with Northern Ireland.

Godfrey Dudley befriends the Scottish-Irish adventurer, George Mahoney, at the extramural department of an unnamed university where he works. Mahoney has nowhere to stay and he moves in with Godfrey. During a friend's visit, Mahoney claims the friend's son tore up his copy of *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*, dated 1649. Mahoney received the book as a present when leaving the monastery at Ardfert, where he was looking for God, and where, coincidentally, St. Brendan lived as a monk in the sixth century. The torn book reveals an ancient map, proving that sixth century Irish monks discovered America.

Godfrey introduces Mahoney to his friend and secret love, Victoria Pratt, a map curator in a major library. Victoria is not convinced by the map, but evidence in favor of its genuineness soon starts piling up. The poem scribbled on the back of the map is verified by an Irish language professor, and the origins of the book in which the map was found are reliably traced. Mahoney and Victoria visit Ardfert together and being an affair.

Victoria tricks her library into buying the map from Mahoney by making them believe Harvard University is interested in getting it as well.

Victoria's sister, Serena, is a travel agent and she offers adventure holidays to rich businessmen. Because of a misunderstanding with the natives, Serena once lost a group of tourists to a cannibalistic tribe. The unfortunate incident brought her closer with the private detective Harvey Small, who occupies the office next to hers. Even though he is nice, Harvey is fixated on his mother, who is in turn extremely jealous of Serena because she is afraid Serena might be romantically interested in Harvey. Serena is very critical and sometimes jealous of her better educated sister. She thinks Victoria is wasting her life living with Mahoney who cannot even keep a job. Victoria, however, is happily in love and even happier to be writing a ground-breaking book on the Brendan map. With its publication, she is catapulted into fame, but she does not know that her suspicious sister has had Harvey look into Mahoney's past. Harvey discovers that Mahoney is educated in map restoration, and that the map is most likely a fraud. Mahoney is arrested and goes to prison. Victoria's pratfall means the end of her academic career. She retreats into a job where she makes school atlases. When the freshly released Mahoney comes to her workplace, unwittingly, looking for a job, she refuses him. She also refuses to forgive him and continue their affair. The very end of the play betrays that Godfrey is getting married to Serena even though their relationship is not mentioned (and probably does not exist) during the play.

## **6.5 *Northern Star* (1984)**

The action of the play takes place after the unsuccessful 1798 United Irishmen Rising. Its protagonist is Belfast-born Henry Joy McCracken, one of the leaders of the rebellion. He, his lover Mary Bodle, and their baby daughter are hiding in a half-unfinished and half-burned country cottage built by Mary's tragically deceased cousin and haunted by his bride-to-be who committed suicide after his death. McCracken narrates the play in flashbacks representing the seven years of the United Irishmen and, symbolically, the seven ages of man. These flashbacks are written in the styles of different famous Irish dramatists.

McCracken is preparing for his own arrest and death. He cannot be persuaded to run away or emigrate—he is ready to die for his cause—and he is reminiscing about his life. In the first flashback, he remembers the very beginnings of the United Irish movement

when he and his friends met in a pub to discuss their noble, enlightened cause. One of the girls employed in the pub turns out to be a spy who delivers information about them to the aristocracy. In the second flashback, McCracken visits the home of a Catholic to gain his support for the United Irishman cause. The house is invaded by two Orangemen who come to punish the homeowner, Patrick Hamill, because he is allegedly the leader of the Catholic organization known as the Defenders which is responsible for violent attacks on Protestants. McCracken persuades them that they are mistaken, even though Hamill confesses that he is indeed a member of the organization.

McCracken's sister comes to bring him forged documents which would enable him to escape to the United States. Her attitude to her brother as a hero sharply contrasts with that of Mary who only wants a husband and a father for her child. The third flashback shows McCracken talking to Wolfe Tone. An army patrol comes to the cottage and searches it. They are not convinced by McCracken's fake documents and want to arrest him. The patrol is, however, chased away by the Phantom Bride, and McCracken is safe, able to rehearse his gallows speech and converse with the ghosts of his United Irishmen collaborators.

The fourth flashback shows McCracken being sworn in as a member of the Defenders in order to, again, get their support for the Rising. The fifth flashback shows McCracken and three of his comrades in jail. Some of them are being pardoned after the vigorous lobbying of their families, and McCracken is bitterly disappointed with their disloyalty to the cause in which he himself so firmly believes. In the last flashback, three prisoners are violently interrogated until they divulge the name of the leader of the Rising, and they all implicate McCracken. The play ends with McCracken addressing himself to the imagined spectators at his public hanging, but his words are drowned in the sound of a Lambeg drum.

## **6.6 *Heavenly Bodies* (1986)**

*Heavenly Bodies* is a play with musical accompaniment. The main action takes place in New York, 1890, but the protagonist, Irish playwright Dion Boucicault, who is about to die, is reviewing his life in a number of flashbacks. The framing narrative of the play is Boucicault's dialogue with the ghost of Johnny Patterson, a famous Irish entertainer, who has come to announce to Boucicault that after his death he would not go to heaven but to "limbo." Throughout the play, Patterson reproaches Boucicault especially for his leaving



Ireland and for not doing anything in order to help out during the Famine, spending time instead on writing inane plays for London audiences. Boucicault argues that he did a lot for the Irish, including writing plays about them. Several scenes from Boucicault's most famous plays are also rehearsed.

The play opens in the Madison Square Garden theater, New York City, where Boucicault is giving a drama class. He angrily dismisses it and finds out from the newspaper about the death of Johnny Patterson. Patterson was allegedly killed during his show while he was singing a song whose message was that Catholics and Protestants should unite. Left alone at the theater, Boucicault gets a heart attack. Patterson appears to him to take him to limbo, but Boucicault insists he deserves to go to heaven and demands his "case" be reexamined. Patterson lets him tell his story, sometimes initiating flashbacks that Boucicault dislikes, but he has to play himself in every single one.

Even though he denies it, Boucicault's biological father was not the husband of his mother but their lodger, Dionysius Lardner, after whom he is named (Dion being short for Dionysius). Boucicault dislikes Lardner and hates to think of him as his father. Lardner later proves to be not much of a character by running away from Anne Boursiquot with the wife of his business partner.

Boucicault's first play gets attention by coincidence. It is mistaken for a play by another, already well-established writer, and read by Charles Matthews. Matthews likes the play but thinks it old fashioned and advises Boucicault what to write next. Boucicault obliges, Matthews likes his work again and, very much rewritten, successfully stages it with his company. His other plays in the same vein are not as successful, and Boucicault is recommended to write melodramas. Benjamin Webster of the Haymarket, London, employs him to plagiarize French popular plays. In France, Boucicault meets his first wife, heiress Anne Guiot. She soon dies under suspicious circumstances, and Boucicault inherits her money. He gets married again, this time to actress Agnes Robertson. They move to the United States and have children. Boucicault is often unfaithful to her with young actresses, they separate and he marries again without having obtained a divorce.

Boucicault is best known for his melodramas, not so much for their artistry or good plots and more for the sensation and special effects he managed to stage. Patterson remains unconvinced about Boucicault's worth as an artist. Boucicault begs him to rehearse the last scene—the finale of his Irish play, *The Shaughraun*. Patterson himself is forced to recognize the merit of the scene, and Boucicault's spirit rises towards heaven.

## **6.7 *Pentecost* (1987)**

The action of *Pentecost* takes place in Belfast, 1974, mostly during the UWC strike. The play is split into two acts and five scenes.

Lenny has inherited a house from his aunt after the death of its last tenant, Lily Matthews. He invites his estranged wife Marian, who is also an antiques dealer, to have a look at the place and take whatever she wants for her shop. Marian decides she wants to buy the whole house, and Lenny agrees to sell it to her provided she signs their divorce papers. Marian and Lenny separated five years ago after their infant son, Christopher, suddenly died. Marian, still embittered by the loss, has decided to sell her flat as well as her antiques shop so that she could be left alone for which she finds Lenny's house suitable.

Before the house legally belongs to her, Marian moves in. She consumes lots of alcohol and spends her time alone, going through the belongings of the late Lily Matthews. Then Lily's ghost appears to her. Only Marian can see and talk to Lily, so maybe the ghost exists only in her imagination. Lily is not happy with Marian living in her house, especially because both Lenny and Marian are Catholics and she is a Protestant. She is extremely prejudiced and old-fashioned.

Marian is sought out by her friend Ruth. Ruth's husband David is a police officer and during the strike and the Troubles in general, he is overwhelmed with work. Ruth has run away because David beat her on the head with his baton. This is not the first time David has been violent towards Ruth, and it is also not the first time when Ruth has run for cover to Marian and vowed to leave him. Marian voices her dismissive opinion about Ruth's situation, and they have an argument at the end of which Ruth asks for a place to stay the night. On the same evening, Lenny arrives. His flat has been burgled and even his bed was stolen. Marian is insensitive to Ruth's and Lenny's troubles and reproaches them for intruding upon her.

Another guest comes in with Lenny some weeks later. It is his friend Peter who just arrived from Birmingham. Peter dresses and behaves in an anglicized way and is openly dismissive of Northern Ireland. Marian, however, does not mind him staying because he is a property surveyor. She wants him to do a survey of the house, as she is planning to sell it to the National Trust as a museum of working-class Protestant life. Her attempts at preservation are not welcome by Lily, and Lenny also thinks Marian must have gone mad.

Ruth, a devout Protestant and unionists, listens to Harold Wilson's "spongers speech" on the radio and is infuriated. She has an argument with Peter, who, in spite of being born Protestant, is not as devoted as herself. Peter offers her sex as reconciliation and Ruth accepts. Marian, who has been trying to save her car from a barricade, comes home bruised. She was pursued by a gang of Protestant women who thought she was a squatter in the house. She has her last conversation with Lily. She has found her diary and exposes the ghost to all that she knows about her. Lily married her husband Alfie before World War I. During the war, Alfie suffered some injury which made him impotent. Lily devotedly (and masochistically) kept up appearances, but when Alfie went to search work during the Depression era, she had an affair with Alan Ferris, a British army pilot and lodger at her house. Together they had a child which she gave birth to on her own and then left it on the steps of a Protestant church. Marian might have thought she would feel better exposing Lily, but instead, she feels sympathy. She too lost a child and her friend Ruth went through several miscarriages, probably caused by her husband's abuse.

The last scene takes place as the strike is coming to an end. All four come together and share stories. Marian tells them about Lily, and they all go through a semi-religious catharsis. Marian especially changes. She recognizes the pain caused to her by the death of her son and purges it while Ruth reads from the Bible and Lenny and Peter play a hymn.

## 7 Representations of Northern Ireland

In this chapter, I am discussing two kinds of representation of Northern Ireland that I identified in Parker's plays. Subchapter 7.1 introduces two characters whose life story surprisingly mimics that of Northern Ireland in Parker's time. Subchapter 7.2 comments on the obvious symbolism of the house and how it represents Parker's Northern Ireland in three of his plays.

### 7.1 Character as Parker's Northern Ireland

I argue that in two of his plays, Stewart Parker wrote characters who could very well be referred to as the personifications of Northern Ireland: Monagh Cahoon in *Catchpenny Twist*, and Godfrey Dudley in *Pratt's Fall*. I will analyze several crucial scenes for each character, and illustrate their similarities to Parker's Northern Ireland. I propose that Monagh is the Troubles-era Northern Ireland that Parker was observing at the time of writing in the mid-1970s. Monagh is mentally decaying throughout the play and the same could be said for Northern Ireland shortly before and especially after the UWC strike.

Godfrey Dudley, on the other hand, eerily resembles Northern Ireland on the way towards the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Even though Parker himself claimed that *Pratt's Fall* has nothing to do with Northern Ireland,<sup>362</sup> I do not think his intentions in writing the play somehow thwart my analysis of Godfrey as Northern Ireland. In the case of Monagh, I can imagine he might have intentionally written the character so that her destiny parallels that of Northern Ireland, but in the case of Godfrey, I highly doubt it, if only for the very obvious reason that the Anglo-Irish Agreement could not influence Parker at the time of writing, as it was not signed until two years after the play's first production. Even though the parallel is most likely unintentional, I still wish to discuss Godfrey as Anglo-Irish Agreement-era Protestant Northern Ireland. As an acute observer of the political situation, Parker undoubtedly saw what was happening and thanks to his intelligence could make reliable guesses about what might possibly follow. It is not my intention to claim he did make such a guess, but I would like to again bring up the fact that Parker was constantly rehearsing the topic of Northern Ireland in all his artistic work, and therefore it was always, without a doubt, in the back of his head.

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<sup>362</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 241.

### 7.1.1 Monagh Cahoon: Northern Ireland in Trouble(s)

Out of all the characters in *Catchpenny Twist*, Monagh is the most emotionally engaged in the subject of the Troubles and Northern Ireland in general. The Catholic paramilitary activist Marie Kyle may be physically involved in the action, but she is not nearly as thoughtful as Monagh; Marie Kyle does not think critically about what is happening—she merely parrots what her ideology tells her.

Monagh's two friends, Roy and Martyn, are a Protestant and a Catholic respectively. They hold different views on Monagh, and in my analysis they represent the attitude of the Protestant Northern Irish and the Catholic Northern Irish to their country. Monagh's lover, the British television producer Playfair, represents, as his nationality suggests, Britain's government and its treatment of Northern Ireland. The Republic of Ireland's views are (at least partially) expressed by Mrs. Baker, the Dublin cabaret owner.

During the play, Monagh undergoes a radical change for the worse. From a singing young teacher with her life ahead of her, she becomes a wreck of nerves, dependent on prescription medication. Just like Northern Ireland, she had a good start, but owing to her own unfortunate actions and some accidents beyond her control, she ends up incapable to take care of herself.

First performed in 1977 (and without any information on the time in which the play should be taking place), I concluded from Monagh's remark that she, Roy, and Martyn have been working at the school for seven years, that they began teaching there at the beginning of the 1969 school year, also known as the year when the Troubles began. "Think of what's been happening in this country," Monagh urges her two colleagues, referring to the past seven years of the Troubles.<sup>363</sup> Then she ponders what it is like to live in the midst of it:

Whenever I think it over, when I weight up moment by moment – it all seems as good as you can expect. But if I look back on a week or a month – it always turns out to be as bad as you can get. Like as if the best you can say about anything is – it could be worse.<sup>364</sup>

Her thoughts are fully engaged with the topic. She does not think of the Troubles in terms of ideologies, however, but in terms of actual individual human lives lost and that is what

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<sup>363</sup> Stewart Parker, *Plays 1* (London: Methuen Drama, 2000), 82.

<sup>364</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 82.

she is most sorry for. Martyn does not react to her existential musings, and Roy answers with, “All I want is out.”<sup>365</sup> Later in the play, Roy and Monagh have a similar dialog. She confronts him about hating Northern Ireland, he replies, “I can think of better places to be born.” She only comments that it is “too bad” because he is “stuck with it” anyway.<sup>366</sup>

Monagh has been working as a music teacher for seven years. She never wanted the job, and she is not satisfied working it. Northern Ireland has been suffering from the Troubles for the same period of time, and the situation in which it finds itself in the mid-1970s could hardly be called satisfactory. On two occasions, Monagh mentions her twenty-first birthday party eight years ago. The party never took place because she came down with shingles. She was therefore unable to celebrate this rite of passage in 1968 or 1969 due to an illness caused by a virus dormant in everyone who has contracted chicken pox earlier in life.<sup>367</sup> Northern Ireland, likewise, instead of coming of age and becoming a stable country, started suffering of something that lay dormant in its history and culture: sectarian violence. Just like the human herpes zoster virus, sectarian violence attacked Northern Ireland’s neural pathways, and the country was brought to a halt by events such as the UWC strike of 1974.

When Monagh, Roy, and Martyn are fired from their jobs, it is because they are drinking alcohol in a classroom, and the headmaster catches them while Monagh is performing a stripping number. She does not give any reason for her behavior, and she is prompted to it at least partially by Roy, who, according to the stage directions, “begins to vocalize some strip tease music.”<sup>368</sup> Prodded by alcohol and her Protestant friend’s tune, Monagh starts taking her clothes off, inviting a myriad of possible interpretations of her actions for her two friends as well as for the headmaster who catches her in the act. Northern Ireland opens itself to interpretation in the same way. Both Catholics and Protestants interpret its history, its statehood and its overall meaning, and they do so in drastically different ways, as I already described in the chapters above. The Catholics who, unwillingly, found themselves living inside its borders for the most part wish for Ireland to be united again. The very existence of Northern Ireland and how its border was

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<sup>365</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 82.

<sup>366</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 105.

<sup>367</sup> “Herpes zoster,” Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed April 15, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/science/herpes-zoster>.

<sup>368</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 83.

constructed to fit the Protestant needs, seems to them unfair—yet another setup which allows Protestants to repress them. Protestants, on the other hand, want Northern Ireland to continue to exist because should there be a united Ireland, they would suddenly be the minority citizens, but unlike centuries ago, they could not possibly use the same undemocratic means in order to be in control over the majority.

Having lost her unsatisfactory teaching job, Monagh moves to Dublin to start a new life as a cabaret singer. Her boss, Mrs. Baker, considers Northern Ireland “a bloody silly place,”<sup>369</sup> and she considers Monagh a hopeless act because she is too old and does not have much talent, let alone “decent tits.”<sup>370</sup> It does not take long for Monagh to start arguing with Mrs. Baker, and the argument quickly escalates into who is and is not allowed to call herself Irish, with Monagh exclaiming, “She’s not telling me I’m not Irish!”<sup>371</sup> Not only does Mrs. Baker offend Monagh by criticizing her appearance and talent, she also does not think of Northern Ireland as a “kind of” Ireland, and says that “the British are welcome to the whole crowd” of Northern Irish citizens.<sup>372</sup> Starting upon partition, Ireland was indeed quick to forget the parts of Ulster that it lost as well as the sectarian violence which used to be an island-wide issue. The Free State concentrated on its own survival and could but leave Northern Ireland to take care of itself from then on. As Mrs. Baker represents Ireland in my analysis, she perfectly voices this opinion that the British are free to take the region with all the good (the successful industry), but they will also have to take the bad (the sectarian violence) with it.

Monagh has an affair with both Roy and the British producer Playfair. While Roy has been quite devoted to Monagh, telling her that he loves her still, Playfair is married with children. He constantly promises her a divorce, but never acts on his promise. Roy goes as far as to say that Monagh freely decided to love Playfair, in spite of her intelligence and education. “She wants to [love him] badly enough,” he complains. “So she does. Bitch.”<sup>373</sup> While Northern Ireland’s Protestants looked up to Britain at the beginning, they were quickly disappointed by how undevoted the British government was to their cause. After the abolishment of Stormont, Protestants were even more dissatisfied

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<sup>369</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 98.

<sup>370</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 99.

<sup>371</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 99.

<sup>372</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 99.

<sup>373</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 113.

because under the influence of the British leadership, their country started to treat them like a “bitch.” Any type of return to the majority rule was absolutely out of question and a lot of work was done to ameliorate the predicament of the Catholics. Roy’s complaints that Monagh is “still hooked on that creep”<sup>374</sup> to run her life for her is very much in accordance with the sentiments of Protestant Northern Irishmen of that time, especially politicians. The establishment of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland position introduces British politicians who are supposed to “run Northern Ireland’s life,” while the unionist politicians who ran it previously (and thought they were doing a good job of it) are sidelined. “She can’t cope with being a free agent,”<sup>375</sup> Roy goes on, and indeed, Northern Ireland does not seem to be capable of running its own life either. Catholic action brought down Stormont, Protestant action brought down the Sunningdale Agreement—Northern Ireland clearly cannot run itself because there is no common ground for these two groups of its citizens.

“You need a romantic ballad to break nearly any female act,” Roy says, suggesting to Martyn they should write a ballad for Monagh witch which she could gain the sympathies of the music industry.<sup>376</sup> After they write the ballad, Monagh is invited to shoot it at a television studio. She is frequently interrupted by the crew, and a girl even asks, “Is there much more of it, love?” when she is only halfway done singing. Both Monagh’s and Northern Ireland’s message is falling on deaf ears, especially when television is concerned. Very early into the Troubles, the public became disinterested in any kind of media coverage of the violence, also asking questions to the effect of whether there was still more of it yet to come. There was, in Monagh’s words, still “fifty whole per cent.”<sup>377</sup>

The only scene which shows Monagh as a housewife also shows her as not a very good one. She prepares chicken which, as Roy points out, is raw on the inside and he refuses to eat it. Monagh responds with, “Shut your hole!” and angrily throws the chicken, freshly from the oven, at Roy who, trying to catch it, burns his hands. Then she storms out of the room. “She’s trying to wreck my career,” Roy whines, while Martyn is trying to tend to his hands. Northern Ireland’s control over its home affairs is as bad as

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<sup>374</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 112.

<sup>375</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 112.

<sup>376</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 110.

<sup>377</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 112.



Monagh's. Even though it receives financial and military support from Britain, the country is unable to end the Troubles. The money is wasted on more violent action (throwing the chicken) and the lives of British soldiers are marred as they are often targeted by the IRA. Northern Ireland's civilian citizens meanwhile suffer injuries (Roy's burned hands).

Even though Playfair himself never appears on stage, his wife does. "He himself wishes to end the affair," she tells Monagh, "but he can't bring himself to hurt your feelings."<sup>378</sup> The affair, the wife claims, distracts Playfair from his important work as "the only broadcaster in Belfast who's trusted by both sides."<sup>379</sup> This attempt on the part of Playfair's "frightfully British" wife,<sup>380</sup> resembles the various SOSNI's attempt to create a Northern Irish executive to which some powers could be devolved. Britain, they are saying, considers the SOSNI institution temporary and expects Northern Ireland to take care of its own policy as soon as possible, just like Playfair's wife expects to get rid of Monagh as a competing dependent on her husband.

After Roy and Martyn found a producer in London, they are recommended to "lose the lady."<sup>381</sup> Martyn is fine with doing that. "She doesn't care," he says of Monagh. "She stopped even trying."<sup>382</sup> Roy, however, is opposed. Eventually, they agree to let her go and break the news to her, none of which, however, happens on stage. Their decision can only be perceived as implicit from their further behavior. Without any inhibitions, Monagh acts her worst in front of the producer as well as some people from the business and carelessly tells a young journalist the whole story of Martyn and Roy's escape from Northern Ireland. Martyn's having no problem with sacking Monagh is an attitude representative of that of all Catholics generally towards Northern Ireland. For many, Northern Ireland is an illegitimate country, and almost all favor the idea of a united Ireland. The fact Roy and Martyn's decision is not explicitly discussed, still leaves room for potentially thinking that, even though the Catholic Martyn does not care to be in a band with Monagh, the Protestant Roy still might believe in the possibility of recovery of their relationships.

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<sup>378</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 133.

<sup>379</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 134.

<sup>380</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 133.

<sup>381</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 141.

<sup>382</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 144.

During the same scene when the trio are schmoozing with the people from the music industry, Monagh surprises one of them with her bleak outlook on the world. “I think you must be a Scorpio, Monagh,” a woman says.<sup>383</sup> Monagh replies that her zodiac sign is actually Cancer. Taking into account the polysemy of the word C/cancer, Northern Ireland can also be viewed as such—definitely by the British population and government. Northern Ireland is a painful malignant growth on the overall political success of the United Kingdom and defies any attempts at healing. The disease even tries to spread, as evidenced by the many IRA attacks in London and elsewhere.

At the Eurovision-like song contest, the trio do poorly. Monagh is in a terrible shape after Playfair’s violent death, and she embarrasses herself on the stage. Even though commercial, the song they present, “Crybaby,” has much more depth to it than the ultimately winning entry, “The Zig Zag Song.” I interpreted this situation on two levels. Firstly, it has been notoriously difficult for Northern Ireland to attract positive international attention. It is more likely to be condemned for having been fighting the same war for centuries without reaching any result and for not being able to make a democratic compromise to accommodate all its citizens. Even if Monagh performed the song well, I doubt they would win the contest because there is a message that the song carries, and similarly, Northern Ireland would like to explain its complex history, but no one is listening. For the general international public, the story of Northern Ireland is too complicated and too long. It will be stereotyped, judged, refused, but rarely will it be heard out in its entirety. Simple messages, or, as in the case of “The Zig Zag Song,” no messages at all, are much preferred. Secondly, one must look at the reason why Monagh did not perform well. She is grief-stricken and heavily medicated after her lover was killed in the Belfast violence. Northern Ireland would be in a similar situation if the IRA attacks managed to achieve what they were intended to do: making Britain completely withdraw from Northern Ireland by making it too costly in terms of both lives and money to stay there (in the play represented as the death of Playfair). Without British financial support and governmental interventions, the prospects of Northern Ireland could look as bleak as those of a singer on drugs who loses her shoe on stage.

Shortly before Martyn and Roy open the letter bomb, Roy observes about Monagh, “Her handbag is full of pills.”<sup>384</sup> Because she has suffered a mental shock, the

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<sup>383</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 148.

<sup>384</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 156.

pills are most likely to be sedatives. Sedatives, however, do not remove a problem, they just calm the sufferer down during the worst periods so that they could deal with the situation later. In the same way, the attempts to help Northern Ireland are also sedatives or band-aids, trying to patch up the problem on the surface, but never going into much depth. Unionist and British politicians alike have always been afraid of angering the Protestant public. Once they saw Catholics were being made concessions for, they threatened to strike or overthrow the government, and silently the government always tried to pacify them with making new allowances for them or by compromising the reform so that both sides would be somewhat satisfied.

I would like to conclude this section by pointing out the final situation in which Monagh finds herself at the end of the play. Roy and Martyn open a letter bomb and are seen “on their knees, hands and faces covered in blood, groping about blindly.” In other words, both the Catholic and the Protestant are mangled, possibly even killed, by the sectarian violence. Monagh is not affected by the bomb itself, but she is already in such a bad state mentally that it almost does not matter. This is a bleak vision for Northern Ireland’s future: its people are blown to pieces. The country as such survives, but it is so scarred that very little hope remains for it.<sup>385</sup> The ending of *Catchpenny Twist* is sudden, heartbreaking, surrealistic but definitely not hopeful. Was this the way Parker saw the future of his country? That is, of course, impossible to say, but he did manage to at least imagine and portray the worst possible future.

### **7.1.2 Godfrey Dudley: Protestant Disagreement**

Just like Monagh is the most thoughtful character of *Catchpenny Twist*, Godfrey is the most ineffectual one in *Pratt’s Fall*. His narrative frames Victoria and Mahoney’s story, but he only participates in it as an observer. Mahoney and Victoria stand for Britain and the Republic respectively in my analysis. Victoria is indeed English, and Mahoney is of Scottish and Irish Catholic descent. Godfrey introduces the two of them, and they fall in love with each other, much to Godfrey’s dismay. In a similar way, Northern Ireland and its acute problems were the reason why the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland opened communication and started the negotiations which would eventually lead to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, much to Protestant Ireland’s dismay. Protestant politicians

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<sup>385</sup> Cf. Eberhard Bort, “Stewart Parker,” in *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary Irish Playwrights*, eds. Martin Middeke and Peter Paul Schnierer (London: Methuen Drama, 2010), 368.

underestimated the situation and did not take part in the talks because they believed that if they boycott the talks, there would be no Agreement. In essence, Protestant Northern Ireland remained silent and it hoped everything would turn out fine for it. Godfrey Dudley behaves in the exact same way. He never tells Victoria that he is romantically interested in her. In fact, he is not even able to order a drink he would like, taking instead whatever he is offered. When he is offered sherry, his reaction is, “What? Well, uh,” and because what he says does not really mean no, he gets the sherry.<sup>386</sup> He does know what he wants—he wants a large gin—but he cannot make himself speak up.

When Victoria and Mahoney become romantically involved, Godfrey rages, “OH, FOR GOD’S SAKE PUT A STOPPER IN IT!”<sup>387</sup> when he has to watch a scene of them kissing from his narratorial position, obviously implying he is beyond jealous. He never clarifies his feelings to Victoria, maybe hoping she would make the first move. In the same way, Protestant politicians, represented by James Molyneaux, did not enter the Agreement talks. Then, just like Godfrey, they could only rage after the Agreement was signed because it was not going away.

Godfrey’s tone-deafness is mentioned twice in the play. Trying to teach him a tune is, Mahoney tells Victoria, “a waste of time.”<sup>388</sup> Indeed, trying to teach Protestant Northern Ireland a tune has proven impossible; majority rule is still the only song many of them can sing, and those politicians who are perceived as too lenient or willing to share the government with nationalists, are promptly disposed of by these extremists.

Godfrey’s marriage to Serena at the end of the play seemingly comes out of nowhere, but in my analogy, it takes on a sinister meaning. Serena is the person who sets the private eye Harvey Small on Mahoney’s track, Harvey then reveals Mahoney’s true identity as a forger, and this in turn leads to the end of Mahoney’s relationship with Victoria. If I regard Victoria as Britain, Mahoney as Ireland, and their relationship as the Anglo-Irish Agreement, by bringing about the end of that relationship, Serena is the faceless agent who potentially could destroy the Agreement. Protestant Northern Ireland

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<sup>386</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 265.

<sup>387</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 297.

<sup>388</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 269.

would happily “marry” whoever that would be because it does not wish for anything else than for the agreement to fail.<sup>389</sup>

One big difference between the characters of Godfrey and Monagh is that while Monagh, a character central to *Catchpenny Twist*, undergoes changes, Godfrey could hardly be perceived as changed at the end of *Pratt's Fall*, just like nothing officially changed in the status of Northern Ireland upon the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Northern Ireland, as represented by Godfrey, is the post-Stormont and post-UWC strike Northern Ireland in a state of paralysis. He cannot possibly change himself because he does not feel the need or have the courage to do so. Instead he is going to continue to grudgingly accept whatever he is given, including the unpleasant Serena who, like a *deus ex machina*, removes the unpleasant Agreement from the outside. Then Godfrey would murmur, “Count myself fortunate. Happiest man alive,”<sup>390</sup> but will remain paralyzed because, like many times before, something unpleasant for a group of people has been removed, but nothing new and better is put into place in its stead.

Shortly before his death, Parker made a significant change in the play which basically takes the protagonist status from Victoria (who is the Pratt of the title) and shifts it onto Godfrey. In the unfinished revision, it is Godfrey whose last name is Pratt and the titular fall becomes his. Richtarik comments on this change, “By the end of the play, Victoria has lost her newfound faith; Mahoney, overcome by love as he never was by belief in God, remains a victim of his own deception; but Godfrey, unable to believe in anything, is more pathetic than either of them.”<sup>391</sup> Parker might have had one of these two reasons for putting Godfrey's misfortune in the center of the play instead of Victoria's. Firstly, he might have realized that his portrayal of Godfrey's human tragedy is overshadowed by the easily palatable tragedy of romantic love. I tend to believe, however, that Godfrey's tragedy was not originally supposed to be the focus of the play at all, and that it is important to look at the play's production period side by side with what was actually happening at that time in Parker's personal life. *Pratt's Fall* premiered in January

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<sup>389</sup> Cf. Anthony Roche, “Stewart Parker's Comedy of Terrors,” in *Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama: 1880 to the Present*, ed. Mary Luckhurst, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 293. He agrees that *Pratt's Fall* treats the relationship between England and the Republic, but does not consider its form satisfactory for the purpose.

<sup>390</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 333.

<sup>391</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 231.

1983. In mid- and late 1982, when the script had already been finalized and was being rehearsed at the Tron Theatre, Parker's relationship with his wife deteriorated and they decided to separate. This experience probably changed Parker's feelings towards marriage and cemented his resolve not to leave problems and desires unaddressed, like he had done for so many long years with Kate's poor mental health. Shortly before his death, he fully understood that Victoria, being a more resilient character than Godfrey, is not the hopeless one, even though she retreats to her shell of "facts before feelings." She did not fail, Godfrey did because he never spoke up, he never let people know about his thoughts and feelings, and now he is marrying the sister of the woman he really loves. He is the real victim of fraud, doubly so because he is also its perpetrator.

## 7.2 House as Parker's Northern Ireland

Here I would like to propose the analysis of how in *Spokesong*, *Northern Star*, and *Pentecost* Stewart Parker uses the house as a metaphor for Northern Ireland. Each one of the houses discussed below is "a house apart"—it is divided in purpose, ownership or usage, between two characters or two groups of characters. The house in *Spokesong* is divided between two brothers who could not be more different; in *Northern Star* it is unfinished and already partially destroyed; and in *Pentecost*, the it is divided between Catholics and Protestants on multiple levels.

### 7.2.1 *Spokesong*: "A House Divided Against Itself"

In *Spokesong*, the "house apart," or the "house divided against itself,"<sup>392</sup> is the childhood home of Frank Stock and his adoptive brother Julian, the home of their late grandparents, and also the location of Frank's bicycle shop. In their will, the grandparents left Frank the shop, but Julian was the one to inherit the house. Seeing their younger grandson's volatile nature, Francis and Kitty thought that if Julian inherits a home, it would provide him with some stability and keep him out of trouble. "They were heart-scared," Julian reminds Frank, "I'd fall into a life of crime."<sup>393</sup> What they actually achieved by doing this, however, is not stabilizing Julian, on the contrary, they placed their other, more loyal grandson's fate in the shifty Julian's hands. Julian, who returned to Northern Ireland

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<sup>392</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 61.

<sup>393</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 61.

solely for the purpose of selling the house, presumably to get some money and get rid of all the ties to his hometown, strips Frank off the roof over his head in a split second and without letting him know beforehand. The house is sold to none other than the local Protestant paramilitary capo, who is also Daisy's father, and the plan is to turn the house into his organization's headquarters. Frank is desperate and angry, but surprisingly, it is not the prospect of homelessness that hurts him the most. "It's one thing for it to fall in the path of a bomb or a bulldozer," he tells Julian. "One of them's bound to strike it sooner or later. That's like an act of God. But I won't allow you to sell out their shop."<sup>394</sup> Julian thinks that Frank should "rejoice" and "[cycle] out of the past into the future."<sup>395</sup> In a final twist, however, Julian does not succeed in turning his brother into a homeless man. Daisy blackmails her own father into letting her have the house or else she gives him in to the police. This is already part of the slightly naïve ending when Daisy decides to stay with Frank, secures the roof over their heads, and they ride off stage on a tandem bicycle.

The house, like Northern Ireland, is divided between two types of people who have been living alongside each other for years. Like Julian and Frank, they are not blood brothers, they were only raised together in the same place. Frank, who has always been loyal to the house, gets to use it, but the disloyal Julian has Frank at his mercy. Running the house, just like Protestant politicians were running Northern Ireland for over four decades, Frank makes his living out of the bicycle shop in it. Julian's ownership of the building, however, is a ticking time bomb in the same way that the oppression of Catholics was. Upon his return, Julian overthrows the old established rules in a similar way that the civil rights movement did, and he puts an end to Frank's ability to do whatever he pleases with the house by selling it. The buyer is a paramilitary who wants to make it his headquarters—the house is to become the center of paramilitary violence, just like Northern Ireland. Daisy is introduced as the one who saves the house from that fate by threatening her blood relative with legal action. In the early 1970s, Northern Irish citizens, Parker included, still might have believed in a swift peaceful end to the Troubles. Daisy could be seen as a hypothetical Northern Irish politician who ends the violence and solves the crisis by legal means.

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<sup>394</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 61.

<sup>395</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 62.

### 7.2.2 *Northern Star*: Half-built, half-burned, and haunted

In the stage directions, the house is described as a “farmer labourer’s cottage,” “half-built, half-derelict.”<sup>396</sup> The cottage is Henry Joy McCracken’s hiding place, but he thinks it is laughable to call it “a safe house”<sup>397</sup> because it is in such a bad shape that “one good belch would bring it down.”<sup>398</sup> The house was to be the home of his lover Mary’s cousin, O’Keefe, and his future wife. Mary tells McCracken a legend-like story of how the bride-to-be found O’Keefe dead one morning and the house half-destroyed. People blamed the fairies because O’Keefe took some stones from “the fairy fort on the hill.”<sup>399</sup> McCracken laughs at the story—as a man of reason, he does not believe in “little people,” especially when Mary adds that her cousin “was a freethinker. People hated him.”<sup>400</sup> McCracken then thinks that it is clear that it was rather the people that hated him who murdered O’Keefe, not fairies. The bride-to-be went insane, Mary continues, came to the house on the wedding day in her dress and hung herself from the same rope McCracken has been practicing his gallows speech with. She concludes that the Bride’s ghost often stands by the door and has a deadly stare, and “any man that looks her straight in the eye is a dead man,” and therefore the house is a safe place to be.<sup>401</sup>

When the army comes in, the Captain characterizes the house as a “picturesque ruin.”<sup>402</sup> As he is about to arrest McCracken, he is told that his men have run away because they saw “the ghost of a woman standing at the gate.”<sup>403</sup> The Captain threatens to court-martial everyone, but when he exits the stage, only his “death cry” can be heard.<sup>404</sup> Then the Phantom Bride enters the house, kisses McCracken and “with a predatory leap, clamps her bare legs around his waist.”<sup>405</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> Stewart Parker, *Plays 2* (London: Methuen Drama, 2000), 3.

<sup>397</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 5.

<sup>398</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 6.

<sup>399</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 6.

<sup>400</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 6.

<sup>401</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 6.

<sup>402</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 42.

<sup>403</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 48.

<sup>404</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 48.

<sup>405</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 50.



Richtarik writes that the burnt-out house is a common 1970s occurrence, and so are groups of soldiers randomly intruding on people's privacy.<sup>406</sup> I do believe, however, that the house stands for much more than this, even though Parker used similar "contemporarization" techniques throughout the rest of the play. I suggest that the house can also be read as a representation of Northern Ireland, a young, "unfinished" country, which is already half-burned and destroyed. The "fairy folk" are hardly at fault, as McCracken sees it, nothing supernatural happened, it was the people who destroyed it—the people and the grudges they hold against other people in their community. Richard Rankin Russell interprets the Phantom Bride as "the ghost of the Ireland that could have been" were the United Irishmen rising successful.<sup>407</sup> While it certainly fits his analysis, and compliments his view of Mary Bodle as "the beleaguered human representative of the Ireland that resulted from the uprising—a country that just wanted to settle down and have domestic peace,"<sup>408</sup> for my analysis, I would like to look in more detail at the Bride's behavior. Namely, I have three instances of it in mind: her suicide, her chasing out the British soldiers, and her contrasting amorous behavior towards McCracken. I would like to use these as proofs that the Phantom Bride is Ireland's history, rather than its botched possible future.

It is important to notice that the woman appears as a bride in her wedding dress. The wedding, as the ultimate expression of two people's desire for unity, is the key here, and the unity in question that was desirable but never happened, is of course the full peaceful unification of the Catholic and Protestant communities. The bride's suicide is symbolic of the attempt to erase from history movements such as the United Irishmen and those before them who tried to bring this unification about. Neither the bride can rest in peace, nor can the actual history, and it haunts Northern Ireland constantly, speaking through people who find out about it, like Stewart Parker did.<sup>409</sup> The Bride obviously behaves amorously towards McCracken because he is someone who believes (or at least believed earlier) in the unification of Catholics and Protestants, and she chases out the

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<sup>406</sup> Richtarik, "Living," 23.

<sup>407</sup> Richard Rankin Russell, "Playing and Singing toward Devolution: Stewart Parker's Ethical Aesthetics in *Kingdom Come* and *Northern Star*," *Irish University Review* 37, no. 2 (Autumn/Winter 2007): 387, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25505047>.

<sup>408</sup> Russell, "Playing," 387.

<sup>409</sup> In Chapter 4: Failed Origins in his *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland*, Tom Maguire calls this technique "excavation."

British soldiers because they are against it as well as because they want to arrest McCracken. McCracken himself then refuses to leave the house until, most probably, the time he is successfully arrested. He remains in the half-built, half-derelict Northern Ireland with its haunting past, until the very end.

### **7.2.3 *Pentecost*: “The Last House on the Road Left Inhabited”**

“Everything is real, except the proportions,” Parker writes about the house in the stage directions. “The rooms are narrow, but the walls climb up and disappear into the shadows.”<sup>410</sup> In other words, the house of *Pentecost* is from the beginning made to look realistic and unrealistic at the same time, which is a device that neither *Spokesong*, nor *Northern Star* uses.

This house is divided on multiple levels. Firstly, there is the owner-tenant dimension. The house was owned by Lenny’s Catholic aunt, now it belongs to Lenny, who, although he is not a practicing one, was still born a Catholic. Its occupant, on the other hand, was the Protestant Lily Matthews. The analysis of this situation is very straightforward. The land of Northern Ireland has only ever belonged to the Irish people who are prevalently Catholics. The Protestants are (quite literally) only occupants, who appropriated the land for themselves and “decorated it,” just like Lily did with her house, with their symbols and artifacts.

Secondly, there is the self-explanatory physical location of the house in between the two worlds. As Lenny explains that “it’s the last house on the road left inhabited! – the very road itself is scheduled to vanish off the map, it’s the middle of a redevelopment zone, not to mention the minor detail that it’s slap bang in the firing line”<sup>411</sup> between a Catholic and a Protestant residential area.

Thirdly there is the state the house is in: “It’s reeking of damp,” Lenny says disgustedly, “there’s five different layers of wallpaper hanging off the walls . . . nothing to cook on apart from that ancient range, brown lino everywhere and rooms bunged up with junk, there’s probably rats, mice and badgers in the belfry, it’s riddled with rot and its dingy, dank and absolutely freezing!”<sup>412</sup> When Marian later defends the house, she

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<sup>410</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 171.

<sup>411</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 179.

<sup>412</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 179–180.

says, “This house was [Lily’s] whole life,”<sup>413</sup> and she protests the notion that only exceptional houses (mostly the rich ones, owned by the nobility) should be considered worthy conservation. Marian’s idea of protection, however, is freezing the house in its current state, and going back into the past to catalogue everything. Lenny’s argument is that the house is uninhabitable. There is nothing to cook on—nothing to provide nourishment; it is unhealthy and parasite-infested, and on top of that it is cold and inhospitable. All of these characteristics could well be applied to Northern Ireland both at the time Parker was writing the play and especially at the time in which the play is set—the 1974 UWC strike. It sustains life poorly, one is constantly running the risk of being collateral damage in a sectarian attack, and it is definitely inhospitable—many people emigrate. Even the peeling wallpaper can be translated as the multiple attempts of various moderate-minded Prime Ministers, and later Secretaries of State to introduce democracy and reform, all of them eventually “peeling off” after failing to succeed or even failing to materialize to begin with. Marian’s preservation, then would be the state of paralysis that Northern Ireland entered after the UWC strike managed to bring down the Sunningdale Agreement because it seemed that from there, it was only possible to go back to history and find something new there because nothing could be found in the present.<sup>414</sup>

Fourthly, the house becomes a refuge for Catholics and Protestants alike. It also becomes a place where they, in spite of all their differences, spiritually unite and reevaluate their lives. Marian is the first one to “move in” after Lily’s death while the house still is not hers yet. Then Ruth comes, seeking shelter from her violent husband. Lenny arrives after his flat has been burgled of everything including his very bed, and Peter joins them last. Marian is a Catholic and she goes to church regularly. Her sense of nationality is not discussed in the play. Ruth, even though she is Marian’s friend, is a devout Protestant who identifies as Northern Irish; after she listens to Harold Wilson’s “spongers speech” on the radio, she gets extremely offended, calls Wilson a “smug wee English shite,”<sup>415</sup> and makes a sharp distinction between “us” and “them” in terms of who built the city of Belfast, and by extension, the whole country of Northern Ireland. Lenny

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<sup>413</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 208.

<sup>414</sup> Cf. Emilie Pine, *The Politics of Irish Memory: Performing Remembrance in Contemporary Irish Culture* (London: Palgrave, 2011), 168–169.

<sup>415</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 215.

is a disillusioned Catholic with a conflicted attitude towards Northern Ireland. “It’s the arsehole of hell, who’s arguing. No future in it,” he says to Peter, but once Peter starts calling the country names, Lenny proudly declares, “I call it home.”<sup>416</sup> Peter is the not particularly religious son of a Methodist minister who has given up on Northern Ireland a long time ago and moved to Birmingham. He describes Northern Ireland as “this teeny weeny wee province of ours and its little people, all the angry munchkins, with their midget brains, this festering pimple on the vast white flabby bum of western Europe.”<sup>417</sup> Peter’s national identity is definitely mainly British.

Marian is like those people who were the settlers of what today is Northern Ireland pre-Protestant plantation. She considers the other three intruders, but is not able to physically get rid of them, she only verbally abuses them. She is haunted by Lily, but I decided to exclude Lily from this analysis because I consider her ghost a figment of Marian’s imagination—her coping mechanism—and therefore a part of her as opposed to a separate person. Ruth is a Protestant plantation-era intruder, and she brings in violence in the form of her injured head, and also fear that her husband David might come looking for her. Lenny could be anyone who is simply looking for a peaceful place to stay, but he already finds the house divided—it is Marian against the rest of the world, trying to preserve the peace and quiet of what she considers hers. Lastly arrives the Anglicized Peter with his extreme prejudices and foreign mannerisms—the British politician, running the country from the point of view and in the interest of Great Britain.

This heterogeneous group remains together in the house during the UWC strike’s electricity and food shortage. Pushed to the very edge, Marian especially is changed, and so is her attitude to the house. “What this house needs most,” she says, “is air and light.”<sup>418</sup> Instead of freezing it in time, she decides to throw out most of what she was meaning to preserve, renovate the rest and make the house her home. In other words, Marian makes the decision not to look in the past for explanations, she is willing to take the risk and look to the future for new beginnings for herself, as well as the house. The same change that happens in Marian is, as this analogy suggests, the only possible cure for Northern Ireland. To restore peace, the two communities must stop looking at past wrongs, survive the present, and hopefully look out for better days to come. The admixture of spirituality

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<sup>416</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 200.

<sup>417</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 200.

<sup>418</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 238.

is also important. Marian's catharsis is accompanied by Ruth's reading from the bible and Lenny's and Peter's playing a hymn, but the actual realization Marian makes about her own suffering, is more spiritual rather than strictly according to some religious teachings. She starts to see "the christ [sic] in everyone." Her christ with lowercase c is the humanity and human fallibility in every person, and only this—considering the "other" community as human as one's own community—is the only way out of the cycle of constant mutual killings. Without a spiritual leap, Parker seems to be suggesting, no person can set him- or herself free from their personal suffering, and in the same way, no community can be restored to peace without it.<sup>419</sup>

### 7.3 Representations of Northern Ireland: Conclusion

My intention in this chapter, as well as in the following chapters, is to bring the kinds of messages Parker endowed his plays with to the light, and uncover, at least partially, some of his intentions in writing them. In this chapter, I have analyzed two characters and three houses and compared their story arcs and descriptions to incidents and situations pertaining to the Northern Ireland in Parker's lifetime. I have portrayed Monagh Cahoon from *Catchpenny Twist* as the Troubles-era Northern Ireland because her important life events coincide with important dates and "rites of passage" of Northern Ireland. Having premiered in 1977, the play appeared after the most traumatic part of the Troubles from which Northern Ireland emerged in a bad and hopeless state, in the same way Monagh emerges from the play at the end embittered, jaded, and heavily medicated. I analyzed the character of Godfrey Dudley from *Pratt's Fall* in the same way, arguing that, most likely unintentionally, his life story is very similar to that of the Protestant faction of Northern Ireland at the time of the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which happened two years after the play premiered. Godfrey lives in a state of paralysis, similar to the paralysis in Northern Ireland after two strongly supported attempts at government were brought down by violent action on either side of the sectarian divide. Godfrey remains rigid throughout the play, waiting for things to turn out the way he wants, but they never do. His inaction resembles that of the unionist politicians who decided not to enter the talks

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<sup>419</sup> Cf. Claudia W. Harris, "From Pastness to Wholeness: Stewart Parker's Reinventing Theatre," *Colby Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (December 1991): 240, <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2850&context=cq>.

around the Agreement, wrongly assuming that without their support, the Agreement cannot be signed.

In the second part of the chapter, I analyze three houses from three plays, all of them sharing one characteristic: some kind of division. There were, however, more ways in which they resembled Northern Ireland besides just being divided. The house in *Spokesong* is divided between two men who were raised as brothers, but who are not blood relatives. One of them decides to unseat the other one by selling their house to a paramilitary organization, similarly to how Northern Ireland was subverted by paramilitary violence following the Civil Rights struggles. The situation is sorted out quickly and peacefully as the Troubles might have but never was solved by swift political action from within Northern Ireland. The second house, the derelict cottage of *Northern Star*, is still unfinished and yet already half-destroyed, like Northern Ireland itself. The house is also haunted by a ghost in her wedding dress in the same way Northern Ireland is haunted by those suppressed parts of its history which contained people and movements whose intention it was to bring all of its inhabitants together. The third house from the play *Pentecost* is divided between a Catholic owner and a Protestant inhabitant, then it becomes hostile, dangerous, and uninhabitable, but still it accepts and shields new inhabitants. In a vision of a possible future for Northern Ireland, the house also becomes the site of a spiritual revelation, and in the future, possibly, it is again turned into somebody's home.

It was my objective to demonstrate in this chapter that Stewart Parker's plays are concerned with the Troubles not only on the literal level, but on the metaphorical and symbolical level as well. His knowledgeable contemporaries and his Northern Irish audiences especially could derive more inspiration and wisdom from his plays than viewers elsewhere who were not as familiar with the day-to-day life in Northern Ireland. The premieres of his plays fell on deaf ears because only as late as 1984 was a play of his first premiered in Belfast. When a play is not successful during its first staging, nobody asks whether it was because it was simply bad or whether audiences were not ready for it. It is not successful, and everyone will think twice about putting it on again. When these deeper messages are not properly understood, Parker's work is just like any other writing of a well-educated, witty playwright. It might seem entertaining, but also trivial and purposeless. I believe that understanding a piece of writing only halfway is not sufficient

or, indeed, satisfactory, as it leaves one feeling the play thwarted their capabilities or that it simply left a great deal to be desired.

## 8 Overpoliticization and Its Influence on Private Lives

In this chapter, I would like to discuss two aspects of heterosexual romantic relationships across four of Parker's plays. They are *Spokesong*, *Catchpenny Twist*, *Northern Star*, and *Pentecost*. The first aspect, discussed in subchapter **Chyba! Nenalezen zdroj odkazů.**, is which one of the partners has the leading role in that relationship, in other words, "who wears the pants," whether the man or the woman. As my examples show, men and women are equally able to take the lead, but their leading role always comes with heightened political awareness and is strongly influenced by it. The second aspect, whether the marriage is endogamous or exogamous and what are the implications of either arrangement, is analyzed in subchapter 8.2.

### 8.1 The Leading Roles

#### 8.1.1 *Spokesong*: Ladies in the Lead Bring Reason

In *Spokesong*, there are two strong female characters, Kitty Carberry, the protagonist's grandmother, and Daisy Bell, his love interest. They both assume the dominant role in their respective relationships. Kitty is a late-nineteenth-century nationalist and suffragette, holding her life firmly in her own hands. She rides a bicycle, which is still considered strange and absolutely improper for women at the time. She wears "bifurcated garments,"<sup>420</sup> better known as bloomers, something scandalous for the older generations. Francis, however, is fascinated by her love of cycling and her independent spirit. When she visits his shop, he offers to install a twist-grip bell on her bicycle for free, and she immediately reproaches him for running his business like a "philanthropic foundation,"<sup>421</sup> and for not requiring a payment from her. When Francis asks whether he can call on her father and ask for her hand, she answers, "You may certainly visit my father anytime you like," but then adds, "I shall find nothing that he might say of any interest."<sup>422</sup> Then she makes the dumbfounded Francis ask her personally for her hand, and before she giving him an affirmative answer, she subjects him to an interrogation as to his political views; whether he agrees or disagrees with the ongoing legal process with Oscar Wilde; whether

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<sup>420</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 12.

<sup>421</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 21.

<sup>422</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 20.



he is a Parnellite or an anti-Parnellite; nationalist or unionist. He passes the test to her satisfaction, but she has still more conditions. "I have resolved," she tells him firmly, "never to give the world a child until it gives me a vote."<sup>423</sup> Francis, however, is so fascinated by and infatuated with her that he cheerfully accepts all her demands and conditions and they are married. Her father, Major Carberry, is strongly opposed to their union, but Kitty never counted on his support. When the Major tells her, "Don't expect a settlement for me," she simply answers, "Its absence in no way upsets the calculations of my economy." World War I, however, changes Kitty's opinion on not having children before being able to vote. "The war will no doubt bring us the vote,"<sup>424</sup> she says, but she is also worried that it might take too long, and after its end, she might be "past the age of childbearing."<sup>425</sup> She therefore directly suggests to Francis that they should make love before he leaves for Europe. It might seem that Kitty moderates her demands, but she is convinced that the right to vote is soon to come. She does not seem especially fond of her baby's being a "war child,"<sup>426</sup> but at the same time, the war is happening so far away that her baby will be in no direct danger from it. In other words, she makes a correct guess based on her knowledge of politics and her experience with suffrage.

Two generations later, in the same shop, Frank falls in love with Daisy Bell. An even bigger dreamer than his grandfather Francis, he lives on the outskirts of sectarian violence. He is on sufficiently good terms with the local paramilitary capo, Duncan Bell, as well as the police. To both he seems harmless with his bicycle-ridden versions of both the past and the future. Just like Kitty, Daisy wants to help Frank with his accounting books. She abruptly changes her mind for a while after Julian offers her a life in London—she considers leaving Frank with him in order to better herself materially. Just in time, however, she recognizes what kind of person Julian really is, and decides to stay with Frank. Like Kitty, she has two conditions. The first one is "no wedding bells," as she refuses to be "responsible for another child growing up in this town" (i.e. Belfast).<sup>427</sup> Without the intention of having children, Daisy thinks, there is no point in getting married. She feels strongly about having children because she works as a teacher, and her pupils

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<sup>423</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 19.

<sup>424</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 41.

<sup>425</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 42.

<sup>426</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 42.

<sup>427</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 73.

frequently educate her on such topics as how to make a car bomb. Daisy is sorry for these children because their childhoods are ruined. Unlike in Kitty's case, the war is not far away, it is happening right at their doorsteps, and her fear for her hypothetical child's safety is well-founded.

Just like the characters of Frank and Francis, Kitty and Daisy were, I believe, written by Parker to mirror each other. They represent the rational, decision-making side which, Parker seems to suggest, should take primacy in the times of violent crises. People should get out into the real world, face the facts, and act accordingly, like these two women, and quit dreaming and painting past, present, and future pink like their two cycling-obsessed partners.

### **8.1.2 *Catchpenny Twist* and *Northern Star*: Peacemaker Men Die Violently**

In the case of Monagh's love triangle with Playfair and his wife in *Catchpenny Twist*, Playfair is obviously the one in charge of the relationship. For some time, he leads Monagh on, promising he would separate from his wife, which he never does, and ultimately, it is his wife who seeks Monagh out and terminates their affair. Whether it was or was not Playfair's own wish for her to do so is beside the point—he clearly was not going to do anything personally either way. Mrs. Sylvia Playfair explains her (or her husband's) reasons thusly:

The sole reason I'm here is that you're distracting him from his work. As you know, he's the only broadcaster in Belfast who's trusted by both sides. What you don't know is that he's been acting as a go-between. A mediator. It's very important that he succeed. A good deal more important, frankly, than causing you distress.<sup>428</sup>

In other words, Playfair and his mission, whether presumedly or actually important, is paramount. He is too significant politically to be distracted by feelings as trivial as love or dilemmas such as deciding whether he should obtain a divorce from his wife and marry his mistress. To Monagh's sarcasm, Sylvia replies that Monagh has "a career"<sup>429</sup> to work on, which Monagh very well knows is not going according to plan. When asked about her plans, Monagh responds with more sarcasm, "I rather though I might try and change

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<sup>428</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 134.

<sup>429</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 134.

the course of Irish history. Assassinate the Queen, maybe. Sit down in the middle of Belfast and set fire to myself.”<sup>430</sup> While she is still devastated by this forced breakup, the news of Playfair’s death reach Monagh at the same time she is sacked by her friends from their musical group. The extent of her grief is huge—Playfair still holds more power over her life than she does, as Roy frequently repeats throughout the play.

As Rachel O’Riordan points out, the very beginning of *Northern Star*, which presents the image of Mary Bodle singing to her child, portrays Mary as “the archetype of romantic Mother Ireland.”<sup>431</sup> From the first scene, O’Riordan claims, the play juxtaposes the female domain of the crib and childcare with the male action of hanging and death.<sup>432</sup> In his important analysis of the (only) three roles which women take in Northern Irish novels, Bill Rolston identifies the categories of mothers, whores, and villains. Mary fits into his “mothers” category perfectly. “Their concern for peace,” Rolston writes about mother characters, “is a continuation of their domestic role.”<sup>433</sup> Throughout the play, Mary is trying to persuade her lover that he has “a whole new life ahead of [him],”<sup>434</sup> that his sister is bringing him new documents, and that he should use them to run away to America. The two of them are, however, speaking in two different languages. While McCracken is trying to explain to her his failed noble ideas and constantly refers to himself as “the man of Reason,” Mary has accepted her role of “a gamekeeper’s daughter with a bastard son to rear.”<sup>435</sup> She refuses to listen to his monologues, simply saying, “I’ve had no head on me for all your dreams of glory.”<sup>436</sup> She reproaches him for his blind idealism, that getting a parliament was not enough for him, and that now, with his (to her) ridiculous devotion to die for what has failed, he is going to abandon her and their daughter without as much as saying sorry. Throughout the

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<sup>430</sup> Parker, *Plays 1*, 134.

<sup>431</sup> Rachel O’Riordan, “Dead Women Walking: The Female Body as a Site for War in Stewart Parker’s *Northern Star*,” *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation*, ed. Melissa Shira (London: Palgrave, 2007): 145.

<sup>432</sup> O’Riordan “Dead Women,” 148.

<sup>433</sup> Bill Rolston, “Mothers, Whores and Villains: Images of Women in Novels of the Northern Ireland Conflict” *Race & Class* 31, no. 1 (July 1989): 44, <https://doi.org/10.1177/030639688903100104>.

<sup>434</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 5.

<sup>435</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 7.

<sup>436</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 7.

play he only mourns his failed rebellion, without realizing the real “botched birth”<sup>437</sup> is that of his own daughter whom he will deliberately leave fatherless. In other words, McCracken is so blinded by his cause that, even after it has failed, he will accept the death sentence because he considers it the only honorable demise for an unsuccessful political revolutionary.<sup>438</sup> Even his sister Mary-Anne, who brings him the forged documents and who considers him “a patriot and a hero,” urges him to leave Northern Ireland as soon as possible and goes to great lengths to secure his safe passage.<sup>439</sup> Mary’s and Mary-Anne’s motivations are very different, but in the end, they both desperately want for McCracken to survive. Mary does not consider him a hero like Mary-Anne does, she thinks of him simply as the man she loves and the father of her child. For her, that is reason enough for him to try to save his life. The love of the public, she tells him, is an illusory, fleeting, and toxic. “Go ahead,” she says, “let them love you to death, let them paint you in forty shades of green on some godforsaken gable-end.”<sup>440</sup>

Even though they are not very similar on the surface, McCracken and Playfair find themselves in pretty much the same situation. Both are considered exceptional, heroic, and larger-than-life; love and family are too trivial for them to concern themselves with—their political significance being above any individual’s feelings. In their immediate surroundings, each have two women, one of whom supports their delusions of grandeur (Sylvia Playfair and Mary-Anne McCracken) and the other (Monagh and Mary) who simply wants them as a partner, husband, father—a normal, “domestic” man. Both also overestimate the difficulty of their heroic tasks and their own abilities—both die as a result of their sacrosanct mission to save (Northern) Ireland on which they either set out alone (in Playfair’s case) or in which they were left alone by their comrades (as is the case of McCracken). Their idealism, just like that of Frank and Francis in the section above, is ineffective, the only difference between these political activists and the bicycle-enthusiasts is that they are not dreamer idealists, they are acting idealists, but none achieve anything. It is as if Parker was suggesting that any sort of idealism, passive or active, will not bring the desired results. Once again, the message seems to be that the return to reason

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<sup>437</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 9.

<sup>438</sup> Maguire, *Making*, 68.

<sup>439</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 31.

<sup>440</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 55.

is necessary with the additional hint that the heart's opinions should not be cerebrally ignored.

## 8.2 Endogamy and Exogamy

The meaning of the word endogamy is “marrying within a tribe.” Exogamy is its opposite—marrying outside of a tribe. Endogamy, 1972 research suggested, was the most important reason for the continuation of Northern Ireland’s cultural segregation.”<sup>441</sup> The issue of endogamy and exogamy is therefore crucial in explaining the Northern Irish Troubles, and it comes as no surprise that it is richly represented also in Stewart Parker’s plays. In this subchapter, I would like to discuss the results which endogamy and exogamy nearly always have in Parker’s plays: endogamous relationships are childless, exogamous relationships can produce children, but these will remain parentless. In *Pentecost* and *Spokesong*, I found in total three endogamous relationships which fail to produce offspring for various reasons. In *Northern Star* and *Pentecost*, I identified two exogamous couples whose children’s destiny is to become orphans.

### 8.2.1 Endogamous Relationships Are Childless

Three of the four couples discussed below can be found in the play *Pentecost*. They are Lily and Alfie, Ruth and David, and Marian and Lenny. In *Spokesong*, such a couple can be seen in Daisy and Frank. In *Pentecost* especially, the “endogamous relationship are childless” metaphor is overwhelmingly present, and it indeed constitutes one of the central issues of the play. Lily and Alfie got married shortly before World War I. Alfie, however, returned from the war impotent and the couple was destined to remain childless.

Ruth has been pregnant multiple times but always suffered a miscarriage and she might not be able to get pregnant again. The play implies (and Marian voices that opinion) that the miscarriages were caused by David’s acts of domestic violence towards Ruth. Ruth goes to great lengths to defend him, and when Marian calls David a “sadistic pig,” Ruth, like many other battered women, defends him as “a human being”<sup>442</sup> whose “nerves are frayed away to nothing”<sup>443</sup> because of his job as a police officer. Megan M. Minogue

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<sup>441</sup> Grant, “Endogamy,” 72.

<sup>442</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 190.

<sup>443</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 188.

proposes an interesting comparison of Lily's relationship with Alfie and Ruth's relationship with David. She analyzes the two women's self-denial in a similar way as I analyzed Sylvia Playfair and Mary-Anne McCracken in section 8.1.2 above. Minogue suggests that Lily's and Ruth's devotion to their respective husbands correlates with their heightened loyalty to Northern Ireland and the loyalist ideology. Even though their relationships to their husbands are barren and violent (Lily quotes her husband as threatening, "never make me lose my temper"<sup>444</sup>), they are still fiercely loyal to them and would go on defending them no matter how brutally the husbands treat them, just like loyalists would always defend the union with Great Britain, no matter what.<sup>445</sup>

Marian and Lenny "never intended to hitch up" before she became pregnant.<sup>446</sup> The birth of their son Christopher brought them together. "It's the one time so far," Lenny describes it, "I've ever felt one hundred per cent alive."<sup>447</sup> Five months later, Christopher suddenly died in his crib, and, having lost all that ever kept them together, Marian and Lenny separated. Writing about endogamy in Parker's *Pentecost*, Patrick Grant also makes an interesting point about the character of Peter, who begins an affair with Ruth, which suggests how deeply ingrained the desire for an endogamous relationship is in people. Peter, Grant writes, "angrily denounces 'this whole tribe, so-called Protestants,' but in seeking out his 'Protestant nookie,' [i.e. Ruth] he reconfirms the tribalism he condemns, and his practice remains endogamous, despite his theory."

The story of Daisy and Frank in *Spokesong* is still different. Daisy makes a free decision not to have children because they would have to grow up during the Troubles. Even though *Spokesong* is Parker's first theatre play, Daisy and Frank are chronologically the last couple who are deciding whether or not to have children. Unlike in the case of the other couples, Daisy's decision not to have a child is directly influenced by the very effect that endogamy has on the population: it supports intolerance, the result of which is the continuation of sectarian violence which in turn creates the very atmosphere into which Daisy does not want to bring children.

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<sup>444</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 230.

<sup>445</sup> Megan M. Minogue, "Home-Grown Politics: The Politicization of the Parlour Room in Contemporary Northern Irish Drama," *Studi irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies* no. 3 (2013) 193–194, [www.fupress.net/index.php/bsfm-sijis/article/download/13801/12876](http://www.fupress.net/index.php/bsfm-sijis/article/download/13801/12876).

<sup>446</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 204.

<sup>447</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 205.

### 8.2.2 Exogamous Relationships Produce Orphans

Here I would like to discuss two exogamous relationships which produced a child, but the child never got to live with their parents: the relationship of Henry Joy McCracken and Mary Bodle, and the relationship of Lily Matthews to her lodger Alan Ferris. Both these relationships are exogamous affairs; McCracken and Mary are not married, and Lily was at the time of her pregnancy married to Alfie who was then absent for a long period of time. In the case of Mary and McCracken, the relationship is exogamous in the Northern Irish sense—Mary is a Catholic and McCracken is a Protestant. Lily’s affair is exogamous not because of two different religions, but two different nationalities, as Ferris is an Englishman. Regardless of the nature of exogamy, however, both relationships produced healthy children. Apparently without Ferris’s knowing, Lily hid her pregnancy, delivered her baby on the floor of her house by herself, and then abandoned it, “lying on the porch of a Baptist church,” even though Lily herself prefers to say that she “entrusted him to the care of the Lord.”<sup>448</sup> The child never got to know or live with his parents, Lily instead relied on other, wealthier people to take care of it.

In *Northern Star*, Mary is the only one of the couple, who thinks of and cares for their baby daughter. McCracken is busy rehearsing his memories and his gallows speech, ignoring the child completely. Even though during the play the child still has both of her parents, McCracken is soon to be hanged, and history tells us Mary Bodle, in the end, did not raise her either. Little Maria was taken up by Mary-Anne McCracken and raised by her.<sup>449</sup>

Parker seems to be suggesting that the continuation of strictly endogamous marriages has to stop: nothing new comes out of them, this newness being represented by a child. Exogamous marriages, on the other hand, may produce a new generation, less prejudiced than the one before it, but they also run the risk of being broken up by the established norms of the society. The orphan, growing up on their own, has to figure out the way for themselves, just like the new, tolerant generation would have to find completely new patterns of behavior to rely on in the new climate of peace and equality.

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<sup>448</sup> Parker, *Plays 2*, 230.

<sup>449</sup> Graham Reid, “Review: A Northern Star,” *The Irish Review*, no. 7 (Autumn 1989): 87, <http://doi.org/10.2307/29735476>.

### 8.3 Overpoliticization and Its Influence: Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to analyze two aspects of heterosexual romantic relationships which permeate Parker's plays. Firstly, I looked at how a firm political stance is often correlated with being the one in charge in the relationship. I introduced two relationships from *Spokesong*, in which strongly politically opinionated women were "in charge" of their more dreamy and naïve partners. Then I analyzed one relationship from *Catchpenny Twist* and *Northern Star* each, where the men were in charge, but their idealism and delusions of grandeur in the end spelled their downfall. I concluded that in writing about these relationships, Parker is suggesting two things. Idealism is not helpful in dealing with the political situation, whether it is the dreamy kind of idealism, or self-sacrificial heroism. The attitude that is likely to be effective is approaching the Troubles with the eyes open and a critical and realistic judgment, but at the same time, the heart must be heard as well because if overly devoted to rationalism, man loses his humanity.

Secondly, I looked at the factors of endogamy and exogamy, as the practice of endogamy is an important factor in keeping the sectarian divide open. I found examples for each type of coupling and concluded from them that Parker mostly portrays endogamous relationships as tragically childless, and exogamous relationships, even though they produce offspring, also deem it to live a life without its own parents. Especially *Pentecost* is a play rich in dysfunctional and barren endogamous relationships, and most of my examples are taken from there. I concluded that Parker's opinion on endogamous relationships is quite clear: they do not help Northern Ireland to move forward. They are unfruitful, and he represented that by the obvious childlessness. Exogamous relationships are more problematic. Both of those analyzed above are only affairs, not official marriages, and they are also much rarer in the plays. About these Parker seems to suggest that they are the step in the right direction because they do produce children, they are, however, still quite unacceptable (none of them are marriages) and have a difficult life. Children are born, but are given up and/or deserted by their parents, left to fend for themselves in the world. I interpreted this as the obstacle a new, more tolerant Northern Irish generation would have to face: they could only find support in themselves because even though the previous generation did make the first step, they were still at the time clueless as to what the world was going to be like for their culturally mixed children. They will have no instructions for them—these would have to be figured out during the process of change.



## 9 Art and Its Options

In this chapter, I would like to compare Parker's evolution as an artist with four of his plays in which he endowed his characters with similar decisions or dilemmas that he had to confront, sometimes with different results. The plays are not presented in their chronological order, but I don't consider it necessary for them to be. Parker often had the ideas for his plays years before he wrote them, and even when this is not the case, an artist is never constrained to write only about his life or only about what is relevant to his present state of mind.

Taking into consideration Parker's frequent use of self-conscious theatricality and his similarly frequent discussions of art and artistry on stage (in plays such as *Catchpenny Twist*, *Nightshade*, or *Heavenly Bodies*), I do not consider it too far-fetched to look for all the basic elements of his artistic evolution inside of his stage plays.

### 9.1 Understanding "Home"

The first step of Parker's career I would like to discuss here is the recognition of where his allegiance lied. As I mentioned in the summarized biography in Chapter 4, already when he was a student at Queen's University, Parker was working on his degree in order to obtain a teaching position in the United States. Not only was teaching keeping him away from his creative pursuits, however, he also discovered that "he would never be more than an observer" in the United States and felt he "had to grapple with his birthplace, which he loved and hated in equal measure."<sup>450</sup> Later, he wrote two characters with similar escapist sentiments, one in his first, the other one in his last play—*Spokesong* and *Pentecost* respectively. Neither *Spokesong*'s Julian, nor *Pentecost*'s Peter are nostalgic towards Northern Ireland in the same way Parker was, but they both return back home. Julian's motivation, however, is to cut his ties with Belfast (and possibly to make his unworldly brother's life a living hell). Peter's relationship to his home country is more complicated and that is why I decided to discuss him in this context rather than Julian. Peter, moreover was characterized by Richtarik as "the mouthpiece for many of Parker's

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<sup>450</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, vii.

own sentiments from the time of *Pentecost*'s setting" (i.e. the 1974 UWC strike), and in the same way as Parker he distances himself from the opinions of his younger self."<sup>451</sup>

While he immediately compliments Lenny's "Lilliputian wit,"<sup>452</sup> Peter does not disclose his reasons for returning to Belfast, especially in the middle of the UWC strike. "I was due a trip home," is his only commentary.<sup>453</sup> He argues with Lenny whether Northern Ireland is or is not his home. "The rest of the world has crossed the street, passed on by – on account of having fully-grown twentieth-century problems,"<sup>454</sup> Peter says bitterly. Even though Parker was equally disappointed by the ideological inflexibility of his country, he would never say, as Peter does, that he has "exilephilia," a condition Peter describes as "the desperate nagging pain of longing to be far, far away."<sup>455</sup>

What Parker also shares with Peter is their attitude to the Troubles and the extremism behind it. After he listens to Harold Wilson's "spongers speech" with Ruth, they have an argument in which she defends the UWC strike as "something [that] had to be done."<sup>456</sup> She is willing to tolerate the lack of electricity, food and other basic services because the streets are silent—because "the IRA have been stopped in their tracks." Peter, just like Parker himself, cannot believe her superficial belief that violence can stop violence, exclaiming, "For Christ's sake, they're on hold, that's all . . . Are you deaf, blind and entirely thick?"

Last but not least, Parker lets Peter share one of his most important experiences he made in the United States: the participation in the African-American students' siege of Cornell University. "Six years ago," Peter tells Ruth, "I was standing in a human chain encircling a building. It was in America . . . a university."<sup>457</sup> Even though they both Peter and Parker went through this crucial formative moment, they learned two different lessons from it. While Peter rates his American experience as something that he "[doesn't] quite see . . . happening"<sup>458</sup> in Northern Ireland, Parker was moved by it towards

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<sup>451</sup> Marilyn Richarik, "Stewart Parker, Belfast Playwright," *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* 68, no. 1–2 (Winter 2007): 555, 10.25290/prinunivlibrchro.68.1-2.0526.

<sup>452</sup> Parker, *Plays* 2, 198.

<sup>453</sup> Parker, *Plays* 2, 200.

<sup>454</sup> Parker, *Plays* 2, 200.

<sup>455</sup> Parker, *Plays* 2, 218.

<sup>456</sup> Parker, *Plays* 2, 215.

<sup>457</sup> Parker, *Plays* 2, 216.

<sup>458</sup> Parker, *Plays* 2, 216.

humanism and tolerance. He decided to try to become the change he wanted to see in the world, moved to Belfast, addressed himself to its people in his plays, and critically examined its problems, whereas Peter keeps his pessimism and instead moves to Birmingham.

## 9.2 Discovering the Mission

Early on in his career, Parker identified that his calling was to treat the political situation in Northern Ireland in his art in order to promote tolerance, mutual understanding, and suggest solutions.<sup>459</sup> I would like to contrast this decision of his with that of Dion Boucicault from the play *Heavenly Bodies*. Even though he was Irish, Boucicault's career started in London and continued and ended in New York. Boucicault deliberately avoided the treatment of Ireland in his plays, and yet today he is most famous for those Irish plays that he did write, *The Coleen Bawn* (1860), *Arrah-na-Pogue* (1864), and *The Shaughraun* (1874).<sup>460</sup> When the ghost of Johnny Patterson appears, he threatens Boucicault with limbo—where all “show people” go instead of heaven.<sup>461</sup> Boucicault exclaims, “I am owed a place in posterity!”<sup>462</sup> Patterson therefore allows him to defend himself, but does not make it easy on him. “So tell us, Mr Boucicault,” he parodies an interview, “how did you react during the Great Irish Famine? – Oh, I kept London well supplied with me comedies of manners.”<sup>463</sup> Patterson keeps reminding Boucicault that for financial success and for fame, he completely abandoned his country of birth. “I confronted the major issues of the day,”<sup>464</sup> Boucicault objects, but Patterson thinks those issues either insignificant or strategically chosen for bigger profit. In spite of all Patterson's objections, Boucicault does go to heaven in the end thanks to the ending of one of his Irish plays, *The Shaughraun*.

As can be deduced from reading his lecture “*Dramatis Personae*,” Parker could not and did not even want to take the same path as Dion Boucicault. He probably would not be able to live with himself if he did. A playwright, for him, is “a truth-teller,” and “a

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<sup>459</sup> Parker, *Dramatis Personae*, 24–25.

<sup>460</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 289.

<sup>461</sup> Parker, *Plays* 2, 92.

<sup>462</sup> Parker, *Plays* 2, 93.

<sup>463</sup> Parker, *Plays* 2, 116.

<sup>464</sup> Parker, *Plays* 2, 139.

sceptic in a credulous world.”<sup>465</sup> Even though he recognized that writing about Northern Ireland is “an enterprise full of traps and snares,” he would never be able to write inane commercial drama.<sup>466</sup> When he decided towards the end of his life that he wrote all that he could on the subject of Northern Ireland, fate was not going to allow him to treat any new topic—he died before he even chose one for himself.<sup>467</sup>

### 9.3 Becoming “Magician and Mortician”

The previous subchapter discusses what Parker did *not* choose to do, in this one, I would like to propose that what Parker decided to become instead of a Dion Boucicault is in its idea similar to the professions of choice of Quinn, the magician and mortician of *Nightshade*. The tools of his trade that Parker chose are his trademark.

As discussed in Chapter 5 above, Parker essentially had two choices to make when he was deciding about the way to approach the Troubles, his selected subject. Not only did he have to avoid the trap of the stereotypical Ulster (or Troubles) Play, as he writes in “*Dramatis Personae*,”<sup>468</sup> but he also had to figure out a strategy to deal with the ubiquitous violence. In other words, he had to choose his mortician’s strategy. Would he allow violence on stage, or would he leave it happen off-stage only? Would he present death and violence at all? Like most other playwrights, he decided to always treat violence indirectly (with the exception of the ending of *Catchpenny Twist*, that is). It can be heard and its consequences can be seen (for example in *Pentecost* where several characters arrive on stage with injuries), but it can never be directly observed on stage.<sup>469</sup> It is, however, always potentially present because Parker valued creative honesty.<sup>470</sup>

In choosing his main mode of communication, Parker decided against realism; instead he became a magician. Self-conscious theatricality, role-playing on stage, and multi-purpose characters all frequently appear in his plays. As Richtarik sums it up,

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<sup>465</sup> Parker, *Dramatis Personae*, 24.

<sup>466</sup> Parker, *Dramatis Personae*, 25.

<sup>467</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 326.

<sup>468</sup> Parker, *Dramatis Personae*, 25.

<sup>469</sup> Cf. Maguire, *Making*, 166.

<sup>470</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 127.

“magic shows, theatre, and undertaking all involve the manipulation of appearances to create an alternate reality for spectators.”<sup>471</sup>

## 9.4 The Trappings of Intellectuality

I have previously attributed the comparative lack of international recognition Parker received during his lifetime to the audience’s lack of patience with the topic of Northern Ireland and their insufficient knowledge of Northern Irish culture and history. While I still recognize these reasons as the main ones, I would also like to bring up Parker’s style and its realistic accessibility to an average member of the audience. In this aspect, I want to make my last comparison, this time to the protagonist of *Northern Star*, Henry Joy McCracken.

As Tom Maguire writes, *Northern Star* is concerned, in both its content and form, with the power of language, exemplified by McCracken’s constant rehearsals of his gallows speech.<sup>472</sup> Richard Rankin Russell describes McCracken as “remorselessly intellectual” and ascribes his failure as a revolutionary to the discrepancy between his conciliatory rhetoric and the reality of the people he is trying to convince to join in it.<sup>473</sup>

The form of *Northern Star* has been the subject of many studies. As I write above, it uses multiple flashbacks and scenes-within-scenes, but that is not what makes it Parker’s most intellectually challenging play because he uses this device in other plays, such as *Pratt’s Fall* or *Heavenly Bodies*. In *Northern Star*, Parker’s own voice can be heard alongside the voices of eight other Irish dramatists, namely George Farquhar, Dion Boucicault, Oscar Wilde, G.B. Shaw, John Millington Synge, Sean O’Casey, Brendan Behan, and Samuel Beckett.<sup>474</sup> With this complex technique of pastiche, Elmer Andrews (and many others) argues, Parker “runs a risk of distracting the audience into a literary guessing-game in which the point of his citational mode is missed. Essentially, it is an ‘estranging’ technique.”<sup>475</sup> The point of Parker’s citational mode, to use Andrews’s

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<sup>471</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 204.

<sup>472</sup> Maguire, *Making*, 69.

<sup>473</sup> Russell, “Playing,” 389.

<sup>474</sup> Bort, “Stewart Parker,” 371–372.

<sup>475</sup> Elmer Andrews, “The Will to Freedom,” *Theatre Ireland*, no. 19 (July/September 1989): 20, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25489395>.

words, is to underline his “pluralistic vision of Irish identity.”<sup>476</sup> Even though *Northern Star* is arguably Parker’s most literary play, others are multilayered and quite complex as well, and *Nightshade*, for example, is a unique mix of private symbols, Biblical references, and psychological drama.<sup>477</sup>

Describing the technique of *Northern Star* as “estranging” (as Andrews does) is very fitting. Going back to Maguire’s modes of presentation—realism vs. self-conscious theatricality, or, as I have suggested above, the *continuum* between these two—the most important effect of self-conscious theatricality is the alienation of audience—estrangement, in other words—from their reality. Using alienation is a risk because it might turn out to be so alienating that it will not fulfil its purpose of making the audience think outside the box, leaving them just confused instead. Using such evident pastiche which is at the same time so difficult to decode as to its meaning for the play, alongside of a plot presenting a nearly forgotten chapter of Northern Irish history, is most likely the greatest creative risk Parker ever took on stage.

As Richard Rankin Russell amusingly says, “Parker’s plays were often considered too zany . . . for the mainstream theatre.”<sup>478</sup> If Parker opted for his trademark intellectuality but used a more realistic mode, he might have received more positive reviews during his lifetime. It would also mean, however, that he would not stay true to himself. He might have done it in order to address wider audiences, but it would be a catchpenny twist decision, which he vowed never to make.<sup>479</sup> By combining intellectuality and theatricality, he spoke exactly in the way he wanted to, but also he voluntarily ran the risk of being misunderstood or not understood at all, leaving, just like many other artists before him, and indeed like Henry Joy McCracken himself, his work for the posterity to judge its merits.

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<sup>476</sup> Richtarik, “Belfast,” 551.

<sup>477</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, 204.

<sup>478</sup> Russell, “Playing,” 371.

<sup>479</sup> Cf. Richtarik, *Life*, 290.

## 10 Conclusion

Even though the Troubles made Parker a “Belfast playwright,” he never took sides. His primary goal always was to “[get] behind the symptoms of cultural division,” and, most importantly, to “[find] new and unexpected angles from which to examine it.”<sup>480</sup> Towards the end of his life, he was considering abandoning the role of the “Belfast playwright,” but sadly, and maybe even symbolically, he was not allowed to do so, dying right at the end of his “Northern Irish period.”

Throughout his life, Parker was often underappreciated or misunderstood while other Northern Irish playwrights fared better. He, of course, wished to be successful, but there were bounds he was not willing to cross—he did not want to become a commercial playwright whose plays entertain the audience but gave them nothing to think about. Clare Wallace also cites “the heterogeneity of his writing activity” as a possible reason why he was not able to follow his first play, *Spokesong*, with something equally popularly successful.<sup>481</sup> There is indeed no such thing as “a typical Parker play”. There is his typical humor, wit, and sophistication, but as a whole, each play is different from the rest.<sup>482</sup> They are connected only on a deep level, which might escape an untrained observer: Parker was always looking to answer the same questions, “Why were the inhabitants of a tiny province with a population of fewer than 1.5 million killing one another? What did they believe could possibly be achieved by it? And what might induce them to stop?”<sup>483</sup> He always hoped his plays would “educate his audience into a deeper understanding of what was happening.”<sup>484</sup> A herculean task, one might say, but in spite of all hardship, Parker remained faithful to it until the very end. His most mature answers to these problematic questions can be found in his last play, *Pentecost*. *Pentecost* presents the most quarrelsome and sectarian characters of all his plays, and ends in the spiritual revelation that all people, inside or outside our own community, are human, but that they are *only*

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<sup>480</sup> Richtarik, *Life*, viii.

<sup>481</sup> Clare Wallace, “‘A Sceptic in a Credulous World’: Re-evaluating the Work of Stewart Parker on the Twentieth Anniversary of His Death,” *Ilha do Desterro*, no. 58 (January/June 2010): 160, <https://doi.org/10.5007/2175-8026.2010n58p157>.

<sup>482</sup> Marilyn Richtarik, “Sam Thompson, Stewart Parker, and the Lineage of Northern Irish Drama,” *Ilha do Desterro*, no. 58 (January/June 2010): 179, <https://doi.org/10.5007/2175-8026.2010n58p179>.

<sup>483</sup> Richtarik, “Belfast,” 533.

<sup>484</sup> Richtarik, “Belfast,” 535.

human. I consider it very fortunate that these should be, in a way, Parker's last words to his audience.

Besides celebrating Stewart Parker's life and work at the thirtieth anniversary of his death, this thesis has provided an analysis of Parker's theatre plays in terms of how they represent Northern Ireland, its politics, and social issues. By providing an overview of Northern Irish history, I hoped to demonstrate that Parker's plays are inseparable from it, and even though they are still entertaining, without understanding the history, their deeper messages—those that Parker cared the most about transmitting—are unintelligible.

Even though he passed away thirty years ago and is very much a playwright of his time, Parker's legacy lives on. The Stewart Parker Trust financially helps starting playwrights to avoid the problems Parker himself had to face. Among the trustees are his partner Lesley Bruce, his niece Lynne Parker, or his friend, actor Stephen Rea. Former trustees include Seamus Heaney or Brian Friel.<sup>485</sup> Lynne Parker keeps her uncle's legacy alive by staging his plays with the Rough Magic theatre company of which she is the artistic director. Most recently, the company staged *Northern Star* in 2016.<sup>486</sup>

"The strengths and weaknesses of theatre in Ireland," Parker wrote in an article titled "State of Play:" "the strengths are in acting and writing, and the weaknesses in directing and criticism."<sup>487</sup> In the article, he laments the unprofessionalism of Irish theatre critics, saying that "the average theatre reviewer in Dublin is generally a journalist whose actual area of expertise is agriculture, medicine or hurling."<sup>488</sup> The absence of the critical tradition in Ireland, he writes, is caused by the "lack of any intellectual or theoretical foundations."<sup>489</sup> In spite of knowing this, Parker never reduced his own intellectuality, he never sold out his personal style for critical or financial success. This, aside from treating a controversial topic that international audiences were bored with, speaks volumes about Parker's devotion to his idea of what art should be. Even if his plays should read merely

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<sup>485</sup> "History of the Trust," Stewart Parker Trust, accessed April 20, 2019, <http://www.stewartparkertrust.com/trust.html>.

<sup>486</sup> "Northern Star," Rough Magic, accessed April 20, 2019, <http://www.roughmagic.ie/archive/northern-star>.

<sup>487</sup> Parker, *Dramatis Personae*, 90.

<sup>488</sup> Parker, *Dramatis Personae*, 90.

<sup>489</sup> Parker, *Dramatis Personae*, 91.



as entertaining history lessons today, his devotion to art and his own purpose is timeless and has a lot to teach us even thirty years after his death.

## 11 Resumé

V roce 2018 uplynulo třicet let od smrti severoirského dramatika Stewarta Parkea (1941–1988). Tato diplomová práce, napsána v letech 2018 a 2019, toto smutné jubileum neplánovaně připomíná. Parker se narodil v Belfastu v Severním Irsku v roce 1941. Vyrůstal během druhé světové války a těžil z britských poválečných reforem ve školství. Jako inteligentnímu dítěti, které ovšem pocházelo z dělnické třídy, by se mu nikdy nedostalo kvalitního středoškolského a rozhodně ne vysokoškolského vzdělání. Jeho protestantská, nikoliv však ortodoxní rodina, se nikdy neangažovala v sektářských konfliktech a Parker proto vyrůstal s tolerancí ke své vlastní (protestantské) komunitě, i k té katolické. Krátce po nástupu na Queen's University v Belfastu mu byla diagnostikována rakovina kosti a v devatenácti letech přišel o levou nohu. Nepříliš aktivnímu a vždy spíše intelektuálskému Parkerovi amputace život rozhodně změnila, ale záliby, jimž se věnoval dříve, kvůli ní opustit nemusel. Již na univerzitě psal a režíroval dramata, ale za svou nejdůležitější kreativní činnost v té době stále považoval poezii. V roce 1964 se oženil a na několik let se i s manželkou přemístili do Spojených států, kde vyučoval Irskou literaturu a kreativní psaní. Belfast a Severní Irsko však v myšlenkách nikdy neopustil a učení ho frustrovalo, protože mu nedávalo dostatečný prostor pro vlastní kreativní činnost. V roce 1969 se proto s manželkou vrátil do Belfastu a rozhodl se věnovat dramatické tvorbě. Politické klima v Severním Irsku, a zvláště pak v Belfastu, ale nemohlo být k začínajícímu spisovateli nepřátelštější. Severoirský konflikt, známý v angličtině pod eufemistickým názvem „the Troubles“ (potíže, trable), zuřil mezi znepřátelenými komunitami lojalistických protestantů a nacionalistických katolíků sice už od nepaměti, ale v 60. a 70. letech se situace tak vyhrotila, že na ulicích běžně docházelo k bombovým útokům, ke střelbě a k náhodnému vraždění civilního obyvatelstva. Divadla povětšinou nefungovala a Parker, který se rozhodl primárně věnovat prknům, která znamenají svět, nezbylo než se poohlížet po produkcích jinde. Poprvé uspěl v Dublinu v roce 1975 se svou první hrou *Spokesong*. Vždy psal pro belfastské publikum, ale tam se mu povedlo hru uvést premiérově až za dlouhých devět let. Divadelních her napsal mezi let 1975 a 1987 celkem osm, z toho jeden nikdy nepublikovaný muzikál. Napsal také mnoho rozhlasových a televizních her a podílel se na několika filmových scénářích. Jeho tvorba je rozmanitá a je těžké identifikovat konkrétní pojítka mezi všemi jeho díly. Vždy však chtěl divákovi něco předat, navázat s ním dialog o Severním Irsku a jeho „trablích“ a snažil se pomoci mu najít cestu ven

z všudypřítomného násilí. Parkerovým velkým problémem byla paradoxně jeho inteligence. Nechtěl se snížit k psaní komerčních a masově úspěšných dramát, a proto dodnes zůstává pro svět takřka neznámým umělcem. Parker nezanechal žádné potomky, ale jeho neteř Lynne se svou divadelní společností Rough Magic se stará o to, aby díla jejího strýce neupadla v zapomnění. Když Parker v sedmačtyřiceti letech onemocněl rakovinou žaludku, byl evidentně spokojen s tím, čeho dosáhl. Ukončil, jak sám říkal, jednu etapu svého života, po kterou se věnoval tvorbě na severoirská témata. Cítil ale, že se v té oblasti vyčerpal a chtěl začít psát o jiných věcech. Zemřel po krátké nemoci a jeho popel byl rozprášen v Severním průlivu.

Jak je evidentní z názvu této práce, jejím hlavním cílem je analyzovat ty aspekty Parkerových divadelních her, které přímo i nepřímo zabývají Severním Irskem. První dvě kapitoly obsahují historický a socio-kulturní popis Severního Irska, jehož znalost je k pochopení Parkerova díla nezbytná. Kapitoly 4 a 5 se věnují Parkerovu životu a jeho pozici mezi ostatními severoirskými dramatiky. Parker si zvolil vysoce intelektuální formu tvorby, jejímž hlavním účinkem na obecnostvo je jeho odcizení od reality. Touto technikou chce Parker podnítit diváky, aby přemýšleli netradičně o tom, co je jim prezentováno nejen na jevišti, ale i v běžném životě plném strachu a násilí. Často ovšem narážel na nepochopení. Kritici a diváci nedokázali proniknout dostatečně do hloubky jeho děl, popřípadě jim úplně chyběla znalost kultury a historie Severního Irska tak podstatná pro pochopení jeho komplexního smýšlení. Neméně často se setkával s tehdy běžným názorem, že hry, knihy či televizní pořady zabývající se Severním Irskem a jeho „trablemi“ jsou bezpředmětné a nudné, a že tak dlouho trvající konflikt mohou vést pouze nábožensky pobláznění ignoranti.

V kapitole 6 jsou seskupeny popisy dějů všech sedmi analyzovaných her. Sedmá kapitola analyzuje dva způsoby, jimiž Parker na jevišti ztvárňoval Severní Irsko: pomocí postavy a pomocí kulis. Nepříliš úspěšná zpěvačka Monagh Cahoon ze hry *Catchpenny Twist* představuje Severní Irsko zdecimované konfliktem. Godfrey Dudley ze hry *Pratt's Fall* ztvárňuje protestantskou frakci Severního Irska v době podpisu Anglo-irské dohody. Pokud se týká kulis, Parker často ukazoval domy jako rozdělené, např. mezi dva adoptivní bratry, a znázorňoval pomocí nich situaci v Severním Irsku, také metaforicky rozděleném mezi dva nepokrevní bratry, katolíky a protestanty.

Kapitola 8 se zabývá analýzou Parkerových heterosexuálních romantických vztahů. Ten z páru, který má vyhraněnější politické názory, na sebe ve většině případů

bere vůdcovskou roli. Ten, který ztratil kontakt s realitou a příliš se pohroužil do politických ideologií pak vždy vztah rozbíjí, protože nebere ohledy na city jednotlivců a pídí se po pochybném „veřejném blahu“. Zajímavý je i Parkerův přístup k endogamním a exogamním vztahům. Endogamie, jinak také vztah uvnitř vlastní komunity, je Parkerem znázorňována jako neplodná – z endogamních svazků se nerodí děti, stejně tak jako se v endogamních vztazích nerodí žádné nové myšlenky, směřující k toleranci a rovnoprávnosti zneprátených komunit. Exogamní vztahy plodné jsou, ale často končí osiřením či opuštěním dítěte. Parker jako by naznačoval, že ukončení sektářského konfliktu leží v exogamním vztahu, v přijetí člena jiné komunity na základě jeho lidskosti, nikoliv jeho ideové příslušnosti. Toto řešení je však často nepřístupné a velmi nebezpečné. Potomci exogamních vztahů musí objevit nové způsoby chování a jejich rodiče jim v tom nejsou schopni pomoci. Jako opuštěné nebo osiřelé děti jsou tedy ve světě sami.

Poslední kapitola se věnuje čtyřem Parkerovým důležitým kreativním rozhodnutím a jak podobná dilemata ztvárnil u postav ve svých hrách. Po návratu ze Spojených států se rozhodl Belfastu raději věnovat než před ním utíkat, zvolil si, co pro něj drama znamená a jakým způsobem ho bude tvořit. Zvolil si i to, že se nepodřídí diktátu doby a zůstane věrný svým nejhlubším názorům.

Tato práce v žádném případě není vyčerpávající pokud se Parkerovy politické angažovanosti týče. Jeho hry jsou doslova prostoupeny symbolismem a metaforičností. Žádné z jeho děl nebylo doposud přeloženo do češtiny a je sporné, zda by měl českému čtenáři či divákovi co říct, když nebyl vyslyšen ani větší částí britského a irského publika v době svého života. Doufám ale, že aspoň tato krátká sonda do jeho díla někoho inspiruje, aby Parkera sám pro sebe objevil. Byla by věčná škoda, kdyby upadl v zapomnění.

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