“Accursed Time”: Gilles Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition* and John McGahern’s *That They May Face the Rising Sun*

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/etudesirlandaises/8382>

DOI: 10.4000/etudesirlandaises.8382

ISSN: 2259-8863

Publisher

Presses universitaires de Caen

Printed version

Date of publication: 31 December 2019

Number of pages: 95-111

ISBN: 978-2-84133-964-8

ISSN: 0183-973X

Electronic reference

Graham Price, “Accursed Time”: Gilles Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition* and John McGahern’s *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, *Études irlandaises* [Online], 44-2 | 2019, Online since 06 May 2020, connection on 15 November 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesirlandaises/8382> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesirlandaises.8382>

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Abstract: This article analyses the connecting threads between the philosophies of Gilles Deleuze – as they appear in his 1968 text *Difference and Repetition*, which is one of Deleuze’s major solo works (along with *The Logic of Sense*) prior to his famous, anti-Oedipal collaborations with Félix Guattari – and the final novel written by John McGahern, *That They May Face the Rising Sun* (2002). It shall be argued that Deleuze’s conceptualisations of temporality and humanity’s relationship with its physical surroundings find their perfect literary realisations in the pages of McGahern’s *That They May Face* as he attempts to provide a vision of contemporary Ireland’s transcending of James Joyce’s nightmare of history and the deadening habit of what Samuel Beckett’s character Pozzo calls “accursed time”. Shakespeare, Proust, Joyce, and Beckett are the four literary authors who most unite Deleuze and McGahern in shared enthusiasm and they shall be considered as mediating presences between McGahern and Deleuze throughout the course of the article. It shall be argued that a Deleuzian vision lies at the heart of contemporary Irish literature and that *That They May Face the Rising Sun* represents a primary textual example of this literary strand.

Keywords: contemporary Irish literature, Irish studies, continental philosophy, cultural theory, Gilles Deleuze, John McGahern, James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, Marcel Proust, ecocriticism.

Résumé: Cet article analyse les liens qui unissent la philosophie de Gilles Deleuze, telle qu’elle est présentée dans son texte de 1968 *Différence et répétition*, l’une de ses œuvres majeures (avec *La logique du sens*) qui précède ses célèbres collaborations avec Félix Guattari sur *l’anti-Œdipe*, et le dernier roman de John McGahern, *That They May Face the Rising Sun* (2002). Les concepts de Deleuze à propos de la temporalité et de la relation des hommes avec leur environnement physique trouvent une parfaite forme littéraire dans cette œuvre de McGahern. En effet, l’écrivain cherche à donner une image de l’Irlande contemporaine qui transcende le cauchemar de l’histoire chez James Joyce et l’habitude assourdissante que le personnage de Samuel Beckett, Pozzo, nomme « accursed time ». Shakespeare, Proust, Joyce et Beckett sont les auteurs qui unissent avec enthousiasme Deleuze et McGahern et ce rôle sera souligné tout au long de l’article. La vision de Deleuze est au cœur de la littérature irlandaise contemporaine et *That They May Face the Rising Sun* en est un des premiers exemples textuels.

Mots clés: littérature irlandaise contemporaine, études irlandaises, philosophie continentale, théorie de la culture, Gilles Deleuze, John McGahern, James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, Marcel Proust, écocritique.

A single and same voice for the whole thousand-voiced multiple, a single and same Ocean for all the drops, a single clamour of Being for all beings: on condition that each being, each drop and each voice has reached the state of excess – in other words, the difference which displaces and disguises them and, in turning upon its mobile cusp, causes them to return.

Gilles DELEUZE¹

[T]he past and the present are all the same in the mind. They are just pictures.

John MCGAHERN²

Recent studies of contemporary Irish literature by critics such as Claire Bracken and Susan Cahill have argued that the philosophical vision of Gilles Deleuze can be valuably used in the analysis of recent Irish authors such as Marina Carr, Colum McCann and Éilís Ní Dhuibhne because of how their works represent temporality, trauma, memory, and history in the context of a new, increasingly globalised Ireland³. This article analyses the connecting threads between the philosophies of Gilles Deleuze – as they appear in his 1968 text *Difference and Repetition*, which is one of Deleuze's major solo works (along with *The Logic of Sense*) prior to his famous, anti-Oedipal collaborations with Félix Guattari – and the final novel written by John McGahern, *That They May Face the Rising Sun* (2002). It shall be argued that Deleuze's conceptualisations of temporality and humanity's relationship with its physical surroundings find their perfect literary realisations in the pages of McGahern's *That They May Face* as he attempts to provide a vision of contemporary Ireland's transcending of James Joyce's nightmare of history and the deadening habit of what Samuel Beckett's character Pozzo calls "accursed time". Shakespeare, Proust, Joyce, and Beckett are the three literary authors who most unite Deleuze and McGahern in shared enthusiasm. Beckett's writing, in particular his prose trilogy and *Waiting for Godot*, shall be engaged with during the course of this article as important mediating presences between Deleuze's and McGahern's thoughts and texts at crucial times in this argument. McGahern and Deleuze were heavily influenced by the intellectual and literary cultures of their times, in particular by the texts of James Joyce and especially Samuel Beckett. What François Dosse – in

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1. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, Paul Patton (trans.), London – New Delhi – New York, Bloomsbury, 1994, p. 378. All further references refer parenthetically to this edition with the abbreviation *DR*.
 2. John McGahern, *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, London, Faber and Faber, 2002, p. 77. All future parenthetical references are to this edition with the abbreviation *TTMFRS*.
 3. See Claire Bracken, *Irish Feminist Futures*, London, Routledge, 2016; and Susan Cahill, *Irish Literature in the Celtic Tiger Years 1990 to 2008: Gender, Bodies, Memory*, London, Continuum, 2011.

his valuable joint biography *Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: Intersecting Lives* (2011) – says about Deleuze's creative attitude towards other writers in various mediums can be equally applied to McGahern:

Deleuze elevated what he considered to be the best and most authentic in the authors for whom he became the spokesperson, staying as close as possible to the internal logic of their thinking⁴.

Neither Deleuze nor McGahern slavishly imitated any of the writers with whose work they engaged; rather, they creatively and ethically confronted what they considered to be the heart of the greatness of those earlier generations of literary and philosophical masters and used the legacy of those previous artistic and philosophical individuals to make new and original contributions to 20th century literature and thought. Deleuze himself referred to the act of critically and creatively engaging with another writer's work as

[...] a kind of ass-fuck, or, what amounts to the same thing, an immaculate conception. I imagined myself approaching an author from behind and giving him a child that would indeed be his but would nonetheless be monstrous⁵.

For Deleuze, to critically confront another author's work would lead to the creation of something that would be both of that other work and also a going beyond what was intended by the previous writer. This is almost certainly the case with Deleuze's engagement with philosophers such as Friederich Nietzsche, Henri Bergson, and Baruch Spinoza. The sustained analysis of Samuel Beckett's texts in Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972) highlights Deleuze's (and Guattari's) keen awareness of Beckett's value as a 20th century literary and cultural influence⁶ and the implicit and explicit references to Beckett's texts in McGahern's writing performs a similar testimony. Ever since McGahern's first novel, *The Barracks* (1963), his works have often presented a version of life in which routines and habits are repeated over the course of the days of particular characters' lives and those days are portrayed as being consistently "both different and the same"⁷. This simultaneously Beckettian and Deleuzian vision of existence, I shall argue, finds its most poetic and healingly redemptive expression (as far as McGahern's oeuvre is concerned) in *That They May Face*.

4. Francois Dosse, *Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: Intersecting Lives*, Deborah Glassman (trans.), New York, Columbia University Press, 2010, p. 109.

5. Gilles Deleuze, "I Have Nothing to Admit", Janis Forman (trans.), *Semiotext(e)*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1977, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 112-113 (translation modified).

6. See Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, Helen R. Lane (trans.), London, Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 24-25. See Paul Ardoin, "Deleuze's Monstrous Beckett: Movement and Paralysis", *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2015, p. 134-149, for a thorough analysis of Deleuze's engagement with the works of Samuel Beckett.

7. John McGahern, *The Barracks*, London, Faber and Faber, 1963, p. 204.

Deleuzian philosophy and McGahern's Irish, artistic vision

Philosopher and Deleuzian, Manuel DeLanda, writes of Deleuze's philosophy as positing a radical departure from social constructivism in its focus on the relationship between men, the non-human, temporality, and the natural world; concerns that have been at the core of the discipline of Irish Studies for more than twenty years:

[...] unlike social constructivism, which achieves openness by making the world depend on human interpretation, Deleuze achieves it by making the world into a creative, complexifying and problematizing cauldron of becoming. Because of their anthropocentrism, constructivist philosophies remain prisoners of what Foucault called "the episteme of man", while Deleuze plunges ahead into a post-humanist future, in which the world has been enriched by a multiplicity of non-human agencies, of which metallic catalysts, and their acts of recognition and intervention, are only one example⁸.

Claire Bracken also notes how Deleuze's philosophy is very much concerned with materiality, nature and embodiment and how this distinguishes it from the linguistic and cultural preoccupations of the majority of 20th century philosophy and cultural theory:

Differing from deconstruction, Deleuze's work posits a space that exists in excess of language and discourse, a heterogeneous material force that is always *virtual* – meaning that it cannot be captured within discourse / representation / language. Furthermore, this space is positive and productive, as it is generative of the *actual* – discourse / representation / language⁹.

In McGahern's last novel, the space that Deleuze theorises is made manifest via the tools of literary representation which enable this rural world to be in existence. Denis Sampson's ecocritical approach to McGahern's *Memoir* and *That They May Face the Rising Sun* highlights how the world in which those works exist is a product of naturalistic representation, and also of subjective, private vision: "His [McGahern's] pastoral is grounded by the scrupulous characterization of each person as an individual and the equally scrupulous rendering of time and landscape as aspects of a larger sensual reality"¹⁰. For Deleuze (as Susan Cahill asserts): "[...] the past is part of the present and the present is simultaneously created as past"¹¹. The appropriateness of Deleuzian thought to the ever expanding discipline of Irish studies is very apparent because of its preoccupation with the examination and theorising of land, landscape, ecology, trauma, history, memory and imagination. One passage in *That They May Face* actually suggests

8. Manuel DeLanda, "Deleuze and the Open-Ended Becoming of the World", *Dialogues*, on line: <https://www.cddc.vt.edu/host/delanda/pages/becoming.htm>.

9. Claire Bracken, "Queer Intersections and Nomadic Routes: Anne Enright's 'The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch'", *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2010, p. 124, note 5.

10. Denis Sampson, "Open to the World: A Reading of John McGahern's *That They May Face the Rising Sun*", *Irish University Review*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2005, p. 145-146.

11. Susan Cahill, *Irish Literature in the Celtic Tiger Years 1990 to 2008...*, p. 9.

the appropriateness of Deleuzian-time to an Irish context: "The greatest country in Ireland was always the world to come. And all we have is the day" (*TTMFRS*, 210). This quote is a paraphrase of Hamm's assertion in Beckett's *Endgame* that his life has always been taking place in a world that was yet to be fully present¹² and the implication – in McGahern's novel – is that Ireland exists in a temporal zone in which past and future times coexist in a continuous present.

One notable quote in *That They May Face* that signals some of the similarities and differences between Deleuze's and McGahern's approach towards thinking about temporality and its relationship to the physical world is the following: "The past and the present are all the same in the mind Kate said, they're just pictures" (*TTMFRS*, 77). Like Deleuze, Kate Ruttledge (possibly speaking for McGahern) does not believe in the orderly division of time into past, present, and future. However, her suggestion that the mind controls how time truly operates is not the same as Deleuze's theory (discussed above) that the natural world and its eco-system is just as powerful as the machinations of human beings. Thus, despite the similarities in their ideas, McGahern should be regarded as somewhat more of a humanist than Deleuze, even though both authors are certainly interested in the role of memory in human perception of the physical world.

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze, primarily following on from Henri Bergson, Emmanuel Kant, and Friederich Nietzsche, develops concepts such as *difference in itself* and *repetition for itself*, that is, concepts of difference and repetition that are logically and metaphysically prior to any concept of identity. Unlike Deleuze's critical perception of Hegel and Hegelian thought, Deleuze creates concepts out of a joyful and creative logic that resists the dualism of dialectic which he sees as being as a closed off and dictatorial system which arrests and fixes identity and subjectivity. Repetition, for Deleuze:

[...] is to behave in a certain manner, but in relation to something unique or singular which has no equal or equivalent. And perhaps this repetition at the level of external conduct echoes, for its own part, a more secret vibration which animates it, a more profound, internal repletion within the singular. [...] Repetition can always be "represented" as extreme resemblance or perfect equivalence, but the fact that that one can pass by degrees from one thing to another does not prevent their being different in kind. (*DR*, 2)

Deleuze regards art in various forms as being a perfect conduit for repetition with a difference because no artistic use of an element is ever truly equivalent to other uses.

Like Beckett, Deleuze regards repetitive habit as an important feature of existence although he views habit more positively than Beckett's work appears to, on a surface level at least. According to Deleuze:

12. See Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*, London, Faber and Faber, 1958, p. 35.

[...] it is perhaps habit which manages to “draw” something new from repetition contemplated from without. With habit, we act only on the condition that there is a little Self within us which contemplates: it is this that extracts the new. (*DR*, 9)

Unlike Beckett’s assertion – placed in the mouth of Vladimir – in *Waiting for Godot* (1956) that “habit is a great deadener”¹³, Deleuze regards habitual repetition of life moments as containing the potential for life affirming, anti-linear rhythm with each enactment being as different from the previous ones as they are similar. This is equally the case in *Waiting for Godot* where the two acts indulge in a dance of difference and repetition in terms of actions, stage design and dialogue. The tree at the centre of the stage is rigidly present in both act 1 and act 2 but at least it has four or five (albeit clearly artificial) leaves to adorn it in act 2 as a symbol of the difference existing in the repetitious second part of the play.

In chapters 1 and 2 of *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze works through the history of philosophy to isolate the concepts of “difference in itself” and “repetition for itself” upon which the assumptions of previous philosophies and philosophers for hundreds of years had previously been formulated. In the process of creating his definition of repetition, Deleuze reveals the literary qualities of his philosophical thinking:

Repetition is the power of language, and far from being explicable in negative fashion by some default on the part of nominal concepts, it implies an almost excessive idea of poetry. The coexistent levels of a psychic totality may be considered to be actualised in differentiated series, according to the singularities which characterise them. (*DR*, 380)

As is the case with fellow continental philosopher Jacques Derrida, Deleuze believes that our world is inherently textual and can be interpreted in the same linguistic formula as literature. When one considers the literary aspects of Deleuzian thought, the usefulness of applying his theories to a work of literature such as *That They May Face* becomes clear.

In chapter 2 of *Difference and Repetition*, the concept of “repetition for itself” is theorised as repetition that is freed from being a repetition of an original self-identical thing and becomes instead the more radically open “repetition of [or possibly with] difference”. According to Deleuze’s reading of Nietzsche’s eternal return / perpetual recurrence, repetition is the return of the differential genetic condition of real experience each time there is an individuation of a concrete entity:

[...] eternal return eliminates precisely all those instances which strangle difference and prevent its transport by subjecting it to the quadruple yoke of representation. Difference is recovered, liberated, only at the limit of its power – in other words, by repetition in the eternal return. (*DR*, 391)

13. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, London, Faber and Faber, 1965, p. 90.

Deleuze loved Nietzsche for his perpetual recurrence material and, in *Difference and Repetition*, he advanced an influential reading of Nietzschean thought in which he highlighted the repetition with a difference:

If a new present is required for the past to be constituted a past, then the former present would never pass and the new one would never arrive. No present would ever pass were it not past “at the same time” as it is present: no past would ever be constituted unless it were first constituted “at the same time as it were present”. (DR, 84)

Ultimately, as Daniel Smith and John Protevi argue,

Difference and Repetition will show that the individuation of entities is produced by the actualization, integration, or resolution (the terms are synonymous for Deleuze) of a differentiated virtual field of Ideas or “multiplicities” that are themselves changed, via “counter-effectuation,” in each individuating event¹⁴.

Deleuze gives his conceptualising of difference and repetition a proper grounding and powerfully relates it to the concept of temporality:

In truth, the past is in itself repetition, as is the present, but they are repetition in two different modes which repeat each other. Repetition is never a historical fact, but rather the historical condition under which something new is effectively produced. [...] Moreover, what is produced, the absolutely new itself, is in turn repetition: but the third repetition, this time by excess, the repetition of the future as eternal return. (DR, 117)

It is apparent from the above quote that Deleuze believes that imitating the past (which is itself also a repetition) by merely passively copying without regard to the radicalness of differentiation for its own sake is not relating authentically or ethically to the past. Passages from *Difference and Repetition*, such as the one above, help inform an analysis of the philosophies contained within *That They May Face* which mark that novel out as a text of ideas as much as one of formal literary merit in which the future perfect is the most appropriate and used tense in the book because of its blurring of temporality within the narrative being related¹⁵. One example of sustained usage of the future perfect tense in this book is in the following passage:

[T]hrough them ran a sense, like an underground passage, that there would come a time when these days would be looked back on as happiness [...] They would cross the lake together in the morning, let out the hens, loose and feed the pair of dogs, clean out and feed the cows, let the calves to their suck. (TTMFRS, 218)

14. For a summary of *Difference and Repetition*, see Daniel Smith, John Protevi, “Gilles Deleuze”, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Spring 2018 edition, on line: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/deleuze>.

15. For another version of this argument see Declan Kiberd, *After Ireland: Writing from Beckett to the Present*, London, Head of Zeus, 2017, p. 440.

The Ruttledges know these habits will constitute their future because they are major fixtures in their present and were also in their past. These ritualistic, rhythmical activities are just some of the Ruttledges' moments of daily repetition with a difference.

Many years before the publication of *That They May Face*, McGahern argued that repetition was a powerful tool to be used in literature: "I have always admired in verse this sort of refrain, 'Daylight and the candle end', [...] because I actually think it is the truth, and that kind of repetition if it's successful, is the same kind of thing as refrain in verse"¹⁶. Like Deleuze, McGahern sees repetition as something that is possessed of great poetic qualities that can be used to powerful effect in writing.

Deleuze channels Baruch Spinoza's seminal work on affect theory as Deleuze moves towards a deconstruction of the idea of the power of clinical being able to reign supreme over the forces of irrationality and emotion. As Deleuze argues:

Stupidity, malevolence and madness are regarded as facts occasioned by external causes, which bring into play external forces capable of subverting the honest character of thought from without. The sole effect of these forces in thought is then assimilated precisely to error. (*DR*, 195)

For Deleuze, "thought" cannot be a self-contained entity that is immune from the outside forces of chaos, change, emotion, and irrationality. Thus, pure and accurate "thought" will always fail to produce a totally rational version of existence.

Joe Ruttledge echoes Deleuzian philosophy regarding the limits of pure, clinical thought as a perfect representative and testifier of nuanced experience when he remembers a peaceful day spent with his wife Kate and friends Jamesie and Mary:

As he [Ruttledge] listened to the two voices he was so attached to and thought back to the afternoon, the striking of the clocks, the easy pleasant company [...] he felt this must be happiness. As soon as the thought came to him he fought it back, blaming the whiskey... [H]appiness could not be sought or worried into being, or even fully grasped. (*TTMFRS*, 192)

In this passage, Ruttledge is rejecting the possibility of pure, clinical thought that does not require sensory input and the power of outside images as being inadequate to the encapsulation of day to day existence. As Deleuze asserts:

The thought which is born in thought, the act of thinking which is neither given by innateness nor presupposed by reminiscence but engendered by its genitility, is a thought without image. But what is such a thought, and how does it operate in the world? (*DR*, 217)

Like McGahern's character Ruttledge, Deleuze recognises that isolated and self-contained emotionless thought can do nothing but sterilise the external world of which it is supposed to be giving an ethical and authentic representation. In essence,

16. Denis Sampson, John McGahern, "A Conversation with John McGahern", *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1991, p. 14.

both Deleuze and McGahern are in disagreement with Hamlet when he asserts "nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so"¹⁷. Denis Sampson argues that McGahern's work frequently collapses the distinction between the "ordinary" person and the artist¹⁸: it is my contention that *That They May Face* allows the rural Ireland dweller to think and sometimes talk like a philosopher.

The above passage from *That They May Face* also highlights the anti-linear nature of time that this book shares with Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*. As Dermot McCarthy argues:

The way McGahern's focalized narrator expresses Ruttledge's feeling is revealing. McGahern describes Ruttledge putting his present feeling into the past by imagining a future when he would look back to this present, as if happiness can only be something one has had and can only be known in retrospect, once it has passed¹⁹.

This interdependence and cohabitation of past, present, and future represents a world in which many of the characters view their lives – Deleuzian-like – as a succession of moments that cannot be compartmentalised into neat temporal zones.

It is also arguable that John McGahern's *That They May Face the Rising Sun*'s formal and narrative style serves to highlight temporality as existing in what Deleuze termed a "succession of present presents":

The succession of present presents is only the manifestation of something more profound – namely, the manner in which each continues the whole life, but a different level or degree to the preceding, since all levels and degrees coexist and present themselves for our choice on the basis of a past which was never present. What we call the empirical character of the presents which make us up is constituted by the relations of succession and simultaneity between them, their relations of contiguity, causality, resemblance and even opposition. (*DR*, 109)

The created world in which *That They May Face the Rising Sun* exists is one in which a linear narrative is subordinated to a cyclical story in which the lives of the characters exist in a rhythm of repetitious events that are also different from their temporal precursors. Both Deleuze and McGahern view art as containing within itself the power to subvert linear temporality and to offer people a view of the world that is less prescriptive and totalising as the one that is conceived of by ordered conceptions of existence and time. Furthermore, by analysing McGahern through Deleuze and vice versa, the importance of Deleuzian philosophy for Irish studies becomes even more apparent than is already the case. The close relationship between Irish literature and culture and French / continental ideas has never been in doubt and this article further builds upon that fact.

17. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Cyrus Hoy (ed.), London – New York, Norton, 1992, p. 35.

18. See Denis Sampson, *Outstaring Nature's Eye: The Fiction of John McGahern*, Dublin, The Lilliput Press, 1993, p. 56.

19. Dermot McCarthy, *John McGahern and the Art of Memory*, Oxford, P. Lang, 2010, p. 312.

John McGahern's awakening from the nightmare of history

John McGahern's artistic career has been marked by an evolving attempt to find a narrative and literary style that could be used as a means of awakening both artist and creations from what Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses* referred to as the nightmare of history; a history that continuously varies in McGahern's oeuvre from the individual, communal, cultural, and political²⁰. Many of McGahern's characters are forced to perpetually struggle with the memories of personal and national tragedies and traumas, their experiences in the Irish wars of Irish independence in particular. In an article McGahern wrote about one of his favourite books, *An tOileánach / The Islandman* by Tomas O'Crohan, McGahern expresses his admiration for how that book escapes from any sense of oppressively linear, nightmarish temporality and embraces the kind of perpetual recurrence written about by Nietzsche and the Nietzschean Deleuze:

I think that the strange sense of timelessness that the book has, of being outside time, comes from the day, a single day breaking continually over the scene and action. [...] If the strong sense of the day, the endlessly recurring day, gives to the work its timeless quality, this is deepened still more by the fact that people and place seem to stand outside history. There is no sense of national pride. The distant rumblings of a New Ireland are brushed aside²¹.

Samuel Beckett also conceived of time as being essentially a continuous present in which all zones of temporality existed together in a blur. As Beckett's titular character / narrator Molloy admits to his readers: "I speak in the present tense, it is so easy to speak in the present tense, when one is speaking of the past"²².

It is not until McGahern's great novel of the 1990s, *Amongst Women*, that he succeeds in creating in the patriarchal figure of Michael Moran a literary character who overcomes the ghost of his nightmarish past and begins – albeit only briefly – to celebrate the present moment and appreciate the possibility of a utopian future growing out of his climactic moment of epiphany which can be embraced by others in his family after he has gone: "To die was never to look on this again. It would live in others' eyes but not in his. He had never realized when he was in the midst of confident life what an amazing glory he was part of"²³. Going on from this redemptive moment at the end of *Amongst Women*, McGahern creates the utopian, Deleuzian temporality of *That They May Face* in which, for some at least, the past, present, and future exist in a kind of harmony and natural cycles repeat themselves, but each time with a difference. For this reason, Seamus Deane, in his review of that novel, had this piece of praise for the book and its author: "At last an Irish author has awakened from the nightmare of history and given us a sense

20. See James Joyce, *Ulysses*, Declan Kiberd (ed.), London, Penguin, 2000, p. 42.

21. John McGahern, "An t Oileanach / The Islandman", *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1, June 1987, p. 9.

22. Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*, New York, Grove Press, 2009, p. 20.

23. John McGahern, *Amongst Women*, London, Faber and Faber, 1990, p. 178.

of liberation which is not dependent on flight or emigration or escape"²⁴. If Joyce's *Ulysses* diagnosed one problem at the heart of Ireland and Irish culture: being held in thrall to a nightmarish history, John McGahern's *That They May Face* can be regarded as having provided a potential vision that acts as a literary cure.

Sampson's assessment of the style adopted by McGahern in *That They May Face the Rising Sun* emphasises how this work wishes to present, in an epic style, a collapsing of temporalities and a blurring of distinctions between man and nature:

The absence of plotting or chapter divisions, the lack of dramatic build-up, the transparency of narrative point of view, the emphasis on description and dialogue with minimal analysis [...] McGahern's poetic narrative appears to discard many conventions of novelistic tradition and to simply present in an impersonal [and cyclical] way a year in the life of a closed, rural community²⁵.

Sampson's analysis of this text highlights how McGahern has adopted a literary form that abandons the novel's traditional binary oppositions and focuses on a communion between cyclical and repetitious time: a style that could conceivably be called Deleuzian (before later being called Deleuzoguattarian).

One of the primary examples of repetition at the level of sentence construction in *That They May Face* occurs in these two passages which are separated by several hundred pages and yet are linked by style, grammar and, most importantly, word choice:

The morning was clear. There was no wind on the lake. There was also a great stillness. When the bells rang for Mass, the strokes trembling on the water, they had the entire world to themselves. (*TTMFRS*, 1)

Easter morning came clear. There was no wind on the lake. There was also a great stillness. When the bells rang out for Mass, the strokes trembling on the water, they had the entire *Easter* world to themselves. (*TTMFRS*, 238; emphasis added)

The word "Easter" is the only real difference between these repetitious passages and this is because the novel is reminding its readers of the importance of seasonal/ cyclical time as opposed to linear time in the world in which *That They May Face* exists.

The most tragic character in *That They May Face*, Bill Evans, is a figure of sympathy because he cannot conceive of his life as being anything more than a dystopian, quasi-Beckettian existence, where the past cannot be properly learnt from nor the future conceived of in relation to the past and the present:

Bill Evans could no more look forward than he could look back. He existed in a small closed circle of the present. Remembrance of things past and dreams of things to come were instruments of torture. (*TTMFRS*, 176)

24. Seamus Deane, "Review of *That They May Face the Rising Sun*", *The Guardian*, 12 January 2002.

25. Denis Sampson, "'Open to the World'...", p. 136.

Unlike Deleuze's notion of a continuous present that contains that which had gone before and offered the promise of something to come, Bill Evans is an anti-Deleuzian / Proustian figure who – to paraphrase Oscar Wilde's "Soul of Man under Socialism" – does not seem to be alive for much of the novel and is merely existing in the world as opposed to properly living in it²⁶. The negative reference in the above passage to remembering things that have passed is a reference to one possible English translation of Proust's mammoth novel *À la recherche du temps perdu* (more often translated as *In Search of Lost Time*). Contrary to how it was for Proust's character Marcel, the act of recovering lost time is never a cathartic act of epiphany and redemption for Bill Evans.

As a victim of church abuse whilst in an orphanage as a child, Bill Evans bears the scars of the physical and psychological trauma inflicted upon him during those years and cannot properly confront that nightmarish past or move on from it. This is apparent when Joe Rutledge attempts to ask Evans about his traumatic personal history:

Weren't you treated any better when you were with the nuns [Joe Rutledge asked Bill Evans]. This time there was no long pause. A look of rage and pain crossed his face. 'Stop torturing me', he [Bill Evans] cried out. (*TTMFRS*, 12-13)

Bill Evans' demand that the verbal torture being inflicted upon him by Rutledge should cease recalls Pozzo's famous monologue in *Waiting for Godot*; one of the most powerful and memorable monologues in the entire play and which follows on from Vladimir's incessant demanding that Pozzo remember and testify to an ordered, linear conception of time passing:

Pozzo: Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day like any other day, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? (*Calmer*.) They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more²⁷.

This speech offers a window onto an anti-Deleuzian continuous present that refuses to allow for anything to be learnt from the past or any future to be created from a perfected repetition of those earlier moments in time. Like Pozzo, Bill Evans is the character in *That They May Face* who is so trapped in the nightmare of history that he has become paralysed in a deadened present where going through the motions is all that is available to him as a coping strategy. He can neither come to terms with the past nor can he move beyond it and begin to look towards a future to come. Stanley van der Ziel notes how the calm embracing of the present-ness of the present is extremely important in an Irish context because of the Catholic Church's insistence on its flock always looking to the afterlife: "The

26. See Oscar Wilde, "The Soul of Man under Socialism", in *Collins Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, 5th ed. with corrections, Glasgow, HarperCollins, 2003, p. 1178.

27. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 89.

married couple at the centre of *That They May Face* are acutely aware of how the future tense of the anticipation of things to come has been officially sanctioned by the Catholic Church to repress their flock's enjoyment of the present"²⁸. In fact, the main characters in *That They May Face* find their happiness through recognising that a single day – simultaneously similar and different to all the ones they have already lived and will live – is all they ever have had, do have, and ever will have. Such a revelation enables them to cherish the present in all its nuances and not to be forever thinking that an unknown future is infinitely better than what they already have.

The character in this novel who most represents the nightmare of history from which the people beside the lake have mostly awoken is Jimmy Joe McKiernan, the local bigwig in the IRA. Near the novel's conclusion, at the funeral of Jamesie's brother Johnny, a conversation occurs between McKiernan and Rutledge that demonstrates how irrelevant his cause, and the violent narrative of past times it represents, truly is in the world of this novel:

McKiernan took him [Rutledge] by surprise by asking, 'You don't believe in our cause?' 'No', Rutledge said. 'I don't like violence'. 'You don't believe in freedom then?' 'Our country is free'. 'A part of it is not free'. 'That is a matter for that other part. I don't think it is any of our business'...' Do you have the time [said McKiernan]?' 'My time is plainly untrustworthy'. (*TTMFRS*, 302)

This paraphrase of Hamlet's observation, "time is out of joint" (a quote that is also important to Deleuze as shall be discussed below), points towards McKiernan being out of place and out of step in a world where time is out of joint but in the most positive way possible. McKiernan's association with the violence at the heart of Ireland's accursedly linear historical narrative makes him essentially a hindrance to the development of a continuous, future-looking present that is not overly burdened by the legacy of a past from which nothing can be learnt and people like Bill Evans find it extremely difficult to escape.

The hope for a potentially Deleuzian future in this novel is embodied in the figures of Jamesie's grandchildren and that is made apparent in the following passage:

It was too early yet to tell how the grandchildren would turn out but they looked alert and interesting. They would not have to undergo the uprooting and transplantation of their father. In them the old learned strengths could show up in a new way. (*TTMFRS*, 271)

These children, it is predicted, shall inherit the old world and customs of their parents and grandparents but will repeat those traditions in different and more modern ways. Again, the sense of a world being narrated in the future perfect tense is apparent and, for the first time in McGahern's work, we encounter characters who are happily able to seize the day.

28. Stanley van der Ziel, *John McGahern and the Imagination of Tradition*, Cork, Cork University Press, 2015, p. 177.

The last exchange of dialogue in this novel, which occurs between Joe and Kate Rutledge, and centres on what work Joe will or will not do during the following day, gestures towards a tomorrow that is both certain and somewhat undecidable:

‘What are you going to do?’ Kate asked as they passed beneath the alder tree.

‘I’m not sure’, he said. ‘We can talk it through. We don’t have to decide on anything til morning’. (*TTMFRS*, 314)

Although they both know that tomorrow will consist of some of the same rustic work that all their other days do, there are potential variables in their routines that can be decided upon when the time is appropriate.

The final lines in *That They May Face* create an image that encapsulates the sense of perpetual recurrence and repetition with a difference that have been such important features of this novel throughout its duration:

At the porch, before entering the house, they [the Rutledges] both turned to look back across the lake, even though they both knew that Mary and Jamesie had long since disappeared from the sky. (*TTMFRS*, 314)

This image calls to mind Christ ascending to heaven with the promise of a second coming which makes that event both a moment of closure and an opening up to a future recurrence which is something that the readers of *That They May Face* expect from the world by the lake by the time the book ends. Every end that occurs in that book only brings with it the shadow of a repetition with a renewing difference of that world’s daily episodes sometime in the very near future. This scene is comparable to Deleuze’s “Empty Time” which he describes as being the third layer of time which still exists in the present, but does so in a way that breaks free from the simple repetition of time and refers to a great symbolic event. In the realm of art, examples of such a moment would be Oedipus killing his father or the potential event of Hamlet killing his uncle (*DR*, 120). Upon rising to this level of Empty Time, an individual effaces him / herself as such and joins the abstract realm of eternal return. Considering the fact that Deleuze’s brother died in Auschwitz during World War II, it is very understandable that he would have felt a certain connection with simultaneously monumental and cataclysmic events such as those that he associates with Empty Time.

Deleuze uses the phrase from Hamlet, “time out of joint”, as a means of explaining his concept of Empty Time which is essentially an amalgamation of Kantian Empty Time and Nietzschean perpetual recurrence:

[T]ime out of joint means demented time or time outside the curve which gave it a god, liberated from its overly simple circular figure, freed from the events which made up its content, its relation to movement overturned; in short, time presenting itself as an empty and pure form. (*DR*, 115)

It is from the literary example of Proust that Deleuze conceives of the concept of Empty Time in concrete terms:

The Proustian formula "a little time in its pure state" refers first to the pure past, the in-itself of the past or the erotic synthesis of time, but more profoundly to the pure and empty form of time, the ultimate synthesis, that of the death instinct which leads to the eternity of the return in time. (*DR*, 157)

Nietzsche, Borges, and Joyce are the other authors who, for Deleuze, artistically create moments of Empty Time in their works and it is to Joyce (as much as to Proust) to whom we can turn as a mediating presence on this occasion between the theory of Gilles Deleuze and its literary realisation in McGahern's *That They May Face the Rising Sun*. According to Deleuze's insightful and provocative analysis of Joyce:

Joyce's work obviously appeals to quite different procedures [from Proust]. However, it remains a question of drawing together a maximum of different series (ultimately, all the divergent series constitutive of the cosmos) by bringing into operation linguistic dark precursors (here, esoteric words, portmanteau words) which rely upon no prior identity, which are above all not "identifiable" in principle, but which induce a maximum of resemblance and identity into the system as a whole, as though this were the result of the process of differentiation of difference in itself. [...] Stephen's "No" which is not the non-being of the negative but the (non) being of a persistent question to which the cosmic "Yes" of Mrs Bloom corresponds, without being a response, since it alone adequately occupies and fills that space. (*DR*, 155)

The climax of the "Cyclops" episode of *Ulysses* – depicting the Christ-like Leopold (Ben) Bloom's (Elijah's) ascension into heaven – can be viewed as being a (albeit somewhat parodic) moment of Empty Time similar to the conclusion of *That They May Face the Rising Sun*:

When, lo, there came about them all a great brightness and they beheld the chariot wherein He stood ascend to heaven. [...] And there came a voice out of heaven [...]. And they beheld Him even Him, ben Bloom Elijah, amid clouds of angels ascend to the glory of the brightness at an angle of forty-five degrees over Donohoe's [...] ²⁹.

At this moment, Joyce uses a unique version of magical realism to create a literal portrayal of an end that contains within itself the promise of a return. The linguistic repetitions with a difference that Deleuze discerns as being central to the Joycean oeuvre are made physical in this fleeting moment. Unlike the apocalyptic vision of the second coming that is offered in Yeats's iconic piece of poetry, "The Second Coming", Joyce, Deleuze, and McGahern offer images of perpetual recurrences that offer hope of a utopian future that contains within itself the repetitions of the past moments that were at one time moments in the present. I would argue that the final image in *That They May Face* – as analysed above – is an allusion to the novel's title which is a reference to the custom of burying people with their heads facing westwards so that when we wake we may face the rising sun: "We look to

29. James Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 449.

the resurrection of the dead" (*TTMFRS*, 297). Even in its title, McGahern's novel suggests a vision of existence where ends are never final but can be repeated with a difference across many lives and days.

In Jeffrey J. Cohen and Todd R. Ramlow's article "Pink Vectors of Deleuze: Queer Theory and Inhumanism", Cohen and Ramlow conclude with a moving description of Deleuze's tragic suicide – by throwing himself out a hotel window – as a moment of empty, inhuman time because of the continuing influence he has had on 20th and 21st century thought and how he keeps on returning because of the number of people who repeatedly return to his work:

The truth of Deleuze's inhumanism can be glimpsed in a trajectory of becoming that was his life, his death, whatever is beyond that death. It is a fall that keeps on moving, all middle, not a leap toward some determinative end, pavement. A century becomes Deleuzian (as Foucault famously put it) only by losing him, and continuing to lose him³⁰.

Deleuze's life and ideas are perpetually interpreted and reinterpreted by his admirers in a continuous process of repetition with a difference that entails both death and returning: it is equally arguable that the same kind of Empty Time has also engulfed John McGahern following his death in 2006 and he has returned and will continue to return for as long as readers return to his work.

In conclusion, Eamon Hughes's essay on *That They May Face the Rising Sun* – which appeared in a special issue devoted to McGahern's work of *Irish University Review* in 2005 – speaks to the radical nature of the book in terms of its expansion of the potential of the novelistic form and this analysis – without ever mentioning Deleuzian thought – gestures towards the fluidity of a text that is built on the rhythm of repetition which always also contains difference:

Certainly the sense of warped time in the novel, alongside its references to mist and ghostliness (almost as frequent as references to play and performance and like them applicable to all aspects of the novel), make it a text which refuses to be bounded. McGahern has found a way to make the novel as expansive as the Rutledges' room³¹.

Temporal and performative difference and repetition are inextricably linked in this novel just as they are in the literary, philosophical, and dramatic texts of Joyce, Deleuze, and Beckett. Unlike in Beckett, however, McGahern allows his characters greater freedom for ad-libbing in their performance which allows them to escape from the deadening effects of habit whilst also adhering to a certain naturally scripted pattern of repetition, but with a difference. McGahern has liberated the

30. Jeffrey J. Cohen, Todd R. Ramlow, "Pink Vectors of Deleuze: Queer Theory and Inhumanism", *Rhizomes*, no. 11/12, Fall 2005/Spring 2006, on line: <http://www.rhizomes.net/issue11/cohenramlow.html>.

31. Eamonn Hughes, "All That Surrounds Our Life': Time, Sex, and Death in *That They May Face the Rising Sun*", *Irish University Review*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2005, p. 161.

novel form from what Jamesie's brother Johnny would consider its "alphabetical" reliance on linear temporality and, by so doing, has helped create a Deleuzian aesthetic for contemporary Irish literature that can simultaneously accept the past, embrace the present, and look toward the future.

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