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THE UNCANNY AS A METHOD: SEMI-MIMETIC NARRATIVES, CLASHES OF
SCALES AND BORDERS DISRUPTION IN IRISH POST-CRASH FICTION

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*(...) the collapse of a small bank in an island economy becoming the
fault line through which the whole universe drains, the whole thing
ridiculously improbable, so unlikely in scale and consequence it's as if
something that never was has finally collapsed (...)*

Solar Bones, Mike McCormack, 2017

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Abstract

The present PhD thesis examines a collection of Irish texts written during and after the Celtic Tiger, analysing their integration of realism with speculative and gothic elements in response to economic and environmental crises. These works, published between 2004 and 2020, articulate tensions between local, global, and planetary concerns. I propose a theoretical framework, ‘Uncanny Realism,’ which synthesizes concepts from Jason Moore, Timothy Morton, Dipesh Chakrabarty, the Warwick Research Collective, Timothy Clark, Amitav Ghosh, and others, to investigate how these texts disrupt familiar worldviews through fragmented, non-linear narratives. These theoretical perspectives introduce a sense of the uncanny, challenging conventional understandings of the world while uncovering latent, forgotten truths, creating an atmosphere of recurrence and doubling.

The proposed framework operates across multiple temporal and spatial scales, engaging with both global social constructs and planetary phenomena. ‘Uncanny Realism’ considers key categories such as the hybridization of genre and form, scalar reading, narrative unreliability, the blurring of life and death boundaries, the creation of inter-worlds, and the presence of what I called uncanny objects and clusters of the uncanny.

The selected texts represent a shift in Irish literature from realism to speculative forms during and after the Celtic Tiger era. The Celtic Tiger (1994–2008), or the “Irish economic miracle,” was largely fuelled by foreign direct investment from North American multinationals and extensive mortgage lending, which also entailed the expansion of new frontiers of primary accumulation. The crash of the Celtic Tiger marks a critical fissure, through which the intertwined crises of the present become visible. Consequently, these texts provide an ideal corpus for my analytical framework. Applying ‘Uncanny Realism’ to this specific geographical context ensures a focus on local specificity, which is crucial for tracing the effects of capitalist world-ecology within material geographies.

Through this framework, I examine these texts on multiple scales: first, the local (post)national economic, social, and political transformations Ireland underwent during this period; second, Ireland’s semi-peripheral position within the capitalist world-system; and third, its embeddedness within planetary dynamics of environmental crisis. The works I analyse include *Notes from a Coma* (2004) and *Solar Bones* (2016) by Mike McCormack, *Nothing on Earth* (2016) by Conor O’Callaghan, *The Devil I Know* (2012)

by Claire Kilroy, *Is Stacey Pregnant? Notes from the Irish Dystopia* (2014) by Tomás Mac Síomóin, and *The Fjord of Killary* (2010) by Kevin Barry.

Introduction

This PhD dissertation explores a collection of texts written in Ireland during and especially after the Celtic Tiger, noting distinct recurrent characteristics. These texts exhibit a marked interplay between realism, speculative and gothic elements, navigating diverse temporal and spatial dimensions, employing multiple narrative voices, intertextuality, blurring the boundaries between life and death, and extensively utilizing unreliable narrators. Authored between 2004 and 2020, these works emerged amidst a convergence of crises: financial downturn, environmental challenges, and rapid technological advancements. The formal thematic choices are rooted in this period, especially in the context of the intersection between local, global, and planetary concerns. Consequently, the shifts in Irish society can be interpreted within a broader framework, notably that of the dynamics inherent to the capitalist world-ecology and the challenges posed by climate change. I propose a framework called "Uncanny Realism" to analyze these texts, which combines concepts from Jason Moore, Timothy Morton, Dipesh Chakrabarty, the Warwick Collective (WReC), Timothy Clark and Amitav Gosh, amongst others, focusing on the disintegration of familiar worldviews and the emergence of uncanny, irrealist, fragmented, non-linear narratives. Their theories possess a profound sense of uncanniness, challenging not only the conventional understanding of the world, but also illuminating latent truths that have long been forgotten, thus imbuing them with an aura of recurrence and doubling.

My thesis is divided into five chapters, coinciding with three main sections: theory and methodology; historical and literary background of the Irish Celtic Tiger and the subsequent crash; finally, the last three chapters focus on the analysis of the seven works of fiction I chose as my case studies.

The first section of the thesis, coinciding with the first chapter, focuses on the theory and methodology employed. The aim of this section is to give an overview of the various theories which shaped and lead the conceptualization of the analytical framework I called Uncanny Realism. This section is further divided into three main paragraphs. The first deals with theories by Jason Moore, Timothy Morton, and Dipesh Chakrabarty amongst others. This part is dedicated to the conceptualization of what I called 'uncanny unworlding', or the progressive disintegration of a familiar, normalized world view. From this perspective, the concurrent and diverse crises of today, which are better understood

as one singular yet manyfold crises (Klein 2014), propel what Heidegger might characterize as a process of *entweltlichung*, ‘un-worlding’ (1962 [1927]). This process involves the disintegration of a world, which is inherently a projection of existence, and leads to a loss of unified meaning, unveiling the limitations in its conceptualization. This unfolding process proves both revelatory and disconcerting. Consequently, the initial segment of this chapter will delve into this process of un-worlding, commencing with an examination of the prevailing concept of ‘world’ in the twenty-first century. The idea of world I take into account coincides with Jason Moore’s theory of the ‘capitalist world-ecology’: namely a way of structuring and controlling human and non-human nature which started with the European conquest of the Americas. This system is heavily based on binary assumptions such as Nature vs Culture, outside vs inside, and background vs foreground.

Therefore, Moore calls the period we live in Capitalocene, which started with Columbus’ arrival to San Salvador in 1492. That same system was then tightened through various waves of capitalist accumulation and is still in place now. Nonetheless, the capitalist world-ecology is now facing an unprecedented crisis due to the progressive scarcity of what Jason Moore calls the four cheaps, namely: nature, money, food and energy. These items are the foundational pillars through which the capitalist world-ecology was created. I read Jason Moore together and alongside with Timothy Morton’s theory of the hyperobjects and his idea of the end of the world. In this respect, although the two theorists belong to different strands of thought I believe that reading them together helps envisioning the various scales (local, global and planetary), of the singular yet multiple crisis (Klein 2014) we are currently facing. In this respect, Timothy Morton’s hyperobjects are pivotal to visualise the non-human scales onto which this crisis unfolds, particularly with regards to global warming. He defines hyperobjects as “things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans.” (2013:1). Hyperobjects brought forward what Morton calls “the end of the world” by destroying the binary assumptions of inside-outside, background and foreground which the capitalist world-ecology is built on:

All humans, I shall argue, are now aware that they have entered a new phase of history in which nonhumans are no longer excluded or merely decorative features of their social, psychic, and philosophical space. From the most vulnerable Pacific Islander to the most hardened eliminative materialist, everyone must reckon with the power of rising waves and ultraviolet light. This phase is characterized by a traumatic loss of coordinates, “the end of the world”. (2013: 22)

Afterwards, in order to read the various scales presented so far, namely the capitalist world-ecology and the unprecedented threats posed by environmental change, I will delve into the latest work by Dipesh Chakrabarty. In fact, he tackles the broad discussion surrounding the Anthropocene through a scalar perspective, where the tension between human and species history, the global and the planetary, is nurtured as a powerful generative source of thinking.

Consequently, the singular yet multiple crises of today (Klein 2014) puts into question the familiar idea of world which has been prominent for the past five hundred years. During this thesis, I refer to this process as ‘uncanny unworlding’. In this respect, the process of undoing of our worldview produces a profound defamiliarization which necessitates a coming to terms with the un-known, or the not so easily understandable. The affective consequence of this process is a deep feeling of uncanniness, which the present thesis conceptualizes as a revelatory yet terrifying in-betweenness:

The uncanny fastens its grip just long enough to unsettle us and, through this unnerving, throw some guttering light on our situation. Because of the power of the uncanny to destabilize patterns, it can conjure the potential for socio-political change. However, the uncanny is a difficult feeling to decode. It has a certain excess which is hard to neatly contain or harness as a point of revelation or learning. But in disconcerting us, it loosens our subjectivities and enables the possibilities for alternatives, whether the ethics of organizing or how we mobilize in support of the public good. (Orr 2023: 2023)

The idea of unworlding is pivotal to understand what Latour (2020:188) calls “the apocalypse of the present” and addresses the necessity of un-doing our own world structure in order to imagine new worlds. In fact, as Jack Halberstam poignantly points out, hope does not dwell in ideas of ‘reparation’, a colonialist policy per se, but on the systemic dismantling of our world view:

Realistically speaking we have to grapple here and now with the impossible tangle of environmental crisis that we have created and that we now inhabit. Confront and decode harsh architectures that hold us in place without us knowing that we’re being held in place by an architecture (...) It forces us, we are forced here this week to rethink the relationship between subject and object, human and animal, damage and repair. (...) For my part, Back to Earth requires us to stop some of the thinking that is implied in the category of world, as I proposed, and this is the business as usual of the university. It means in many ways, literally figuring out how to stop the world. (Halberstam 2023: 9:00- 21:00)

What Halberstam calls “architectures” refers to the complex entanglement of normalized binary assumptions which sustain the *weltanschauung* of the capitalist world-ecology, and that Paul Preciado lists as: “Inside, outside. Full, empty. Safe, toxic. Male, female. White, black. domestic, foreign. Cultural, natural. Human, animal. Public, private. Organic, mechanical. Centre, periphery. Here, there. Analog, digital. Alive, dead” (2022: 63 kindle, my translation)¹. Nonetheless, those fixed categories have begun to move, and the architecture of our world is shaking and progressively crumbling: “The concepts with which we used to fabricate the world have been set in motion” (2022: 63 kindle, my translation)². During the Anthropocene everything becomes porous, malleable and skewed. Literature is no exception: it fills with narratives where genres interpenetrate, where the confines of realism are blurred, where characters represent both themselves and the human body-collective, and they are both individuals and collective geological entity. Literature proliferates with settings where capitalist abstract schemas are subverted and demystified, where teleological time gives space to circular, reticular time frames. Literature catalyses the progressively blurring categories of our world, whose familiarity is giving way to unfamiliar, unsettling un-homeliness.

Consequently, in the second paragraph of my theoretical chapter I will look at how, the present moment, elusive and resistant to cohesive narration, engenders fragmented, non-linear and fractured literary expressions. In this section I draw on theories by the Warwick Collective (WReC), Timothy Clark, Jennifer Wenzel and Amitav Ghosh. Firstly, I will look at WReC’s idea of world-literature as the literature of the capitalist world-system. Namely, literary production worldwide registers and narrates the uneven-development of the capitalist world-system within various material geographies. In this respect, WReC’s theories go hand in hand with Moore’s conceptualizations, showing how literature is deeply implicated in representing the system that he envisioned. Especially WReC’s theory of ‘irrealism’ will prove extremely useful for my theoretical framework. Irrealism is described as a genre-defying, non-realistic form of writing that emerges in response to the uneven development of the capitalist world-system, particularly in semi-peripheral regions. WReC’s notion of irrealism is highly useful for understanding how non-mimetic and semi-mimetic narratives serve as sites of resistance and critique against the global

¹ The original text says: Dentro, fuera. Lleno, vacío. Seguro, tóxico. Masculino, femenino. Blanco, negro. Nacional, extranjero. Cultura, naturaleza. Humano, animal. Público, privado. Orgánico, mecánico. Centro, periferia. Aquí, allí. Analógico, digital. Vivo, muerto. (2022: 63 kindle)

² The original text says: Los conceptos con los que hasta ahora fabricábamos el mundo se han puesto en movimiento. (2022: 63 kindle)

status quo. By moving away from literary realism, these texts create opportunities to challenge dominant narratives and ideologies, shedding light on the complexities of global socio-economic realities.

In the second paragraph, I will explain that in order to challenge the capitalist reality principle, it is essential to move beyond one-dimensional, teleological presentism. By examining the works of Timothy Clark and Jennifer Wenzel, we will explore how multiscale readings can dismantle the realist narrative, revealing aspects of human and species existence that would otherwise remain obscured. In this respect, their theories show how things that can appear 'normal' onto one scale become deeply estranging when looked at from a different scalar point of view. This reading modality engenders a constant process of de-familiarization of familiar events and contexts. Moreover, I will also tackle the current importance of historical depthness, also a way to defy teleological presentism, and to show how material realities carry the mark of several waves of capitalist accumulation.

Finally, I consider Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement*, which advocates for uncanny and multiscale approaches in both creative writing and literary criticism. This work ties together the previous discussions and guides the development of my analytical framework.

The hypothesis of Uncanny Realism combines these various theoretical ideas to address the dismantling of the modern capitalist worldview during the Anthropocene. It focuses on the crisis of the Capitalocene, highlighting the collision between global and planetary scales. This hypothesis connects the concept of irrealism with the uncanniness and spectral nature of reality in the age of hyperobjects, and its aesthetic representation. It emphasizes the importance of reading between scales, using Timothy Clark's scalar reading model, to explore the historical depth and long-term effects of the Capitalocene. The proposed analytical framework operates across multiple time-space scales, considering global constructs and planetary entities as an inextricable whole. It seeks to account for the impact of capitalism on human lives and the environment, while incorporating the "zooming-in, zooming-out" approach central to Chakrabarty's theory of global-planetary collision. Against this background, the guiding light in creating my analytical framework is a feeling of uncanniness; the uncanny is that disconcerting yet revelatory feeling of strange familiarity, of something that was hidden and now comes to light. The uncanny normally resides at the thresholds, in liminal places and spaces where

rules and coordinates blur, where the familiar and the unfamiliar coexist, where past and present are juxtaposed, where local, global and planetary scale dimensions are unified. Building on these theoretical approaches, I construct the concept of Uncanny Realism, focusing on several defining features that emerge across the texts. First, I explore the hybridity of genre and form, where texts weave together various literary genres to create narratives that actively subvert the conventions of literary realism. Next, I examine narrative unreliability, which prompts readers to continuously question the accuracy of the narrative, generating a pervasive sense of uncertainty. Using scalar reading, I analyse how these narratives depict the interconnected crises of the present, challenging the binary distinctions between global and planetary, nature and culture, and interior and exterior. In this context, I introduce the notion of "clusters of uncanny" where the uncanny becomes more pronounced in moments of resource depletion, exposing the illusion of infinite, cheap resources on which capitalist world-ecology is built. I also address the return of historically repressed elements, which resurface to highlight the long-term and systemic disruptions of the Capitalocene, questioning the possibility of repair or resolution within the system. Additionally, I investigate "uncanny objects," which transcend conventional boundaries between human and non-human, past and present, future and here-and-now, further destabilizing established categories. Finally, I explore the blurring of the boundary between life and death, particularly through characters who exist in a liminal state between the living and the dead. These figures reflect the transitional nature of the present and challenge the spatiotemporal frameworks of capitalist world-ecology.

The texts I use as my case study belong to that cohort of novels and short stories which embodied a shift in Irish literature, transitioning from realist to more speculative writing during and post the Celtic Tiger era. The boom, the Celtic Tiger (1994-2008), or the "Irish economic miracle" was mostly based on foreign direct investment from North American multinationals, and on the lending of wholesale funds for an immense number of mortgages, and the expansion of new frontiers of primary accumulation. During the second chapter I adopt a diachronic approach to Irish history which is twofold. Firstly, I aim at situating the Celtic Tiger and the economic crash within the broader history of the semi-peripheralization of Ireland within the capitalist world-system. Secondly, I aim at discussing the socio-economic specificities of the Tiger and the crash in Ireland. Contextually, I will discuss the process of neoliberalization of the country of Ireland, the pivotal role played both by financial and real estate speculation. Moreover, I will discuss

the gender related theme of the feminization of the workforce during the boom, which nonetheless maintained a profound gender inequality within the country. Another pivotal aspect will be the discussion of the myth of the Celtic Tiger as a time of perpetual frictionless boom. Finally, I will look at the economic crash which revealed the foundational asymmetries of the boom, while de-mythologizing the image of the Tiger. Nonetheless, the austerity measures which followed the crash contributed to creating a line of contiguity between the Celtic Tiger and the economic crash, especially in the exploitation of natural resources, privatization and financialization. Contextually, I will draw on the work of Joe Cleary, Maurice Coakley, Proinnsias Breathnach, Peadar Kirby, Sharea Deckard, Eóin Flannery, Carmen Kuhling and Kieran Keohane among others. During my thesis I consider the crash of the Celtic Tiger as a point of fissure through which the singular yet multiple crises of today become visible. It also helps to envision the consequences of uneven capitalist development onto one specific geographical site, therefore fueling a historically deep analysis of the texts produced in that period. Consequently, texts written during the Celtic Tiger prove to be an apt case study for my analytical framework. In the last part of the second chapter, I will give an overview of the main literary trends which emerged after the Celtic Tiger, placing particular emphasis on irrealist writing modalities. Contextually, the emergence of genres such as dystopian, post-apocalyptic and sci-fi novels is analysed alongside the use of irrealist modalities within novels presenting a predominantly realistic tone. Against this background I argue for a realism-irrealism continuum within post-crash fiction production, which helps positioning the novels I have chosen as my case study halfway between openly speculative texts and predominantly realist ones. In my discussion of post-crash fiction, I will widely draw on the fertile ground of contemporary Irish studies. Therefore, I will deal with the works and theories posited by Mary McGlynn, Eóin Flannery, Sharea Deckard, Malcolm Sen and Jason Buchanan amongst many others.

Applying the framework of Uncanny Realism to one specific geographical site allows to maintain local specificity, which is pivotal in the registering of the consequences of the capitalist world-ecology within specific material geographies. Applying the analytical framework of Uncanny Realism to the novels and short stories written during and after the Irish Celtic Tiger, enables us to read those novels on multiple scales. Firstly, the local (post-) national economic, social and political changes which the country underwent during those times; secondly the semi-peripheral position which Ireland occupies within

the capitalist world-ecology; thirdly, its necessary embeddedness within planetary dynamics of environmental crisis. In this respect, the discussions tackled within the first two chapters will inform the reading of the seven works of fiction which I have chosen as my case studies. Contextually, they will organically merge during the reading of the texts in order to give a more layered, multiscalar yet contextually specific reading of the novels.

During the third section of my thesis, coinciding with chapters three, four and five, I will take into account seven works of fiction, namely five novels and two short stories. Some of the texts have already gained scholarly attention while others lack extensive critical studies. Consequently, my thesis also contributes towards a broader critical discussion of such literary works. I divided the texts in three groups. Firstly, narratives set in rural areas: *Notes from a Coma* (2004), *Is Stacey Pregnant? Notes from the Irish Dystopia* (2014) by Tomás Mac Síomóin and *The Fjord of Killary* (2010) by Kevin Barry. Narratives set in domestic spaces: *Nothing on Earth* (2016) by Conor O'Callaghan, and *The End of the World is a Cul de Sac* by Louise Kennedy (2022). Narratives set in urban or urbanizing spaces: *Solar Bones* (2016) by Mike McCormack, *The Devil I Know* (2012) by Claire Kilroy. Dividing the works of fiction based on their setting allows to give more precision to the material geography described. This choice aligns with the idea of scalar reading as it enables us to visualize the regional, micro-scale within the broader national, global and planetary ones. Moreover, this division helps shedding light on the uneven development of the capitalist world-ecology within one specific nation state. At the same time, diving the texts into three groups on the basis of the setting specificity, allows to delve deeper in the specificities of the Celtic Tiger within local geographies.

Firstly, the two novels and short story analysed in chapter three challenge traditional views of the West of Ireland and the bog areas as backward or traditional regions. Instead, they highlight the semi-peripheral trajectory shaped by both the Irish nation and broader historical forces of the Capitalocene. The narrative techniques used by the authors encourage a critical detachment from the normalized capitalist worldview, rendering it unfamiliar and alienating. Uncanny Realism proves to be a valuable framework for analyzing the thematic and narrative features of these texts. The chapter shows how all three works exhibit significant textual hybridity, blending realist elements with gothic, science-fiction, and apocalyptic tones, creating a balance between mimesis and

estrangement. The texts also feature uncanny objects that destabilize binary oppositions such as human vs. non-human and nature vs. culture, while integrating local, global, and planetary scales and encourage historical reflection. These objects include JJ's brain in *Notes from a Coma*, the Water's Edge pub in *The Fjord of Killary*, and the bog in *Is Stacey Pregnant?* Additionally, these works disrupt conventional notions of time and space through fragmented and disorienting narrative structures. In *Notes from a Coma*, this is evident through the Event Horizon and multiple narrative voices, while in *Is Stacey Pregnant?* the uncanny chronotope merges human and non-human temporalities, creating an eerie time setting. Recurring historical events, like the Great Irish Famine, further enhance the uncanny nature of these narratives, reminding readers of the ongoing crises of the Capitalocene.

Chapter four analyses two novels set in domestic spaces, particularly ghost estates, which serve as fertile ground for the emergence of the uncanny. Traditionally viewed as bastions of bourgeois life, houses become permeable and vulnerable to outside influences. In these texts, ghost estates highlight the aftermath of the Celtic Tiger's economic collapse, environmental crises, and gender discourses, transforming homes into inhospitable spaces. The framework of Uncanny Realism effectively reveals how these domestic environments become estranging and unwelcoming. The ghost estates reflect historical echoes, including the Irish Big House and the Great Famine, while the portrayal of women sheds light on the often-invisible nature of reproductive labor within the capitalist world-ecology. In *Nothing on Earth*, the disappearance of the characters symbolizes this erasure, evoking memories of Ireland's patriarchal institutions. The chapter also emphasizes the interconnectedness of these domestic spaces within a larger planetary network, evident in the scarcity of resources like water and food, which disrupts the illusion of limitless availability. This creates 'clusters of the uncanny,' fostering a sense of defamiliarization. Additionally, the uncanny objects of dust and heat blur boundaries between inside and outside, as characters' disappearances challenge traditional notions of time and space. Finally, the high degree of narrative hybridity, particularly through gothic tropes and the blending of belief systems, adds further complexity to these works.

The fifth chapter explores how infrastructural development is portrayed through undead or otherworldly characters, revealing the illusory and vampiric nature of the Celtic Tiger and embodying the spectral qualities of its aftermath. The framework of Uncanny Realism

is crucial for this analysis, as it allows for a deeper examination of how these characters disrupt traditional boundaries between life and death, past and present, and spatial divides. This disruption challenges the foundations of literary realism, particularly its linear conceptions of time and space. Both novels also exhibit significant narrative unreliability, undermining initially authoritative narratives. In *The Devil I Know*, this is evident through a court trial that destabilizes the narration, as well as through the blending of multiple genres and circular temporal structure. Similarly, *Solar Bones* subverts linearity with its continuous monologic sentence, intertwining past, present, and future. The texts present vivid images of scalar upheaval, particularly in *The Devil I Know*, where Tristram observes the excavation for a construction project and later finds refuge in a cave beneath his home. In *Solar Bones*, the construction and deconstruction of everyday objects evoke a powerful sense of scalar disruption and ‘unworlding’. The novel also examines environmental crises through the spread of cryptosporidium, which blurs the boundaries between human and non-human, emphasizing the vulnerability of living beings.

In conclusion, my thesis aims to create an analytical framework, Uncanny Realism, and at applying it onto one specific literary expression, namely Irish post-crash fiction. It will be my goal in the future to expand my model onto different geographical areas and narrative modalities.

1.1 The end of the world and the uncanny



The World Turned Upside Down, George Shaw, 2019³

Our present times show a deep, obsessive concern about the end of the world, which is normally addressed as Apocalypse. According to Bruno Latour, the same word Apocalypse has been profoundly misunderstood. In fact, Apocalypse means “revelation”, and it addresses the present “time of the end”, and is therefore an immanent rather than a transcendental concept, which needs to be embraced through a discourse about “the apocalypse of the present” (2020: 188). According to Latour, and Morton (as I will later discuss), the real meaning of “the end of the world” is namely the end of our worldview, of the globe as produced by Western colonialism, patriarchy, modernity, and capitalism. In fact, the world in which we live, understood as a set of shared values and logics, originated at a precise moment in history, namely with the advent of European colonialism and the birth of a modern world based on the systemic inequality of the parties involved and the exploitation of human and non-human nature. The modern world, as we know it, was created as much in the City of London as on the plantations of South America. And it can be represented equally by the extermination of Amerindian peoples as by the homes of wealthy merchants in England, France, Spain, Portugal, and Italy. In

³ During the three years of my PhD, I spent six months in the city of Limerick, where I benefitted greatly from the library services offered by UL, and from the dialogues with many scholars and professors. Moreover, I immensely enjoyed many of the exhibitions offered by Limerick’s art gallery and Hunt Museum, some of the works I saw exhibited there gave me ideas and inspiration, and George Shaw’s is one of them.

this respect, Anibal Quijano strongly emphasizes how Europe was created through America by the processes of exploitation, violence and dispossession enacted on the continent. Moreover, Quijano highlights how world capitalism was from the very start colonial, modern and Eurocentric (2020). In this respect the world as we know it today was thus created. As showed by Immanuel Wallerstein: “The world we live in originated in the 16th century and was then located in Europe and the Americas. It expanded over time to cover the globe. It is and has always been a world-economy. It has always been a capitalist world economy” (Wallerstein 2004: 23). As Jason Moore further underscores, this world was created through colonialist projects, the rise of modernity, and the creation of what he terms “a capitalist world-ecology”, based on the binary Nature-Culture. Nature was externalised, and relegated to a stockpile of unused material which could serve the rise of a specific kind of global culture (Moore 2015):

Although the distinction between humans and the rest of nature has a long history that predates capitalism, the construct of Nature/Society is thoroughly modern. The notion that social relations (humans without nature) can be analysed separately from ecological relations (nature without humans) is the ontological counterpoint to the real and concrete separation of the direct producers from the means of production. (2015: 28)

Moreover, following anthropologist Mauro Von Hacken, the Nature-Culture binary was based on an “inside/outside polarization which set the foundation for both our naturalist cosmology and for a carbon economy based on climate-altering gases” (2020: 171)⁴. Furthermore, as stated by Pheng Cheah in his book *What is a world?* (2016), modern world building has hinged upon a teleological understanding of time, according to which “rational ends are actualized in the empirical world. It functions to bridge the mechanical natural world and the realm of freedom, defined as a sphere of rational spontaneity that characterizes the rational human being's power of self-determination” (2016:7). Therefore, modernity is based on a normative construction of time which sees human progress as its main end, and which materially externalizes and exploits both naturalized humans and extra-human nature in the strive to reach its goal. In this respect the idea of “human” implied in the previous sentence, follows Braidotti’s understanding of “human”, namely:

The human is a normative convention, which does not make it inherently negative, just highly regulatory and hence instrumental to practices of exclusion and discrimination.

⁴ The original text says: (...) una polarizzazione tra dentro/fuori cui si è costruita tanto la nostra cosmologia naturalista, quanto l'economia del carbonio alla base dei gas climalteranti.

The human norm stands for normality, normalcy and normativity. It functions by transposing a specific mode of being human into a generalized standard, which acquires transcendent values as the human: from male to masculine and onto human as the universalized format of humanity. This standard is posited as categorically and qualitatively distinct from the sexualized, racialized, naturalized others and also in opposition to the technological artefact. The human is a historical construct that became a social convention about 'human nature'. (2013: 26)

Moreover, the connection between ecological destruction and the dynamics of global capitalism have been emphasised for a long time⁵. In any case, in more recent times the concept of Anthropocene revived the need to re-read Marxist and postcolonial texts to highlight their deep reflections on environmental issues.

The term Anthropocene⁶, coined by Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer in 2000, could be considered as the originating conceptualization which gave rise to two decades of discussions about the consequences of human activity on planet Earth⁷. Human beings are considered as a geological force, with the ability to change the stratigraphy of the planet through anthropogenic activities such as industrial production, factory farming, excessive exploitation of fossil fuels, intensive fishing, and waste production amongst many others. According to the two scholars, in the past two centuries, human activity has intensified to such a degree as to mark the passage from Earth's previous geological epoch, the warm interglacial period known as Holocene, to the one called Anthropocene. The term first appeared in May 2000 on *The Global Change Newsletter n.41* of the International Geosphere–Biosphere Programme (IGBP). In their short article titled *The "Anthropocene"* Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer describe the impact of human

⁵ In this regard, a foundational book was Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), in which the author denounced the catastrophic effects of DDT on both the environment and human beings.

⁶ During my thesis I will use the term Anthropocene while also being aware of its shortcomings, and criticisms. In this respect, although the term Anthropocene is debatable, especially within the field of the humanities, on the other it is the magmatic linguistic core from where many reflections on the present ecological crisis stem. In this respect I align my thought with Pieter Vermeulen when he says: "The name is less a rigid designator with a stable referent (for all the reasons discussed above) than a rubric that has, since the beginning of the century, increasingly come to cluster concerns over the human impact on the planet. The term has been undeniably productive as a catalyst for ecological concerns, and for discourses and practices through which human anxieties and aspirations are articulated. The term has generated fewer defenses than arguments against it or in favor of alternatives for it, but such arguments end up demonstrating the usefulness of the term in fueling argumentation, reflection, and debate about crucial aspects of the genealogies, challenges, and prospects that make up the present. The Anthropocene, in other words, becomes useful if we accept that is inevitably a misnomer" (2016: 8).

⁷ The term Anthropocene was not exclusively discussed between the end of the 20th and the start of the 21st century. On the other hand, as stressed by Simon L. Lewis and Mark A Maslin, in their book *The Human Planet. How we Created the Anthropocene* (2018), during the 19th century, when geology became a discipline, scholars such as Thomas Jenkyn were discussing the consequences of anthropic activities. These scholars coined different nomenclatures which don't fall far off the one of Anthropocene. Jenkyn for example called the times he lived in as "Anthropozoic epoch" (2018: 8-21).

activities in the past three centuries (2000: 17), and highlighted the necessity for a new definition of our recent times. More specifically they say:

Considering these and many other major and still growing impacts of human activities on earth and atmosphere, and at all, including global, scales, it seems to us more than appropriate to emphasize the central role of mankind in geology and ecology by proposing to use the term “anthropocene” for the current geological epoch. The impacts of current human activities will continue over long periods. (2000: 17)

The two scholars also argue that the starting date for the Anthropocene might be the latter part of the 18th century, and more specifically the year 1784 (2000: 17)⁸. This date coincides also with James Watt’s invention of the steam engine, which gave an immense contribution to the industrial revolution, and marked the passage towards an economic regime based on fossil fuels, first in Britain and then worldwide (Lewis and Maslin 2018: 141-142). Over that period, “data retrieved from glacial ice cores show the beginning of a growth in the atmospheric concentrations of several “greenhouse gases”, in particular CO₂ and CH₄” (2000: 17). Since then, the impact that humans have had on geological and ecological processes has immensely intensified. Crutzen and Stoermer’s idea of Anthropocene represented a watershed in the debate on the relationship between humans and the environment, and on how human history is actually based on and entwined with the non-human history of the planet (Chakrabarty 2009: 198-201)⁹.

⁸ Although the concept of Anthropocene has been widely accepted and welcomed by the scientific community of various disciplines, it also gave rise to alternative descriptions of the concept itself (Lewis and Maslin 2018:208-212). The major shifts from Crutzen and Stoermer’s theory have been based on its temporalization. Some scholars in fact, identified a much earlier beginning of the Anthropocene, while others postponed it to the middle of the twentieth century, and more specifically to the period known as The Great Acceleration, which followed the end of World War Two, while scholars such as an Jan Zalasiewicz, suggest the 16th of July 1945, the date of the detonation of the atomic bomb Trinity. The initiators of the former temporalization are the scholars J.R McNeill and Peter Engelke, with their book *The Great Acceleration, An Environmental History of the Anthropocene since 1945*, published in 2014. In fact, although human activities have always modified and reshaped the carbon cycle, since the end of WW2 this process has sped un by around ten times (Lewis and Maslin, 2018: 165). Notwithstanding the different time frame that they consider, the two scholars do not disregard the idea that the acceleration processes that characterized global economy since 1945 are rooted in the changes in the economic regime which started with the industrial revolution (2018: 3).

⁹ The debate on the Anthropocene has given way to a rereading of the texts of Marx and Engels to emphasize not only how the two philosophers never divested themselves of analysing the ecological consequences of capitalism, but also how it is precisely the capitalist trajectory, along with its worldview that presents ecological disaster as an endemic consequence. This strand of thought is notably exemplified in works such as *Marx and the Anthropocene* by Kohei Saito (2023) and *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (2000) alongside with *The Return of Nature* (2020) both by Bellamy Foster. These writings diverge from a critical perspective that formerly underscored the absence of ecological considerations in Marx's theories. Such criticisms were prominent in the first wave of eco-socialism which gained prominence after the work of American sociologist James O'Connor. On the other hand, Foster, beyond refuting criticisms aimed at Marxism for purportedly disregarding ecological concerns, undertakes a tracing of the lineage of Marxist theorists, scientists, and intellectuals who have, contrary to prevailing beliefs, anchored their ideologies in

In this respect, in this section I will outline the ideas emerging from three contemporary theorists, namely, Jason Moore, Timothy Morton and Dipesh Chakrabarty who by reflecting on our current times, redefine the borders, limits, and characteristics of the world as we've known since the rise of capitalist modernity. More specifically, I will look at Jason Moore's concepts of "capitalist world-ecology", "double-internality", and "the end of the four cheaps". Moreover, Moore's discourse will be expanded through the work of Silvia Federici (2021 [2004]; 2018; 2020). Federici's work is pivotal to understand how women's bodies, and reproductive work have foundationally been a site of original capitalist accumulation. Secondly, Timothy Morton's theory of the hyperobjects will shed light on how the basic categories of inside-outside, background-foreground which the capitalist *weltanschauung* is based on, are being dismantled by objects which function on non-human time and spatial scales. Thirdly, Dipesh Chakrabarty tackles the broad discussion around the Anthropocene through a scalar perspective, where the tension between humanistic and species thinking, between the global and the planetary is not simplistically solved but is instead nurtured as a powerful generative source of thinking.

My decision to synthesize the recent theories of Jason W. Moore, Timothy Morton, and Dipesh Chakrabarty is rooted in the fact that their respective frameworks offer complementary insights into the multilayered dimensions of the single-yet-multiple crises of today. Primarily, Moore's neo-Marxist analysis, coupled with Morton's object-oriented ontology and Chakrabarty's historiographical revisions, serves to complicate prevailing discourses surrounding "the end of the world" by reconceptualizing them across diverse scales. This interdisciplinary approach illuminates the intricate manifestations of our current crises, extending beyond the confines of capitalism to reveal emergent scalar dynamics that challenge conventional anthropocentric perspectives.

Moreover, their theories possess a profound sense of uncanniness, challenging not only the conventional understanding of the world but also illuminating latent truths that have long been forgotten, thus imbuing them with an aura of recurrence and doubling. In the concluding section, I intend to delve deeper into how the Anthropocene epoch

the profound interconnection between Marxism and ecology. Foster's argument notably hinges upon Marx's reinterpretation of the metabolic rift as a foundational premise (1999).

represents a period characterized by the dissolution of boundaries between inside and outside, prompting a profound ontological restructuring whereby the ontic i.e. the realm of actuality long relied upon, is being eroded (Morton 2010: 31). Consequently, the notion of "the end of the world", whether construed as the demise of our prevailing worldview or *weltanschauung*, emerges as an inherently uncanny process. To this end, the theories of Moore, Morton, and Chakrabarty will be subjected to analysis through the lens of Freudian Uncanny, as well as through the perspectives of numerous other scholars who have examined the uncanny implications inherent in the Anthropocenic phenomenon.

1.1.2 Jason Moore, the extension and the limits of the capitalist world-ecology

Moore builds up a broad set of concepts, which expose how human actions do not exist outside of nature, but they instead develop through it in a process of coproduction. Capitalism in this respect, represents a specific trajectory with which humans engage in a dialectical relationship with the environment through the violent organization and exploitation of both human and extra-human nature. Moore considers the term Anthropocene as problematic, inasmuch as, by focusing on the *anthropos* as an undifferentiated whole (2017: 37), it lacks the necessary political dimension. According to Moore, the word *anthropos* hides away the different roles human beings played in the anthropic transformation of our planet. Especially, the Anthropocene gives a simplified history which overshadows the naturalized inequalities, violence, and alienation inherent in modern power-relations and economy. According to Moore the Anthropocene doesn't engage in criticism with colonialism, imperialism, patriarchy and commodification. Instead, human beings are seen as part of an abstract, and undifferentiated group. According to him, the Anthropocene should be dated not from the invention of the steam engine, which would give prominence to the roles of mines and machines, but from the long 16th century, at the beginning of the capitalist society. In this way the focus shifts to the strategies of global conquest, commodification and relations of power which built the foundation for the world as it appears today. Understanding the network of relationships which sustains the society we live in on a global scale, and which also gave origin to those man-made changes identified in the theory of the Anthropocene, can help us face the consequences of human actions, above all Global Warming (2017: 42). Consequently, Jason Moore calls the epoch we live in "Capitalocene", a time shaped by the endless

accumulation of capital which started with Columbus' arrival to, and subsequent conquest of the Americas. In his essay, *Capitalism in the Web of Life* (2015), Moore says “‘The economy’ and ‘the environment’ are not independent of each other. Capitalism is not an economic system; it is not a social system; it is a *way of organizing nature*” (2015: 2). From this perspective the new economic imperative was never detached from what we now call “Nature”, instead it developed through it. Here the word Nature is purposely written with capital “N”, following Moore’s idea that:

“Society” and “Nature” are part of the problem, intellectually and politically; the binary Nature/Society is directly implicated in the colossal violence, inequality, and oppression of the modern world; and that the view of Nature as external is a fundamental condition of capital accumulation. (2015: 2)

Nature with capital “N” is therefore Nature as a modern abstraction. The main pillar of Moore’s theory could be therefore considered as his attempt to overcome the Cartesian binary of Nature vs Society. This binary is called Cartesian, since it reproduces Descartes’ separation of the mind (*res cogitans*) from the body (*res extensa*), by conceiving Nature and Society as two separate realms. Therefore, Jason Moore, aiming at exposing not only the profound artificiality of the Nature/Society binary but also the role that capitalism plays within it, introduces the idea of *world-ecology*. In order to understand what world-ecology means, we should start first from his definition of *oikeios*:

The *oikeios* is a multi-layered dialectic, comprising flora and fauna, but also our planet’s manifold geological and biospheric configurations, cycles, and movements. Through the *oikeios* form and re-form the relations and conditions that create and destroy humanity’s mosaic of cooperation and conflict: what is typically called “social” organization. Nature as *oikeios* is, then, not offered as an additional factor, to be placed alongside culture or society or economy. Nature, instead, becomes the matrix within which human activity unfolds, and the field upon which historical agency operates. (2015: 46)

Therefore, it is through the *oikeios* that human organizations unfold, creating a spatial and dialectic relationship with it. In fact, although the Nature/Society binary would lead us to think that there is some degree of separation between societal structure and the abstract entity of Nature, they are, instead, inseparable elements of the *oikeios*, and the outcome of mutual coproduction:

Human organization is at once product and producer of the *oikeios*: it is the shifting configuration of this relation that merits our attention. In this spirit I understand “capital” and “capitalism” as producers and products of the *oikeios*. Capitalism as *world-ecology* is

therefore not the ecology of the world, but a patterned history of power, capital, and nature, dialectically joined. (2015: 19)

The specific trajectory that humans created and co-created within the *oikeios*, forms the *capitalist world-ecology*, based on the organization and exploitation of Nature through the cyclical coproduction of spatial relations (2015: 20). Consequently, we can say that history and especially modern capitalist history is also always environment-making history (2015: 23). This aspect is better explained by what Moore calls *double internality*, which he describes as a: “double movement—of capitalism through nature, of nature through capitalism” (2015: 17). The concept of *double internality* stresses how every human action is already and inherently part of nature and vice-versa:

On the one hand, capitalism internalizes—however partially—the relations of the biosphere. In the process, the agencies of capital and empire (but not only these) seek to turn the work/energy of the biosphere into capital (abstract social labour). On the other hand, the biosphere internalizes the relations of capital. These are asymmetrical relations, of course; their valences and vectors change over time. In this, the philosophical point shapes the historical observation: capitalism, like all civilizations, is constituted through a double internalization. (2015: 87)

The concept of *double internality*, also helps make sense of the cyclical restructuring of capitalism, which always and necessarily entails environmental restructuring:

As capitalism evolves and restructures, so do the terms of the double internality. Every phase of capitalism has woven together new and old strands of the *oikeios*: thus do new historical capitalisms and new historical natures flow together. These historical natures take shape out of modernity’s manifold revolutions—scientific, industrial, bourgeois, agricultural, financial, demographic, and all the rest. They unfold through, while creating a new, the *oikeios*. (2015: 28)

Thinking of capitalism as *world-ecology* commits us to thinking through the long history of capitalism which started with Columbus’ arrival to the Americas, and the consequent European colonization of the world. Jason Moore, together with Raj Patel, reconstructed the global history of capitalism in their essay *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things* published in 2018. Moore and Patel’s history of capitalism gives an insight into the interconnectedness of global processes which started at the dawn of the European conquest of the Americas. Secondly, it proves to be a useful tool when it comes to fully grasping the real, layered, and complex, implications of the phrase “anthropic activities” in the Anthropocene. More specifically, the two scholars show how the history of the world as we know it now, has developed through a set of ‘cheap resources’: nature,

money, work, care, food, energy, and lives. These were appropriated through a process of “cheapening” which they define as: “a strategy, a practice, a violence that mobilizes all kinds of work – human and animal, botanical and geological – with as little compensation as possible” (2018: 22). For the process of cheapening to be happening, it’s crucial for capitalism to have frontiers. It’s through the creation and appropriation of new frontiers that capitalism lives and expands. A frontier is “a site where crises encourage new strategies for profit. Frontiers are frontiers because they are the encounter zones between capital and all kinds of nature – humans included” (2018: 19). As I have already mentioned above, the dichotomy of Nature versus Society was the condition *sine qua non* for capitalism’s emergence (2018: 48). The global conquest and mapping of the world and subsequent generalization of private property during the XVI century, were the start of this process (2015: 301). This was coupled with the emergence of new theories like the idea of “the savage and the civilized” that the British developed in their first colonial frontier, Ireland” (2018: 43-60). The consequence was that the realm of Nature was expanded to encompass extra-human life as well as human life:

(...) the realm of Nature included virtually all peoples of colour, most women and most people with white skin living in semicolonial regions (e.g., Ireland and Poland). This is why in the sixteenth century Castilians referred to the Indigenous Andeans as *naturales*. (2018: 51)

The last aspect that I want to highlight brings us back to the discrepancy between the Nature/Society binary abstraction, and the actual material reality of the *oikeios*. The mismatch between the two in our time of epochal crises produces the recognition of the actual finitude of the web of life, which was pushed to a saturation point by a world-ecology based on its presumptive infinity. In fact, the main pillar of the capitalist world-ecology, namely “Cheap Nature” has come to an end: nature’s complementary roles in the world-ecology, namely: nature-as-tap – or as extractive resource, and nature-as-sink – or as dump site, are now colliding:

The cumulative and cyclical dimensions of nature-as-tap—taking the world-historical form of scientific, extractive, labour, and agricultural revolutions—are now meeting up with the cumulative dimension of nature-as-sink. Every great movement of appropriating new streams of unpaid work/energy implies a disproportionately larger volume of waste. That disproportionality has grown over time. The dimension of waste is therefore a crucial relation missing—to this point—from our simplified model of accumulation and crisis. Value and waste are dialectically bound, in a cumulatively disproportionate relation. (2018: 270)

This mechanism produces what Moore calls, expanding Marx's law of *over-production*, the law of *over-pollution*, or the closing up of waste frontiers faster than the relocation of new ones. This engenders climate change and general over-pollution:

The result today is a world in which every nook and cranny bears the impress of capital's toxification: from heavy metals in Arctic glaciers and children's blood, to the plastic "garbage patches" in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, to rising atmospheric concentrations of CO₂. (2018: 271)

Therefore, the capitalist world-ecology and its way of organizing nature, time and space is coming to an end. Especially, its general law of Cheap-Nature as a "civilization process", has come to an end, and with it the epoch which Moore calls Capitalocene.

Silvia Federici's work on primitive accumulation provides a crucial complement to Moore's analysis by emphasizing the gendered dimensions of capitalism's ecological and social impacts. While Moore critiques the overarching dynamics of capitalism and its dialectical relationship with nature, Federici specifically highlights how these processes are deeply intertwined with gender relations. This connection is pivotal for a deeper understanding of concepts tackled by Moore and Patel, particularly regarding human-frontier expansion and reproductive labor. Notably, Moore's concept of "cheap care" is grounded in Federici's insights, illustrating how the exploitation of care work has historically reinforced capitalist structures by minimizing costs at the expense of marginalized communities. Federici restructures the Marxist idea of "primitive accumulation" by focusing on:

(i) the development of a new sexual division of labour subjugating women's labour and women's reproductive function to the reproduction of the work-force; (ii) the construction of a new patriarchal order, based upon the exclusion of women from waged work and their subordination to men; (iii) the mechanization of the proletarian body and its transformation, in the case of women, into a machine for the production of new workers. (2004: 12)

Federici sees as the violent disruptive roots of primitive accumulation both the processes of colonization, the expulsion of farmers from the land, and the witch-hunting persecutions in Europe and on the American continent in the 16th and 17th century. Moreover, and crucially for what concerns the dynamics of recurrence in global capitalism, Silvia Federici states that the processes of primitive accumulation did not end in the 17th century and are instead a pivotal step in the periodic restructuring of capitalism. In this respect, Federici stresses that since its dawn, capitalism has transformed the body

into a work-machine, and that the mechanization of the human body has undergone various stages depending on material time-space geographies. Moreover, women's bodies have been subjected to a double mechanization process: onto one hand as workforce, and on the other as reproductive machines (2022: 23). The reproductive work of women, as also stated in the foundational works by Maria Mies (2014) and Carla Lonzi (1970) – amongst many others, although having been hidden and shadowed by public discourse, and by Marxist discourse also, has always been the basis for the production and reproduction of capitalism¹⁰. Crucially, Federici strongly sustains the inextricable connection of capitalism as a social system and the global network of violence and inequality, and therefore negates any possibility of freedom within capitalism. Her ideas in this respect surface as pivotal also for what concerns the new capitalist restructuring of the green economy and of the feminization of labour on a world scale.

The theories of Jason Moore and Raj Patel, together with Silvia Federici's work will prove to be a useful tool in the analysis of the novels in the second part of this thesis. The three theorists, by tracing the history of capitalism through their work, expose the hidden diachronic and synchronic dynamics on which capitalism is founded. By doing this they break the level of naturalization by obsolescence which justifies them while instead making them surface in a revelatory manner. At the same time, by highlighting the importance of the diachronic history of the capitalist world-ecology, such theories work against historical obsolescence and the flattening of time onto an eternal, unescapable present (Van Aken 2020).

Consequently, from this moment on, we will consider the end of the world as the process of exhaustion and of the world-ecology in which we live. In this context, theorist Timothy Morton identifies the end of the world (and of the spatial-temporal coordinates that constitute it) with the arrival of a new era, the time of hyperobjects. Morton's crucial contribution helps to visualize the dismantling of the foundational abstractions which hold up the capitalist world-ecology, especially engendering a deep feeling of uncanniness through the subversion of time-space, inside-outside coordinates. Morton's work complements Moore's analysis with an ontological dimension, offering a holistic understanding of the intertwined human and non-human forces shaping the current

¹⁰ I will delve deeper into the theoretical and literary discourse surrounding the concept of reproductive work during the fourth chapter, dedicated to novels set within domestic spaces.

moment. This multi-dimensional perspective is necessary to fully grasp the complexity of the present crisis. Moore and Morton's theoretical frameworks, though originating from distinct perspectives, offer complementary insights for analyzing the singular yet multifaceted crises of the present (Klein 2014). Both theories prove useful in examining the layered and complex characteristics of our current moment. In this context, their approaches will be further interconnected through the work of Dipesh Chakrabarty, who advocates for scalar approaches as the most effective means of addressing the multifaceted aspects of what he terms the Global and the Planetary. Moore's perspective provides a nuanced understanding of class, racial, and colonial dynamics within the context of the Capitalocene. Meanwhile, Morton emphasizes the agency of the non-human, drawing attention to how the coordinates through which we typically understand the world are simplistic, anthropocentric abstractions. According to Morton, we are already enmeshed within objects and entities that operate on entirely different temporal and spatial planes. Both approaches hold equal significance, and their combined application allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the current moment. This moment demands a multiplicity of perspectives to fully grasp its complexity and to develop an adequate response.

1.1.3 Timothy Morton, hyperobjects and the end of the world

Timothy Morton is a prominent figure in the philosophical movement known as Object Oriented Ontology (OOO), which seeks to reframe our understanding of relationships between all entities—human and non-human. His work encompasses a wide range of themes, especially dealing with concepts such as, causality, ecology, and planetary crisis. More generically, one of Morton's main theoretical goals is the strive to decentre the human and therefore overcome anthropocentrism by stressing the inherent “intimacy” with other human, and non-human agents, which act, move and organize on time and space scales very different from our own. Therefore, what should emerge after having recognized our strange intimacy with other agents, is a new ecological thought, which will guide us in shaping a post-anthropocentric future (Morton 2010). In his essay *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World* (2013), Morton argues that our understanding of the world has been irrevocably changed by the emergence of hyperobjects—entities that exist on scales of time and space far beyond human

perception. Hyperobjects are entities living on time and space scales which out-scale ours, and which have breached through our daily lives and world ontology. One of the main characteristics of hyperobjects, which makes them particularly uncanny, is their proximity to us. We do not need to reach them through long space distances, instead they are already here all around and within us. Contextually, “‘distance’ is only a psychic and ideological construct designed to protect me from the nearness of things” (2013: 27). To understand the nature of hyperobjects, it's essential to explore their unique properties. The first is *viscosity*. Hyperobjects, in fact, undermine the very concept of distance and “away”, they stick to us leaving no escape: there’s no outer place, we live inside hyperobjects, and we are made of them. Consequently, hyperobjects shake our sense of place, engendering a feeling which could be described as both uncanny and unreal:

While hyperobjects are near, they are also very uncanny. (...) The more I know about global warming, the more I realize how pervasive it is. The more I discover about evolution, the more I realize how my entire physical being is caught in its meshwork. Immediate, intimate symptoms of hyperobjects are vivid and often painful, yet they carry with them a trace of unreality. I am not sure where I am anymore. I am at home in feeling not at home. (2013: 28)

In this respect reality as we thought we knew it melts. We are no longer human subjects on which a certain reality mirrors itself: there’s no reflecting surface anymore, we are becoming aware of our being part of the hyperobjects, we are no longer separable from them: “reality envelops us like a film of oil” (2013: 35). Another key characteristic of hyperobjects is their *non-locality*, a concept borrowed from quantum theory that suggests how our localized experiences do not encompass the entirety of these vast entities. Put it simply non-locality means that: “every local manifestation of the hyperobject is not itself the hyperobject” (2013: 1), which means that we cannot experience the totality of a hyperobject, such as, let’s say, Global Warming, but we can experience the heat on our skin, the drops of rain on our head etc. This means that what we perceive as an 'aesthetic local manifestation'—such as a weather event or a natural disaster—is merely a fragment of a larger hyperobject, reflecting our limited human perspective (2013: 47). Non-locality and viscosity powerfully convey the idea wherein things are interconnected, and therefore our same idea of “locality” appears as “false immediacy” (2013: 48) since our localized perceptions are already part of hyperobjects which are massively distributed in space and time. Hyperobjects stretch back so far into the past and into the future that we can’t grasp them, we can’t see the start nor the end of them. We are directly connected to the extreme far past: “I walk on top of lifeforms. The oxygen in our lungs is bacterial outgassing. Oil

is the result of some dark, secret collusion between rocks and algae and plankton millions and millions of years in the past” (2013: 48). As well as directly connected to the extremely far future: “7 percent of global warming effects will still be occurring one hundred thousand years from now as igneous rocks slowly absorb the last of the greenhouse gases” (2013: 59). Moreover, the time scale of hyperobjects has nothing to do with infinity: hyperobjects are made of a very large finitude (2013: 60), which makes them even harder to imagine. Therefore, we are completely enmeshed in viscous, non-local, extremely far stretching in time hyperobjects. Building on these three properties, Morton introduces a fourth: *phasing*, which describes how hyperobjects exist in a complex, multi-dimensional space that defies our usual three-dimensional understanding. In this respect Morton says: “hyperobjects are “phased”: they occupy a high-dimensional phase space that makes them impossible to see as a whole on a regular three-dimensional human scale basis” (2013: 70). Thanks to their transdimensional quality, we can only see parts and sections of them in the brief stretch of time during which they intersect with our own world, and “the gaps and ruptures are simply the ‘invisible presence’ of the hyperobject itself which looms around us constantly” (2013: 76). The last property of hyperobjects is their *interobjectivity*. Interobjectivity stands for the way in which “all entities whatsoever are interconnected in an interobjective system that elsewhere I call the mesh” (2013: 83). In this respect, *interobjectivity* (together with the other properties of hyperobjects), undermines the importance, centrality, and accuracy of concepts such as intersubjectivity, causality and the present. Intersubjectivity is reconfigured to a specific anthropic area of the interobjective mesh, moreover: “‘intersubjectivity’ is really human interobjectivity with lines drawn around it to exclude nonhumans” (2013: 82). Secondly, interobjectivity questions our idea of causality: “Hyperobjects are so big that they compel us toward this counterintuitive view. Interobjectivity eliminates the difference between cause and sign” (2013: 89), which means that “the idea that causality is the machinery in the basement and the aesthetic is the candy on top (...) is now obsolete” (2013: 90). The third implication, which is strictly connected to the second, elucidates the specific temporal quality of the hyperobjects by questioning our idea of the present: “Appearance is the past. *Essence is the future*. The strange strangeness of a hyperobject, its invisibility—it’s the future, somehow beamed into the “present” (2013: 92). Therefore, the promethean idea of modernity whereby our present moment is constantly tending to a future *telos* (which is in fact tied to ideas such as progress and developmentalism), is disrupted. The “present” as conceived by teleology does not exist,

instead, there exists the conjunction of past and future in an indistinguishable moment in which shadows and lights both reflect. In Morton's words "The present does not truly exist. We experience a crisscrossing set of force fields, the aesthetic-causal fields emanated by a host of objects" (2013: 92). In this way we experience "the end of the world", inasmuch the same context of "world" depends on backgrounds and foregrounds which are lacking during the time of hyperobjects. Therefore, it becomes essential to reconsider our understanding of concepts like 'Nature' and 'world,' particularly the notion of the world as a mere container for entities and events. The "world" as we thought of it was made of background figures such as the weather. But in the age of global warming, the weather has broken free from its background position and entered our daily life:

Now what happens when global warming enters the scene? The background ceases to be a background, because we have started to observe it (...) Global warming is a big problem, because along with melting glaciers it has melted our ideas of world and worlding. (2013: 103)

Timothy Morton's idea of *world* resembles what Chakrabarty calls the Globe, and Jason Moore calls world-ecology: "World is a function of a very long-lasting and complex set of social forms that we could roughly call the logistics of agriculture" (2013: 106). Conceptually, one of our primary goals now should be the dismantling of the concept of world. In this respect, Morton argues that our understanding of the world is intricately linked to capitalist dynamics, which strip nature and matter of their uniqueness and reconfigure them into commodities (2013: 112). Capitalism is made up of two opposite yet complementary trends: firstly, its "relentless revolutionizing of its mode of production" (2013:112), and secondly its "tremendous inertia. And the tremendous inertia happens to be on the side of the modern. That is, the political ontology in which there is an 'away'" (2013: 112). Capitalism works through processes of abstraction and subsequent myth creation. Nature is often viewed as a foundational capitalist myth, perceived merely as a reservoir of resources to be exploited rather than a complex web of interconnected entities: "Nature is the featureless remainder at either end of the process of production" (2013: 112). Nature is nowhere to be found, it's an empty signifier. At the same time, capitalism produces 'matter', which is 'just stuff' (2013: 113), without any specificity, just 'things' made only to be consumed. Nature as a myth enters the process of production only to come out as 'stuff'. Consequently, let's focus on Morton's statement when he says: "The eerie strangeness of this fact confronts us with the ways in which we still believe that Nature is "over there"—that it exists apart from technology, apart from

history. Far from it. Nature is the stockpile of stockpiles” (2013: 114). What we should then destroy is the concept of “beyond” or “foreground”, a place and space where capitalism’s wrecks will disappear, a massive dump ground conceptually away from us but which dwells among us. Percolate particles should be disappearing in some kind of beyond, but they enter our lungs, blood and muscles. There’s no distance anymore, not even the tiniest. The inexistence of a beyond and the physical resistance and permeability of what conceptually capitalism strives to forget and hide undermines the concept of sustainability:

The deep reason for why sustainability fails as a concept has to do with how we are not living in a world. It is thus time to question the very term ecology, since ecology is the thinking of home, and hence world (oikos plus logos). In a reality without a home, without world, what this study calls objects are what constitute reality. (2013: 116)

This quote expands Moore’s ideas of nature as tap, and nature as sink, and brings them onto a different, broader scalar level. It shows how those organizing mechanisms stretch their consequences on many scalar levels, both microcellular, by mixing and meshing with our flesh and tissues, and macroscopic, by transforming our same planet and atmosphere. Consequently, the age of Hyperobjects disrupts the idea of “home”, we find ourselves no longer in the world we conceptually created and thought we were inhabiting, but, on the other hand, we find ourselves “inside some big objects (bigger than us that is): Earth, global warming, evolution” (2013: 118). It therefore brings about a deep feeling of uncanniness: our home, which we thought was made of walls and roof, is instead an illusion, and from our once indoor perspective we witness the crumbling of those abstractions which gave foundations to our dwelling place. Moreover, in the time of hyperobjects, we must develop ways of facing what Morton calls “the future future” and “the strange stranger”. Namely:

Not the future we can predict and manage, but an unknowable future, a genuinely *future future*. In the present moment, we must develop an ethics that addresses what Derrida calls l’arrivant, the absolutely un - expected and unexpectable arrival, or what I call the *strange stranger*, the stranger whose strangeness is forever strange—it cannot be tamed or rationalized away. This stranger is not so unfamiliar: uncanny familiarity is one of the strange stranger’s traits. (2013: 125)

Therefore, echoing Derrida, the age of hyperobjects is also the age of spectres, of the return of what was hidden and repressed under new, strangely familiar clothes. Moreover, the same idea of a site where things could be hidden and repressed was an illusion since there’re no material backgrounds nor foregrounds. Everything remains, endures, and

comes back. In the second last chapter of his book, Morton introduces what he calls “The age of hypocrisy”. He starts by explaining how hyperobjects are dramatically difficult to tackle inasmuch as we live inside them. The idea of “inside” is not limited to the physical realm, but instead is strongly linked to distortions of our ideas of time which are engendered by hyperobjects, and which present themselves as highly futural entities able to stretch extremely far in the future. The extensive duration of hyperobjects requires us to think outside utilitarianism and self-interest. In fact, they compel us to recognize our increased intimacy with other entities, both in the present and the far future. Moreover, objects emit zones, where they propagate independently from us. Thus, it is impossible to conceive of ourselves outside the zone, and the intermingling of zones, propagated by different objects. In the case of hyperobjects the matter becomes more complicated. In fact, they emit a zone which is so big that we can’t not be aware of it, although at the same time their huge dimensions, their non-locality, and their phasal properties, implicate an inherent distance between the core (if even there is one) and the aesthetic dimension of its propagation zone. Consequently, it becomes extremely difficult for us to find a way to tackle them. They also pose deeply unsettling questions to the metaphysics of presence, and therefore to our conception of “the real”:

Ontotheology wants to convince me that I must construe things as real by thinking of them as objectively present and “there” (*vorhanden*, using Heidegger’s term). But the hyperobject prevents me from objectifying it as “real” in this way—although it is of course real, without doubt; it seems to assail me like a nightmare or a threatening circus clown. It is never *vorhanden*, as it’s always disappearing behind the rain cloud, the sunburn, the pile of garbage. The feeling of being inside a hyperobject contains a necessary element of unreality—yet this is a symptom of its reality! (2013: 145 146)

Morton’s argument follows by defining our times, the times of hyperobjects, as a time of hypocrisy, by this he refers to one of the meanings of the word, namely “delivery”, which is deeply linked to physicality. In this respect we could resume his idea by saying that something physical which is both being hidden by someone while being at the same time delivered: “A thing delivers another thing. Rain, sunburn, plastic bags, and car engines all deliver the doom of the hyperobject. They are its hypocrites. They lie about the hyperobject; they tell secrets” (149). Moreover, hyperobjects allow us to: “see this intrinsic, ontological level of hypocrisy, because they are just so much larger in scale than we are, both temporally and spatially. We see signs everywhere, but not the hyperobject as such” (2013: 152).

During the time of hyperobjects, reality becomes increasingly uncanny: the notions of world and Nature dissolve, together with our idea of home and “modern certainties” (2013:130). Instead, we find ourselves inside some extremely spatially and temporally large objects such as global warming. Ultimately, we find ourselves in a state of 'increased intimacy,' as Morton puts it—an acute awareness of our interconnectedness with both living and non-living entities that permeate our existence: “the more we know about interconnection, the more it becomes impossible to posit some entity beyond or behind the interrelated beings” (2013: 129). Accordingly, it is no longer possible to distance ourselves from the world, instead we live in an increased state of coexistence: “Coexistence is in our face: it is our face. We are made of nonhuman and non-sentient and non-living entities. It’s not a cozy situation: it’s a spooky, uncanny situation” (2013: 132).

1.1.4 Dipesh Chakrabarty, scalar quakes in the Anthropocene

Chakrabarty’s latest theoretical investigation is hinged on the concept of scale¹¹ and more specifically on what he envisions as two joint, simultaneous, and inextricable concepts: the “global” and the “planetary”. Those two concepts not only entail a joint reading of both humanist history and planetary history, but also, and consequently, a scaling up of the idea of “human” which emerges as both part of anthropologic history and as a living species. The tension between the 'global' and 'planetary' concepts creates a sense of 'scalar friction'—an emotional disorientation where individuals may feel as though they are 'falling' or 'outscaled' by larger planetary forces. This feeling is crucial for understanding the uncanny nature of our experiences in the Anthropocene.

As stressed by Matteo de Giuli and Nicolò Porcelluzzi, who edited the Italian translation of *The Climate of History: Four Theses* and *Climate and Capital: On Conjoined Histories*, Chakrabarty’s theory is rooted in the tension between the history of

¹¹ The idea of scale is also present in Braidotti’s foundational work *The Posthuman*, in which by looking at Chakrabarty’s work she explores the potentialities of scale thinking to highlight the necessity of envisaging new posthuman identities. Especially, I find Braidotti’s work especially useful when it comes to investigate scale thinking not only at the level of geological time but also at a microbiological level. In fact, Braidotti suggests how our bodies’ permeability constitute a continuum between inside an outside and therefore gives another pivotal insight for the dismantling of the Nature-Culture binary.

planet Earth and that of capitalism. This tension is the generative force of his thinking, in fact: “climate crisis compels us to think, in the same moment, on different time scales, with different resolutions and details” (2021: 29). They describe Chakrabarty’s reasoning process as a continuous alternance of zooming in, for example on the history colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism, and zooming out, onto the long history of the evolution of human beings as a species (2021: 29). In this respect, Moore’s Capitalocene come to coincide with Chakrabarty’s concept of the “globe”, whereas Morton’s “hyperobjects” are more adherent to the “planetary”. In this respect, it is the collision of the two, which brings forward the end of the world as we conceive of it.

In 2009, Chakrabarty published a long article called *The Climate of History: Four Thesis*, which constituted a watershed in his thinking. While Chakrabarty’s previous work was rooted in post-colonial and Marxist theory, *Four Thesis* focused on the questions raised by the concept of Anthropocene, which expanded, and in a certain sense, bifurcated the same idea of *anthropos* which was pivotal for his previous work. In fact, while the history of colonialism and capitalism is, according to Chakrabarty, a good enough framework when it comes to explaining processes of domain, power, and inequality, it proves insufficient when trying to face global warming. The latter, in fact, showed and made explicit the enmeshing relationship between the recorded life of humans, with the history of other earthly agents:

As the crisis gathered momentum in the last few years, I realized that all my readings in theories of globalization, Marxist analysis of capital, subaltern studies, and postcolonial criticism over the last twenty-five years, while enormously useful in studying globalization, had not really prepared me for making sense of this planetary conjuncture within which humanity finds itself today. (2009: 199)

From this stemmed Chakrabarty’s new research question, which has become the *file rouge* of his thinking for the past fifteen years: “If, indeed, globalization and global warming are born of overlapping processes, the question is, How do we bring them together in our understanding of the world?” (2009:200). *Four Thesis* was followed by, amongst other works, *The Human Condition in the Anthropocene* based on Chakrabarty’s lectures given at Yale University in 2015, and *The Politics of Climate Change Is More Than the Politics of Capitalism* (2017). Although it was in 2022 that Chakrabarty published his comprehensive volume titled *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*. The first idea around which Chakrabarty builds his argument is the collision between natural history and human history, which entails a reconfiguration and a scaling-up of our

idea of the human. Natural history and human history have often and for a long time been two separate fields of study, an academic consequence of the Nature-Culture binary. The Anthropocene instead, marks a point when the history of the humans and the natural history of the planet collide or, since they have never actually been separated, they show their actual embeddedness. Humans have in fact become a collective geological agent:

To call human beings geological agents is to scale up our imagination of the human. Humans are biological agents, both collectively and as individuals. They have always been so. There was no point in human history when humans were not biological agents. But climate scientists' claims about human agency introduce a question of scale. Humans can become a planetary geological agent only historically and collectively, that is, when we have reached numbers and invented technologies that are on a scale large enough to have an impact on the planet itself. (2022: 31)

From this perspective we see how two interrelated conceptualizations of the human being seem to emerge: on the one hand we have the human of the humanist history of the last five-hundred years or so, the stretch of time that led us into the Anthropocene, while on the other hand we find the history of humanity as a species. The first, represents a short amount of time included in what has been known as recorded history which is calculated from around the time when agriculture was invented, while the second (which also contains the first) is “The history of humans that goes beyond these years of written records constitutes what other students of human pasts (...) call prehistory and beyond that, deep history” (2022: 36). According to Chakrabarty, although the idea of humanity as a species is often looked upon with suspicion by historians, it is necessary to align it to the discourse on colonization, capitalism, and modernity. It is, in fact, only by understanding the human being as a life-form that we can comprehend why anthropogenic climate change represents such a threat for all life on Earth. Therefore, since “our own awareness of ourselves, the “now” of human history has become entangled with the long “now” of geological and biological timescales” (2022: 7), human beings are faced both with the humanist perception of themselves based on human recorded history and especially the history of modernity and capitalism, and with their uncanny doppelgänger, namely, being one living human species with a collective disruptive force as a geological agent. These two understandings of the human demand a simultaneous reading of different time scales:

The global, as I have said, refers to matters that happen within human horizons of time—the multiple horizons of existential, intergenerational, and historical time—though the processes might involve planetary scales of space. Planetary processes, including the ones that humans

have interfered with, operate on various timetables, some compatible with human times, others vastly larger than what is involved in human calculation. (2022: 86)

In order to understand this aspect, Chakrabarty theorises the concepts of the “global” and the “planetary”. The globe, which we find at the root of the word “globalization”, and which mirrors humanist history, is an entity rooted and based on the history of colonialism, European expansion, science, and technology and consequently on the history of modernization. It therefore “embodies an anthropocentric and anthropological practice of representation” (2022: 75). The planetary is instead something very different from the globe. Its focus is not the human, nor human life, instead it centres on “complex, multicellular life in general” (2022: 78), and on the connection between planet Earth and other planets. It therefore emerges as a “necessarily comparativist enterprise”, which connects “questions of physics, chemistry, geology, and biology” (2022: 79). It is therefore the understanding of how the globe has interfered with the planetary which can give us a deeper understanding of why climate crises, although being engendered by capitalist modernity, unleash forces which exceed it: “What we see in the history of ESS, however, is not an end to the project of capitalist globalization but the arrival of a point in history where the global discloses to humans the domain of the planetary” (2022: 80). Moreover:

For all their differences, thinking globally and thinking in a planetary mode are not either/or questions for humans. The planetary now bears down on our everyday consciousness precisely because the accentuation of the global in the last seventy or so years—all that is summed up in the expression “the great acceleration”—has opened up for humanist intellectuals the domain of the planetary. (2022: 85)

In the next section I will look at how all the ideas explored so far catalyse into a sense of uncanniness and more specifically into what I call “uncanny un-worlding”.

1.1.5 Why is the end of the world a deeply uncanny process?

The theories analysed so far elucidate how the modern world and its worldview, grounded in the Nature-Culture dichotomy, have reached a point of no return (Van Aken 2020). The depletion of cheap resources and the intersection of nature as both tap and sink manifest the extremities reached by the system of capitalist accumulation. Concurrently, the permeability of hyperobjects signals the advent of a new era wherein entities long

considered defenceless and inert, encapsulated within the concept of Nature, reveal themselves as animated and imbued with agency. This development compels us to think on multiple scales and to recognize how anthropic activities, encapsulated in Chakrabarty's notion of the global, intersect with the planetary dimension of deep time. Consequently, the world as it has been conceived over the past five centuries begins to lose the coherence upon which it was constructed, appearing progressively more uncannily familiar yet strange. This shift heralds the beginning of an end—not in the sense of a global apocalypse that eradicates humanity, but rather as the end of a particular conception of the world. Specifically, it signifies the dissolution of the modern colonial, capitalist world. This initiates a process of uncanny unworlding, denoting the gradual dismantling of the ideologies that have underpinned the modern world. This liminal state, while disorienting, also presents opportunities for transformation and the emergence of new ways of being.

The main affect that emerges from this process is one of profound uncanniness. The most crucial work on the uncanny is Freud's 1919 essay *The Uncanny*, whose original title in German is *Das Unheimliche*. At the start of the essay, Freud introduces the concept as: "the "uncanny" is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (1919: 2). In this context, the German word *unheimliche* could appear as the antonym of the term *heimlich* which at a first sight stands for "homely" "belonging to the realm of the home", "being at home". On the contrary, when looked at more closely, the word *heimlich* shows an array of ambiguous meanings. It seems in fact that it both contains the concept of "homely" and "familiar" and the idea of something which is concealed, hidden from sight. In this respect, the word *heimlich* appears to coincide with its opposite, *unheimliche*. Moreover, by following Shelling's definition Freud says: "According to him everything is uncanny that ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet comes to light" (1919: 3). Amongst the many instances of uncanniness which Freud focuses on, three concepts emerge as pivotal for our discussion: the idea of the double, involuntary repetition, and the repressed. The "double" both refers to "persons who are to be considered identical by reason of looking alike" (1919: 10), and to "the constant recurrence of similar situations, a same face, or character-trait, or twist of fortune, or a same crime, or even a same name recurring throughout several consecutive generations" (1919: 10). Both instances seem to be linked to the feeling that something once known (and thus familiar), is now coming back in a

newer, threatening form. Moreover, they are also linked to a feeling of helplessness and lack of agency. This aspect is directly connected to “involuntary repetition”: “which surrounds with an uncanny atmosphere what would otherwise be innocent enough, and forces upon us the idea of something fateful and unescapable where otherwise we should have spoken of “chance” only” (1919: 10). Moreover, the uncanny is strongly linked to something that has been repressed and hidden but keeps coming back: “for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old — established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression” (1919: 13). As we will see shortly, the idea of the uncanny resonates with the processes involved in the Anthropocene, in the way in which during our current times everything that used to look familiar, or taken for granted, has started to assume a strangely familiar character. In this respect, the Anthropocene produces a crisis similar to what Heidegger calls *entweltlichung*, or un-worlding, i.e. the process whereby a world, a unit endowed with meaning, however abstract it may be, loses its familiar coordinates and becomes something alien, familiar but strange at the same time, and deeply disturbing. And it is precisely in these moments when the world unfolds in its otherness that the dimension of anxiety and anguish takes over. Nevertheless, it is in these moments of 'revelation' where we can find the most authentic and profound dimension of existence (Didino 2020: 80 85). The un-worlding brought forward by the crisis of the Capitalocene, together with Morton’s “end of the world” and Chakrabarty’s theory of scalar collision produces an affect which coincides with a feeling of “uncanniness”. The world as we thought we knew it revealed its inner flaws, and by doing so it brings back entities which have been repressed in its aesthetic representation, especially the broad realm of Nature, and the dynamics of violence and exploitation in which the history of the Capitalocene is rooted. Consequently, the world, conceived as a modern set of binary coordinates starts to crumble, by losing its unity of meaning (Van Aken 2020). Consequently, we find ourselves displaced, without fixed categories to hang on to. In this respect everything which used to appear as a coherent natural entity starts to reappear as profoundly strange and uncanny (Van Aken 2020). Contextually, everything from the weather to the food we eat, the fuel in our cars, electricity, urban and rural spaces, and even our clothes now appear menacing and uncanny. This is because they have started to reveal a set of networks that were meant to be invisible but are now coming to light. This unveiling of interconnected systems exposes the underlying complexities and dependencies of the modern world, which were previously taken for granted or deliberately obscured (Van

Aken 2020). This feeling is akin to what Paul Preciado has called *dysphoria mundi* (2022). In fact, building on the critical examination of capitalism's ecological and social dimensions, Paul Preciado offers a perspective that intersects energy, race, and gender. His concept of the "petrosexorracial" regime, introduced in his work *Dysphoria Mundi* (2020), highlights how colonial capitalism is not only fueled by the exploitation of nature but also by the intertwined consumption of fossil fuels and the construction of racial, sexual, and species-based hierarchies. This term captures the layered forms of oppression that have shaped modern power dynamics since the 16th century, expanding the reach of colonial capitalism. In Preciado's words:

I call "petrosexorracial" that mode of social organization and that set of technologies of governance and representation that emerged from the sixteenth century onwards with the expansion of colonial capitalism and of racial and sexual epistemologies from Europe to the entire planet. In energetic terms, the petrosexorracial mode of production depends on the combustion of highly polluting and climate-warming fossil fuels. The systemic infrastructure of these technologies of governance is the social classification of living beings according to modern scientific taxonomies of species, race, sex and sexuality. (Preciado 2022: 40, my translation)¹²

At the same time, Preciado also heralds the incumbent crumbling of the current worldview. Whereas Moore sees the end of the four cheaps as the material final limit for the expansion of the capitalist world-ecology, Preciado focuses on the all-pervasive feeling that he calls "dysphoria mundi"¹³, namely the feeling of estrangement and unacceptance towards the given and normalized "architectures of our world". This feeling heightened during the Covid pandemic and has found a voice in the many global transfeminist, anti-racist and working-class protests worldwide. The concept of "dysphoria mundi" also appears as strongly adjacent to the idea of "uncanny unworlding". In fact, both concepts are hinged on the realization that in our present, time, space and prevailing narrations are out of joint (Preciado 2022).

In this context, both the theories tackled in the first part of the chapter, and especially the literary texts that we will analyse in the second part, give voice to what

¹² The original text says: Denomino «petrosexorracial» a aquel modo de organización social y a aquel conjunto de tecnologías de gobierno y de la representación que surgieron a partir del siglo XVI con la expansión del capitalismo colonial y de las epistemologías raciales y sexuales desde Europa a la totalidad del planeta. En términos energéticos, el modo de producción petrosexorracial depende de la combustión de energías fósiles altamente contaminantes y generadoras de calentamiento climático. La infraestructura epistémica de esas tecnologías de gobierno es la clasificación social de los seres vivos de acuerdo con las taxonomías científicas modernas de especie, raza, sexo y sexualidad. (Preciado 2022: 40)

¹³ Preciado's concept of *Dysphoria Mundi* is developed starting from his experience as a trans man and from the concept of gender dysphoria.

Mark Fisher calls “the Real(s)”. In fact, any given reality, and especially Capitalist Realism, for Fisher, is not a true given biological fact, it is instead highly ideologically mediated. In this respect, Fisher uses Lacan’s theory of “the Real” to emphasize the difference between the real, as a mediated reality principle, and the Real(s), which are not only seldomly knowable, but also systematically suppressed by the real:

For Lacan, the Real is what any 'reality' must suppress; indeed, reality constitutes itself through just this repression. The Real is an unrepresentable X, a traumatic void that can only be glimpsed in the fractures and inconsistencies in the field of apparent reality. So one strategy against capitalist realism could involve invoking the Real(s) underlying the reality that capitalism presents to us. Environmental catastrophe is one such Real (2009: 18).

The normalized, status quo of world capitalism exists by systematically suppressing the Real(s) of resource exhaustion, violence, and exploitation. Moreover, Fisher’s Real(s) also appear to coincide with Moore’s statement that:

These abstractions make statements about ontology-What is?-and about epistemology-How do we know what is? Real abstractions both describe the world and make it. That's why real abstractions are often invisible, and why we use ideas like world-ecology to challenge our readers into seeing Nature and Society as hidden forms of violence. These are undetonated words. Real abstractions aren't innocent: they reflect the interests of the powerful and license them to organize the world. (2015: 58)

In our present times of multiple simultaneous crises Real(s) that have been repressed come back. First of all, it brings back the history of the Capitalocene which had been often repressed, hidden and normalized, and which is the joint network of activities which has sustained the modern worldview through its historical development (Van Aken 2020). In this respect Moore’s theories expose and make surface dynamics which should have remained hidden according to the normalization of the global, extractive, violence-based dynamics which shape and guide the capitalist world-ecology. Some of the Real(s) that Fisher refers to appear to coincide with the seven cheap pillars of the capitalist world-ecology as outlined by Moore: nature, money, work, care, food, energy, and lives, which were systematically invisibilized. This suppression is no longer tenable and therefore those Real(s) surface as an uncanny return of the repressed to break up our reality principle. By exposing them, and conjuring them back into a public, political discourse they generate uncanny revelations, which are pivotal to guide us into critically thinking about the structure of our world system and worldview (Van Aken 2020). Moreover, the recurrence of world-ecological waves is also impinged on the restructuring not only of anthropic-capitalist elements, but also of the relationship that they engage in with the

oikeios. The recurrency of capitalist world-ecological fixes engenders an uncanny feeling not only through their recognizable, familiarly strange, method of gathering new frontiers of Cheap Nature, but also through the reshaping of what is part of *nature* into *Nature*, and therefore sinking new, material parts of the *oikeios* into the capital-driven abstraction of value (Federici 2020). In this way those same areas of the *oikeios* appear in a new, familiarly strange form. Moreover, as David Ferrier says:

A strain of the uncanny colours the central insight of Moore's world-ecology, namely that 'human agency is not purely human at all' but composed of a messy bundle of human and non-human (Moore 2013), and recent criticism has consequently sought to extend these insights to account for a world-ecological perspective. (2016: 456)

The Anthropocene reveals itself as a deeply uncanny time, since it breaks the artificial boundary between Nature and Culture, human and non-human (or the globe and the planet as Dipesh Chakrabarty would say) and by doing so, blurs the boundary between inside and outside which Van Aken refers to. The Anthropocene and the current ecological crisis showed how things are completely, undeniably interconnected. This idea is better embodied by the concept of "the mesh" theorized by Timothy Morton, who says:

All life forms are the mesh, and so are all dead ones, as are their habitats, which are also made up of living and non-living beings. We know even more now about how life forms have shaped Earth (think of oil, of oxygen – the first climate change cataclysm). We drive around using crushed dinosaur parts. Iron is mostly a by-product of bacterial metabolism. So is oxygen. Mountains can be made of shells and fossilized bacteria. Death and the mesh go together in another sense, too because natural selection implies extinction. (2015: 29)

It is not a case then that the blurring of artificial conceptual borders during the Anthropocene is echoed in Royle's definition of the uncanny when he says: "It is not "out there", in any simple sense: as a crisis of proper and natural it disturbs any straightforward sense of what is inside and what is outside. The uncanny has to do with a strangeness of framing and borders, an experience of liminality" (2003: 2). In his essay titled *Anthropocene Uncanny: Nonsecular Approaches to Environmental Change* (2018), Nils Bubandt identifies the Anthropocene as a time when hidden, repressed, or ignored human forces are uncannily coming back:

(...) "nature" takes on the uncanny characteristics of those forms of the supernatural that never had a proper place of their own in the modern West: spirits, monsters, ghosts (Bubandt and van Beek 2011). This uncanny monstrosity gels poorly with hegemonic accounts of the Anthropocene where humans are said to be forceful agents acting upon a passive world. But far from being an epoch when humans have become "a force of nature" (Steffen et al. 2007), the Anthropocene names a time when human industry has conjured into existence nonhuman

life forces that the modern prophets of industry – those who announced humans to be the only true agents in the world – had declared to be dead. The Anthropocene is a time when ghostly forces come to life in ways that are tainted through and through with strangeness. (2018: 5)

The Anthropocene is therefore uncanny, since it is a time where artificial time-space boundaries between objects are being broken down: “it suggests a fundamental indecision, an obscurity or uncertainty, at the heart of our ontology, our sense of time, place, and history, both personal and cultural. And this uncertainty is both unsettling, even potentially terrifying, yet also intriguing, fascinating” (Collins & Jervins 2008: 2). But it is also a time of high recurrence of the repressed. Moreover, and crucially the same idea of world as we have known it for a very long time has disappeared. The idea of the world as an inert background for human actions has been proved as extremely foolish and flawed:

The ecological crisis makes us aware of how interdependent everything is. This has resulted in a creepy sensation that there is literally no world anymore. We have gained Google Earth but lost the world. “World” means a location, a background against which our actions become significant. But in a situation in which everything is potentially significant, we are lost. (Morton 2010: 30)

Timothy Morton argues that during our times of anthropogenic ecological crisis, a new pattern of thought surfaces which he calls *the ecological thought*, it is a form of thinking which by showing the interconnectedness of all things “brings to light aspects of our existence that have remained unconscious for a long time” (2010: 9). The ecological thought, therefore, possesses highly haunting and uncanny properties. Morton therefore argues that Freud’s essay on the uncanny is extremely important for ecological thought: “The uncanny exists because we’re always somewhere. Repetition, with its play of familiarity and difference, it thus possible” (2010: 51). According to Morton, the uncanny enables us to visualize one of the main aspects of the ecological thought, which is the idea of repetition enabled by the awareness of the interconnectedness of all things:

The uncanny stirs because total interconnectedness enables it. Industry means repetition, automation, and the creation of junkspace. Repetition and automation apply to the creation of spaces, not just the manufacture of objects. Think of a grid pattern of streets: functional, efficient, and easy to produce. A grid involves repetition in at least two dimensions – three if you include repeating tower blocks. You will inevitably encounter repetition in the modern city. You will inevitably experience the uncanny. The uncanny is a function of repetition, because it brings to light our compulsion to repeat, a feature of our psyche. This is why *doppelgänger*s are uncanny and why the strange stranger in general is uncanny – both remind us of us. And people live in those streets – other people. Modern life multiplies these uncanny experiences. The uncanny applies to evolution at large, because it appears to reenact its past

actions. The double walls of certain cells are evidence of some ancient coexistence. (2010: 52-53)

Timothy Morton's work is permeated by the uncanny, and he often stresses how uncanniness is not just an inherent trait of our times, but also how it should be nurtured and given space to, as it allows us to embrace intimacy and the strange strangeness of other beings. During the time of hyperobjects, reality becomes increasingly uncanny: the same notions of world and Nature dissolve, together with our idea of home and "modern certainties" (2013: 130). Instead, we find ourselves inside some extremely spatially and temporally large objects such as global warming. Consequently, what we are left with is what Morton terms "increased intimacy", the awareness of being closely linked to other human, non-human, living and non-living entities: "the more we know about interconnection, the more it becomes impossible to posit some entity beyond or behind the interrelated beings" (2013: 129). Accordingly, it is no longer possible to distance ourselves from the world, instead we live in an increased state of coexistence: "Coexistence is in our face: it is our face. We are made of nonhuman and non-sentient and non-living entities. It's not a cozy situation: it's a spooky, uncanny situation" (2013:132). In fact, it is important to keep in mind the idea whereby our world has become unhinged: the coordinates around which we built our globe – in the modern Chakrabartian sense – have been erased. There's no inert planet to perform as a stage-background for the anthropic, capitalist, globalized society we live in. That same idea of modernity has become unreal, a sort of long-lasting inertia which is being eroded by the increasing effects of the planetary crisis which it has itself engendered. Moreover, Morton's concepts of "hypocrisies" and "delivery" shed a clearer light onto the idea of "recognition". Hyperobjects by their networks of "delivery" expose and make recognizable things which were hidden before. They surface again by taking a familiarly strange form. In this respect, Morton's idea of "uncanny" also aligns with Heidegger's who recognises the deep revelatory power of uncanniness¹⁴. The Anthropocene is therefore a highly uncanny

¹⁴ In her recent study *Heidegger on Being Uncanny* (2015), Katherine Whity explores the importance of uncanniness in the work of the German philosopher. In fact, the uncanny keeps coming back in various sections of his writing, and it is an important aspect of *Being and Time* (1927). Moreover, the word "uncanny" appears prominently in Heidegger's study on Sophocles' *Antigone*, and especially in his translation of "The Ode to Man", that he considers the "origin of the human being" (2015: 103). In this respect, he translates the Greek word *deinon* (something like "terrible" or "fearful") with "uncanny". In this respect, "The Ode to Man": "is telling us what the human being is by explaining the human relationship to being. It is the story of Dasein. And on this story, Dasein is *deinon*, uncanny" (2015: 106). In this respect, uncanniness for Heidegger appears to be an ontological status, a perpetual "play between the familiar and the unfamiliar" (2015: 9), something that the *Dasein* both is and feels. And it is by feeling uncanny that we are revealed to ourselves as inherent uncanny beings (2015:48). Moreover, still following Whity's reading

time, when by producing and imposing the artificial binomy Nature-Culture, and by suppressing and hiding the first in an epistemological realm beyond our daily existence, capitalist modernity produced the strongest and most disruptive set of relation within the *oikos*. The uncanny therefore, proves to be extremely useful when it comes to describing the collapse of the boundaries which have defined our conception of the world since the rise of modernity. The uncanny in fact:

shakes fundamental categories of knowledge and experience, while yet depending on them; it challenges the limits of experience and understanding, given the world we (think we) live in. We cannot, therefore, 'locate' the uncanny; we cannot ask where it 'belongs'. 'If it belongs, it is no longer a question of the uncanny.' Thus it disturbs our sense of atmosphere, makes us 'apprehensive' in our apprehension of 'presence', of the here, the now, of time, the taken for granted framework of experience. (John and Jervis 2008: 11)

In this respect, Dipesh Chakrabarty's theory of scalar collision is hinged on the uncanny blurring of inside-outside borders, which engenders a feeling that he calls "being outscaled" or "falling". The idea of "falling" calls back to the Heideggerian "verfallen" which seems to be linked both to our falling into our everyday lives and to an "existential structure of being-in-the-world" (Carman 2015: 2), which is also linked to the idea whereby "both uncanniness and anxiety are at the heart of Dasein's being, so that falling, even in its primordial form, must always be an ambiguous response to the essential elusiveness and obscurity of existence" (2015: 2). In this respect Chakrabarty describes the feeling as:

the relatively recent collapsing of these differently scaled chronologies now stares at us in the face creating an affect that I liken to the affect of falling: we have fallen into "deep" history, into deep, geological time. This falling into "deep" history carries a certain shock of recognition – recognition of the otherness of the planet and its very large-scale spatial and temporal processes of which we have, unintentionally, become part. (2015: 21)

What we should highlight in this passage is the idea of "recognition", of knowing again something which we once knew, and which now presents itself as some sort of familiar yet terrifying alterity:

This thrownness is about the recognition of the otherness of the planet itself: an awakening to the awareness that we are not always in practical and/or aesthetic relationship with this place where we find ourselves. Its very long-term and dynamic pasts that we could, in the

of Heidegger, uncanniness is revealed through "angst" which generally produces a revelatory breakdown. In some respect, and most strikingly, Whity says: "Feeling uncanny is in some sense feeling what we are" (2015: 4).

history of “civilization,” mostly take for granted in going about our daily business, are now something that our smaller histories of conflicting attachments, desires, and aspirations have run up against, suddenly leaving us not only with an identifiable range of moods but also with our own sense of having been decentered from the narratives that we ourselves tell of this place. (2015: 183)

In conclusion, following Chakrabarty’s thinking there are two main aspects which can be highlighted in relation to the uncanny: the first one is the emergence of a human doppelgänger, the human of the “human species” which, through his collective actions can alter planetary dynamics. This collective human body, as also highlighted by Naomi Booth produces and propagates doppelgängers:

In the Anthropocene, the human body proliferates, is doubled, duplicates itself into the world. Your body is in the sky, as a poison and climate turbulence. Your body is on the ground, doubling the dying of the creatures that you have killed. Your body is attending the corpseless funeral of the glacier that you have destroyed. (2020: 1)

Similarly, the same actions produced by humanity’s collective force, come back through those natural events which Amitav Ghosh defines as “improbable and uncanny”, and which Mauro Van Hacken identifies as the uncanniness of nature. As Chakrabarty says, humanity recognizes the alterity of the planet, they come to know again something which has seemingly been forgotten but which is coming back in a way which Freud would recognize as the return of the repressed. At the same time, the idea of “anthropogenic” climate crises questions the same meaning of “human”, while reinstating the necessity of exposing the historical, capital driven dynamics which have brought about this change. In this sense, if the combined crises of the Anthropocene—understood as the climate, economic, social, local, global and planetary crises—produce a sense of un-worlding, then the narratives that emerge will inherently reflect worlds in which the unity of meaning is fractured. These narratives will make room for representations that highlight the lack of coherent world coordinates and the blurring of in-out spaces, or, as Timothy Morton describes, the indistinguishability of backgrounds and foregrounds.

1.2 How can the end of the world be narrated? Non-realist, multiscalar, uncanny narratives

The literary genre of realism, which initially aimed to faithfully depict a coherent and tangible world, appears inadequate when capturing and portraying the complexities of the contemporary period. The modern realist novel was born alongside with the rise of industrial modernity and was widely based on Descartes philosophical precepts of the division between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, and of the individual power to understand, know, and shape the world (Watt 2001 [1956]). Vittorini also says: “the modern narrative presents itself as verisimilitude in the sense that it represents actions that correspond as so many applications to a body of maxims recognised as true by the audience it addresses; these maxims, by the very fact of being shared, do not need to be explicated” (2020: 73, my translation)¹⁵. According to Vittorini, the present lacks the structured, cohesive narrative characteristic of realism and instead manifests as a dynamic and elusive entity that resists straightforward representation. Vittorini suggests that current narratives exhibit characteristics “divergent from the traditional mimetic approaches, favouring reticular, digressive, and fractal structures that eschew unity and embrace a more fragmented portrayal of reality” (2020: 19). In this context, narrative forms that deviate from strict mimesis, embracing semi-mimetic and non-mimetic structures, emerge as more suitable for capturing the nuances of the present moment. Echoing Amitav Ghosh's perspective (2016), there arises a necessity for narratives accommodating ambiguity, estrangement, and the unsettling, while adeptly navigating the spaces in between various contrasting elements. These narratives resist definitive resolutions, embracing the complexities of the in-between, transcending conventional genres and form boundaries. The novels I will analyse do not give any hope for reparation within the current system, but instead unveil and unmask its inherent dynamics. The settings that they depict are partially adjacent to our own “world”, but they systematically render it as unreal through a movement of mimesis and estrangement. This helps questioning what we normally consider as “normal” and “familiar”.

¹⁵ The original text says: “il racconto moderno si presenta come verosimile nel senso che rappresenta azione che corrispondono come altrettante applicazioni a un corpo di massime riconosciute come vere dal pubblico a cui esso si rivolge; queste massime, per il fatto stesso di essere condivise, non hanno bisogno di essere esplicitate”.

Given all this, we should go back to Freud's essay. The *Uncanny*'s most substantial basis could be considered as not only the work of his predecessor Ernst Jentsch, but – even more importantly – literature. Especially, Freud not only analyses the short story *The Sandman* by 19th century German author Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann, but in the same essay *The Uncanny* presents a strong literary character. Contextually, Nicholas Royle states: “he has demonstrated very well that the question of literature, fictionality and “imaginative productions” cannot be dissociated from any attempt (...) to elaborate a theory or critical account of the uncanny” (2003: 18). Freud recognizes the literary as a privileged space for the insurgence of the uncanny, especially because it provides “much more fertile province than the uncanny in real life, for it contains the whole of the latter and something more besides, something that cannot be found in real life” (1919: 18). Although, for the uncanny to surface, the literary text needs to provide some attachment to reality. In this way, the unfamiliar inside the familiar can emerge. In fact, uncanniness fails to appear when the text employs an approach to world-building which differs from common reality, or that includes superior entities, demons, and gods. Instead, we attune to the world presented to us by the writer and consequently, things which would normally appear as uncanny in our daily lives are not felt as such (1919: 18). Rather:

The situation is altered as soon as the writer pretends to move in the world of common reality. In this case he accepts all the conditions operating to produce uncanny feelings in real life; and everything that would have an uncanny effect in reality has it in his story. But in this case, too, he can increase his effect and multiply it far beyond what could happen in reality. By bringing about events which never or very rarely happen in fact. (1919: 18).

Therefore, as expounded in this section and the subsequent one, the phenomenon of the uncanny within literary texts occupies a liminal space straddling mimetic and non-mimetic narrative techniques. It is the interplay between reality and unreality, and between recognition and estrangement, that engenders the peculiar sensation of unfamiliar familiarity which lies at the core of the uncanny. This also echoes McNally's analysis of Gothic Marxism, in which he describes Marx's quest for a language that could defamiliarize what we take as “reality”: “Marx seeks to estrange us from the familiar so that we might actually see it for what it is. To this end, he requires a dialectical language of doublings and reversals” (2011: 116).

More recently, Mark Fisher in his essay *The Weird and the Eerie* (2016) represented an important contribution to this discourse. Starting from Freud's *Uncanny*, Fisher expands

the concept identifying two adjacent “affects” or “modes” that according to him have been overshadowed by the notoriousness of the uncanny. He calls them “the weird” and “the eerie”. If we can trace a line of commonality between the uncanny, the weird and the eerie in Fisher’s terms this would be that: “They are all affects, but they are also modes: modes of film and fiction, modes of perception, ultimately, you might even say, modes of being. Even so, they are not quite genres” (2016: 7). In Fisher’s words the “weird” can be defined as:

a particular kind of perturbation. It involves a sensation of wrongness: a weird entity or object is so strange that it makes us feel that it should not exist, or at least it should not exist here. Yet if the entity or object is here, then the categories which we have up until now used to make sense of the world cannot be valid. The weird thing is not wrong, after all: it is our conceptions that must be inadequate (2016: 7).

On the other hand, the eerie is defined as:

A sense of the eerie seldom clings to enclosed and inhabited domestic spaces; we find the eerie more readily in landscapes partially emptied of the human. What happened to produce these ruins, this disappearance? What kind of entity was involved? What kind of thing was it that emitted such an eerie cry? As we can see from these examples, the eerie is fundamentally tied up with questions of agency. What kind of agent is acting here? Is there an agent at all? (2016: 8).

Notwithstanding Fisher’s definitions, when it comes to describing novels which depict the crumbling of the modern worldview through the recurrence of its repressed aspects such as Nature, capitalist dynamics, and large planetary scales, the uncanny is the most apt analytical category. In fact, if both the weird and the eerie give a perspective of the inside from the outside showing that they were never actually separated, the uncanny employs the opposite perspective. It shows the disruption of the inside through the irruption of the outside and therefore shows, from that “indoor” perspective, that where we thought we had walls separating us from the outside there has never been in fact anything at all. Consequently, Tim Vermeulen’s description of the shopping mall as a metaphor for our times comes closer to the uncanniness of our current present moment, especially depicting the breaking of inside-outside borders from an “indoor” perspective. Vermeulen, drawing on Camille de Toledo’s *Coming of Age at the End of History* (2008) starts by saying that, although the shopping mall was the privileged metaphor for describing the simulacra of the post-modern, nowadays it has lost its centrality and lies outside the realm of philosophical and theoretical discussions. He says that,

metaphorically, after Fukuyama's claim for the end of history we all took shelter into the shopping mall:

(...) the doors are barricaded, we walk around in this air-conditioned halls, and it's quite marvellous: we can shop, we can get coffee from all over the world at the local Starbucks which is served presumably also by people from all over the world, and we feel quite at ease. But gradually, what happens for whatever reason is that people start to feel unwell in the shopping mall. Maybe it's the air conditioning that makes us breathe louder and Toledo calls this "claustrophobia of the chest", we feel sick (...) and as we are strolling around feeling increasingly bad the mall also takes a turn for the worst. We don't know whether it's because of the 2008 crisis, but something is beginning to happen. The shops are boarded up, people begin to have less to spend in those shops, and so the shopping mall becomes to look like every shopping mall from the mid-2000: a zombie movie. And we find there is no way out: shopping malls don't have any windows, they are not part of the outside because they are a simulated environment. And so we then starting hearing something on the walls, a stomping sound: it might be something great or good, it might be an illusion, it might be something real, it might be that the air conditioning is creating the sound or it might be some kind of metaphysical thing. Maybe the outside isn't gone after all, there is something out there, but we don't know. And yet for us to reorganize this insight to give meaning once again people begin to take to these sounds, begin to paint pictures on the wall pretending to see what it could look like, and begin to behave differently and so on. (...) the gist of this metamodern moment is that there is this knocking sound that comes at a moment when we all already have this claustrophobia of the chest: it's a possibility of metaphysics, but not its actualization, it's a possibility of an outside but we don't really know if it's there, it's the possibility of an ecological disaster etc.: it's a living in-between, something it's just around the corner but who knows what it is. (2021: 23:00 – 27:00)

Therefore, many artistic endeavours of the moment are trying to deal with those knocking sounds while still being inside the shopping mall because "none of us has made it out". The inside-outside borders are crumbling but we are still inside the system, our world view is crumbling but we are still coping with it. Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker call the aesthetic representation of our moment of multiple and conjoined crisis "metamodernism" (2010). By "meta" they mean the constant oscillation that current artistic production concerned with a critical account of the present makes between modern and post-modern paradigmas, and especially between modernism's naive optimism and post-modernism's pessimistic desacrilization. In this respect, metamodernism signals a liminal, in-between position which is thus tangential to the resurgence of the Anthropocene uncanny especially in its in-between, neither/or status. Vermeulen and Akker speak about the metamodern tendency to bring back aspects of Romanticism such as the "inclination toward the tragic, the sublime, and the uncanny stem, aesthetic categories lingering between projection and perception, form and the unformable, coherence and chaos, corruption and innocence" (2010: 8). And moreover:

Metamodern neoromanticism should not merely be understood as re-appropriation; it should be interpreted as re-signification: it is the re-signification of "the commonplace with

significance, the ordinary with mystery, the familiar with the seamliness of the unfamiliar, and the finite with the semblance of the infinite'. (2010: 10)

The metamodern paradigm helps to situate current literary endeavours which challenge cemented beliefs, and projects texts into our un-worlding present. Although I won't extensively deal with metamodern theories, the concept of the metamodern period as a "neither-nor status", the idea of constructive pastiche, and historical depthness is pivotal in situating the texts I deal with in the context of a broader literary trend.

The texts I set out to analyse merge several genres, such as realism, gothic and sci-fi, as well as formal structures, as for example, unreliable narrators, structural fragmentation, and strong intertextuality (which do produce a constant oscillation between mimesis and estrangement) together with a continuous re-negotiation of its narratorial formal and genre's limits. The negotiation between recognition and estrangement serves Freud's idea of the uncanny as a breaking through of a certain constituted framework of reality. In this context, Pieter Vermeulen notices how, since the Anthropocene unhinges the basic coordinates of our worldview, strict genre restrictions can't account for its manifold aspects. Consequently, Vermeulen states: "the operations of literary form in the Anthropocene include an acknowledgement of forces that resist form, and it is precisely these resistant forces that emerge in and through the attempt to describe an unruly reality" (2020: 65). Hence, genre hybridity has become common and recurrent. Vermeulen in this respect says: "Anthropocene fiction's genre-bending, then, often produces inscrutable, quaint, and awkward affects, rather than the more grandiose emotions of traditional literature (think of sympathy, exaltation, or catharsis)" (2020: 64). Moreover, still echoing Vermeulen, Akker and Gibson, genres should be understood as a way for specific things to be said, or be made visible, or felt. In this respect, genre hybridity oversteps Frederic Jameson's idea of pastiche as: "the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language" (1991: 48). For Jameson, pastiche is the language of simulacrum which uses old aesthetic modes without creating any new meaning. Instead, in our current time we witness what could be termed as constructive pastiche, in which specific genres are aligned to specific functions, especially in their attempt to critically engage with our present moment:

Metamodern artists often employ similar strategies to their postmodern predecessors in the way that they eclectically quote past styles, freely use older techniques and playfully adopt traditional conventions. Indeed, they, too, recycle the scrapheap of history. Yet, in doing so,

metamodern artists attempt to move beyond the worn-out sensibilities and emptied practices of the postmodernists – not by radically parting with their attitudes and techniques but by incorporating and redirecting them towards new positions and horizons (however effective or politically sound these may be). (Vermeulen 2017: 31)

Consequently, the novels I am going to analyse break the surface of supposedly realistic narrative accounts by means of either using sci-fi and gothic genre tropes and *tropoi*, or by adding extra layers of intertextuality through specific works of fiction which reinforce the main text struggle to act as a critical counterpoint of our current moment. Especially, as we will see in the next paragraph, both gothic and sci-fi, or more broadly “supernatural”, “speculative fiction”, or even “non-realistic fiction” in general, act as a litmus test of various stages of modernity and progress. Therefore, acting as anti-realist narratives which push against the realist-capitalist stance, by making surface all those aspects which should have remained hidden according to the status quo level of representation. Consequently, the reading of the novels which I propose during this thesis, and which I will carry out through an analytical framework called Uncanny Realism, aims at systematically destroying and defamiliarizing the familiar, by showing how the end-of-the-world is closer to us than we normally thought and that it is in the undoing of that same world that the possibility for new worlds reside. The significance lies in recognizing non-realist literary genres as vehicles for the expression of critical perspectives. These genres, in diverging from realism, serve as platforms to articulate notions of critical strangeness and critical perturbation, prompting an interrogation of established notions of reality. Through this lens, literature becomes instrumental in problematizing the principles underpinning reality, thereby catalyzing a critical examination of modernization processes within the capitalist world system. In 2015, the Warwick Collective published a book called *Combined and Uneven Development, towards a New Theory of World Literature*, in which they developed the idea of *irrealism*. Irrealism is seen as a genre-bending, non-realistic writing modality which surfaces against the numerous waves of capitalisation of the world especially within semi peripheral countries or areas. I believe that the WReC’s idea of irrealism is extremely helpful to understand how non-mimetic, and semi-mimetic narrative accounts are a site of struggle and critical attitude towards the reality-status quo world-wide. Through their departure from literary realism, these texts provide avenues for challenging prevailing narratives and ideologies, offering insights into the complexities of global socio-economic dynamics. Consequently, it appears that especially non-mimetic genres such as gothic and the various strands of

sci-fi, have emerged as a critical response to modernity and capitalism, especially contrasting the realist genre which, instead, was seen as an ally of those same logics and dynamics. Moreover, in the second paragraph I will outline how, in order to bend the capitalist reality principle, it is necessary to escape one dimensional teleological presentism. Instead, by looking at the works of Timothy Clark and Jennifer Wenzel, we'll see how multiscale readings enable an unframing of the realist narrative which illuminates aspects of our life as human beings and living species which would have otherwise been hidden. At last, we will look at Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement* which by calling for uncanny and multiscale approaches for both creative writing and literary criticism, brings together the other two paragraphs and leads the way forward towards my analytical framework.

1.2.2 The critical, anti-realist stance of non-realistic fiction

In Monsters of the Market McNally starts his chapter titled *Marx's Monsters: Vampire-Capital and the Nightmare-World of Late Capitalism* by saying:

Capitalism is both monstrous and magical. Crucially, its magic consists in concealing the occult economy the obscure transactions between human bodies and capital – on which it rests. Entranced by this sorcery, the equivalent of magic-caps pulled over our eyes and ears, bourgeois common sense vigorously denies the monsters in our midst. But, as with all anxious denials, what has disappeared performs a return of the repressed. (2011: 113)

Contextually, irrealist writing and criticism function to disrupt and challenge the normalized perspectives surrounding capitalist structures, aiming to reintroduce, summon, and defamiliarize the dynamics that are often accepted without question. Through this process, irrealist forms serve as tools for dismantling the "reality principle"—the conventional view of what is seen as real or given—by employing non-realist modes of expression as powerful mediums of denunciation and exposure. The theoretical approaches discussed in this section seek to deconstruct perceived reality, revealing the latent operations of capitalist forces through the lens of the unfamiliar and the estranged, enabling a critical re-engagement with the structures typically taken as immutable or natural.

In the context of world-literature studies, following the publication of Franco Moretti's essay *Conjectures on World Literature* (2000), many scholars have started to

analyse the relationship between world literature and the capitalist world-system. What is more important for our discussion here is Moretti's parallel between Immanuel Wallerstein's world system analysis and world literature, he states:

I will borrow this initial hypothesis from the world-system school of economic history, for which international capitalism is a system that is simultaneously one, and unequal: with a core, and a periphery (and a semiperiphery) that are bound together in a relationship of growing inequality. (2000: 55)

In 2015, Moretti's essay was followed by a work titled *Combined and Uneven Development, towards a New Theory of World-Literature*, written by the Warwick Research Collective (WReC). Here, they build on Moretti's intuition. The Warwick Collective considers the combined and uneven developed structure of world capitalism alongside the questions posed by "world literature". Moreover, one of the pillars of their theory is the concept of system, which they develop with Braudel and Wallerstein in mind. They describe a system: "as being characterised by vertical and horizontal integration, connection, and interconnection, structurality and organisation, internal differentiation, a hierarchy of constitutive elements governed by specific 'logics' of determination and relationality" (2015: 8). Moreover, the system they consider, and which coincides with Jason Moore's history of Capitalocene, diverges from previous systems inasmuch as: "The significant exception is the modern capitalist 'world-system', one of the indices of whose historical unprecedentedness consists precisely in the fact that it is a world-system that is also, uniquely and for the first time, a world system" (2015: 8). And consequently, they consider "world literature" as: "the literature of the world-system - of the modern capitalist world-system, that is. That, baldly, is our hypothesis, stated in the form of a *lex parsimoniae*" (2015: 8). The WReC also strongly agrees with Fredric Jameson's formulation of "singular modernity", where singular doesn't stand for equal but, on the contrary, it considers the inherent and indispensable inequalities of the capitalist world-system. To further clarify their conceptualization of "world-literature" they underscore how capitalism is its "substrate" and modernity its "concept and form". In addition, they identify the timeframe of world literature "as a development of the past 200 years, though its formal conditions of possibility would have begun to be established some three centuries earlier" (2015: 15). In their analysis they focus on the literary form of the *novel*, which they consider, following Jameson, a product of modernity and therefore the literary form which better incorporates capitalist modernity.

They consider the novel as a form which is both potentially *plastic* and *hybrid*, and more specifically:

The peculiar plasticity and hybridity of the novel form enables it to incorporate not only multiple literary levels, genres and modes, but also other non-literary and archaic cultural forms - so that, for example, realist elements might be mixed with more experimental modes of narration, or older literary devices might be reactivated in juxtaposition with more contemporary frames, in order to register a bifurcated or ruptured sensorium of the space-time of the (semi-)periphery. (2015: 16)

Notably, the idea of semi-periphery should be considered not only as a property of semi-peripheral countries, but also as one of semi-peripheral areas and living material realities, present in what is generally considered the centre. To describe the juxtaposition of different narrative layers and heterogeneous narrative material they continue by saying:

Any typology of combined and uneven development will offer a catalogue of effects or motifs at the level of narrative form: discrepant encounters, alienation effects, surreal cross-linkages, unidentified freakish objects, unlikely likenesses across barriers of language, period, territory - the equivalent of umbrellas meeting sewing machines on (animated) dissecting tables. (2015: 17)

And also:

We might then see the 'accordionising' or 'telescoping' function of combined and uneven development as a form of time travel within the same space, a spatial bridging of unlike times - in Lefebvre's sense, the production of untimely space - that leads from the classic forms of nineteenth-century realism to the speculative methodologies of today's global science fiction. (2015: 17)

They also argue that literary forms and trends are not casual or unbounded from their material background. Rather, they are brought forward by “the long waves of capitalisation of the world”. In this context their literary world system theory “enables comparison of discrepant literary subunits and social formations of the world-system, both at the same point in chronological time and at congruent conjunctures in the recurring rhythmic cycles of capitalism” (2015: 68). Moreover, and probably most importantly for my discussion, it's the collective's idea of a shared set of formal and thematic features common to the texts they examine which they name “irrealism”.¹⁶

¹⁶ The WReC based their concept of irrealism on Michael Löwy's article *L'irrealism critique* (2019). He restarts from Luckas' Marxist tradition of critical realism, noting how that critical tradition can in the long run become not only dogmatic but also restrictive in that it excludes several texts that do not fall under the characteristics of literary realism. These kinds of texts have great critical power for Löwy, which is why he coins the term *irrealism critique*, or critical irrealism. In this sense he takes as an example the novels of

Irrealism stands for both the narrative tendency towards “anti-linear plot lines, meta-narratorial devices, un-rounded characters, unreliable narrators, contradictory points of view” (2015: 51) and their “self-conscious conversation with, and deployment of, relevant formal properties of adjacent forms (often non-literary) within their local or regional cultural ecology” (2015: 52). More specifically, they consider “irrealism” as a property of (semi)peripheral countries and areas in the world-system. It is in fact in the (semi)peripheral conjuncture of fictitious capital and extractivism that the formal features of irrealism are rooted. Fictitious, volatile capital and primitive capital accumulation are not only inherent and necessary to world capitalism, but they can’t exist separately from each other:

The simultaneity of material and immaterial regimes of production – of spilled blood and evanescent credit, to put it sloganistically - which is a pervasive and conspicuous feature of peripheral social formations, especially, does not readily lend itself to representation through the relative facticity of realist forms of the 'ideal-type'. The in-mixing of the imaginary and the factual that characterises 'irrealist' writing is arguably more sensitive to this simultaneity, to the seemingly incongruous conjunction of 'abstract' and 'scarring' modes of capitalisation. (2015: 70)

The irrealist mode of writing, therefore, is characterized by a set of thematic and formal features, such as multiple narrative layers, unreliable narrators, and the influence of multiple literary traditions, especially culture-specific literary forms, gothic and sci-fi tropes as well as non-literary productions. Irrealism is also more prominent in (semi-)peripheral areas of the world-system and of peripheralized zones of the centre. Here, the ferocity of capitalism’s uneven development can’t find satisfactory expression in an “ideal type” realism, and therefore irrealism proves to be the way in which the representation of the real is heightened and perfected. At the same time, they argue that irrealism has been a distinctive narrative mode of the last 200 years, although it’s rooted far back in time, in what Jason Moore identifies as Capitalocene. The concept of irrealism is fundamentally based on a world-system literary analysis. It therefore helps shed light

Kafka, which despite being described by Luckas as carrying a modernist anti-realism based on a subjective vision succeed, according to Löwy, in illuminating reality from within. He recognizes Romanticism as an early example of critical irrealism especially in the critique it brings to industrial modernity and some of its most salient features. First of all, the "disenchantment of the world" through external utilitarian rationalization. In this sense, Romanticism sees in religion, but also in the magical and mystical arts, the possibility of re-enchanting the world. And in the arts and literature it does so by exploring the realm of the fantastic, the Gothic, and the legendary. Secondly, the quantification of the world; then the mechanization of the world; rationalist abstraction; the dissolution of social ties. Afterwards, for more recent examples he turns to E.T.A. Hoffman’s, Kafka’s and Huxley’s. In this respect, he highlights how critical irrealism helps us understand and transform reality.

on the connections, conjunctures, and frictions of the system, and lends itself to fruitful comparisons between coeval literary productions from various parts of the world system, as well as between literature written in different time periods.

In 2019, Sharae Deckard and Stephen Shapiro, who are part of the Warwick Collective, coedited a volume titled *World Literature, Neoliberalism, and the Culture of Discontent*. In this more recent work, they add a few focal points to the argument which they have started in their previous volume. More specifically they make clear their decision to consciously use the term neoliberalism, in contrast to the theoretical trend that has seen it as having become obsolete for the purpose of describing our current economic regime. Moreover, they consider post-modernism as being the cultural substrate for neoliberalism and they strongly stand against those lines of thought which consider “The West” as the most prominent actant in neoliberalism, arguing in contrast for a world-historical approach to the phenomenon (2019: 3). Consequently, they not only consider World-Literature as the literature of the capitalist-world-system, as stated by the WReC, but also as the literature of the Capitalocene. Moreover, they extensively explain their understanding of core, semi-periphery and periphery dynamics:

core states are strong sovereign states that are able to enforce their decisions about the trans-boundary movements of goods, people, and capital (Wallerstein 2004: 46). In contrast, peripheral regions have weak sovereignty and usually tend towards monocultures of cash crops or extractive industries of single export commodities, while semi peripheries combine the two processes. (2019: 9)

Nonetheless, they see those processes as a property not just of the relationship between nation-states but also between the urban and intra-national. Semi-peripheral areas are described as sites where:

(...) the experiences of traumatic dispossession and exploitation by people from peripheries subjected to primitive accumulation, enclosure, and extraction collide together with the speculative entrepreneurship, technical innovations, jobbing interests, and cultural forms of the core. (2019: 10)

They also consider semi-peripheries as collision areas between “oral cultures, folkloric materials, and indigenous knowledge-systems from the periphery with the printed traditions, behavioural performances, and institutionally consecrated notations of the core” (2019: 11). Other crucial points which are developed in the volume are, the difference between *neoliberalism* and *neoliberalization* as well as *periodization* and

periodicity on the other. The first, one is based on the triptych division between neoliberalization, neoliberal modernity, and neoliberalism. First:

(...) “neoliberalization” would refer to the material processes and technologies of capitalist penetration and development, including financialization, privatization, structural adjustment, outsourcing, enclosure, flexibilization and dematerialization of labour, precarization, new regimes of algorithmic governmentality (Rouvroy 2013), and novel technics of enclosure and appropriation of nature (Moore 2015) enabled by revolutions in bioinformatics and genomics and so forth, all of which generate the new lifeworlds of neoliberal modernity. (2019: 15)

The other two instead can be defined as: the particular market ideologies, economic policies, development models, and academic paradigms associated with the global “neoliberal thought collective” (Plehwe as quoted in Deckard & Shapiro 2019: 23), but also the cultural formations which stand as a critique to the neoliberal moment “registering the culture of discontent against the abstraction of financialization and the scarring violence of seizure capitalism’s accumulation via dispossession” (2019: 17).

The idea of neoliberalism is useful to moderate the often-acclaimed novelty, and watershed power of the neoliberal period, while instead stressing the contiguity between the present moment and past stages in the history of capitalism. Moreover:

the use of a triumvirate of terms seeks to avoid both “strategic culturalist” and “reflectionist” interpretations of neoliberalism, that either overemphasize the role of culture or diminish it by portraying it as a deterministic result of political processes, insisting instead on a dynamic reading of culture as one of many relations in the complex totality of pressures that is neoliberal capitalism. (2019: 17)

Moreover, in their volume they argue for the search of periodicity more than periodization, which enables us to find similarities between “the nature of recurring familiarities across historical cycles of capital’s expanded reproduction” (2019: 27).

Periodicity is a useful analytical tool for literary analysis inasmuch as it:

identifies analogical similarities in chronically contiguous moments within capitalism’s long spiral, when writers might seek to reactivate older literary forms that mediate similar processes and refashion them to provide a new conceptual and aesthetic model for the present, while accepting that these recurrences have their own anagrammatic particularity. (2020: 29)

In their idea of periodization, Sharae Deckard and Stephen Shapiro dwell on the idea developed by Eli Jelly Shapiro in her essay *Literature, Theory, and the Temporalities of Neoliberalism* (2019), where she explains how the three moments of capitalist accumulation, namely “primitive accumulation”, “expanded reproduction” and

“accumulation by fabrication”, are not necessarily diachronic phases but actually occur synchronously in different parts of the world system:

the distinctiveness of neoliberalism, as a global systemic phenomenon, lies not merely in the relative centrality of “accumulation by fabrication,” but in the contingent articulation of the latter with the extant temporalities of primitive accumulation and expanded reproduction. (2019: 7)

The idea for World Literature proposed by the Warwick Collective deeply challenges some of the issues which world literary criticism encountered in its development. In this context, Wenzel says:

While I draw on World Literature’s interest in world-systems, transnational circulation, translatability, and the politics of literary prestige (or “consecration”), I also confront the limits of these approaches: They often imagine a world of circulation without friction, where unresolved histories of economic, ecological, and epistemological violence are elided, naturalized, or euphemized. (2019: 8)

In this respect, the work of the members of the WReC, makes visible and stresses the often invisibilised processes of subjugation of both people and nature within the capitalist world-system. Their work represents a crucial perspective when it comes to understanding and analysing neoliberal ecological mechanisms in literary texts. In fact, the WReC challenges capitalism’s “elusive everydayness, its apparently seamless integration into the banal and mundane rhythms of quotidian experience” (McNally 2011: 2), by “operate by-way of estrangement effects, via procedures that make the everyday appear as it truly is: bizarre, shocking, monstrous” (2011: 19). Nonetheless, they don’t completely solve the other issues brought forward by Wenzel when she says: “For me, the urgent question remains how to calibrate the world-system of World Literature with the Earth system remade in the Anthropocene as well as other vectors of environmental injustice” (2019: 8). In order to meet this question, I argue that we need to also encompass in our reading practice planetary time and spatial scales, which, as we have widely discussed before, have been brought to the fore through the epochal scalar conjuncture fuelled by the same capitalist and neoliberal ecological regime that the WReC helps us to envisage. Those scales cannot be read separately. Nonetheless, the idea of *irrealism* as theorized by the WReC, is a pivotal point around which my analytical framework, Uncanny Realism, will be developed. In fact, *irrealism* is uncanny not only because it refers to genres which might themselves be deemed as uncanny, such as gothic, but it also accounts for a layered modality where various narrative forms merge and emerge to haunt

one another. Moreover, since various waves of irrealism mirror various waves of capitalization of the world, the several narrative genres which haunt the text stand for the repressed, forgotten and hidden diachronic waves of exploitation, dispossession and fabrication. In the contemporary moment and drawing on Jason Moore's concept of the "end of the four cheaps" alongside the "crisis of the Capitalocene," the escalating erosion of traditional capitalist foundations signals the onset of intensified, more violent forms of extractivism and exploitation. This shift has not only accelerated a profound Global-Planetary collision but has also facilitated the resurgence of irrealist motifs within literary texts. These motifs resurface as spectral traces, carving a critical pathway for interrogating the historical trajectories leading to the present crisis, while simultaneously offering a narrative space for depicting scales of time and space that transcend the human—a confrontation with the non-human temporality and spatiality that capitalist frameworks traditionally obscure. According to Timothy Morton, art must attune: "to the demonic, interobjective space in which causal-aesthetic events float like genies, nymphs, faeries, and djinn" (2013: 172). In the upcoming section, we will examine the concept of multiple scale-reading, which enables us to comprehend various scales encompassing not only human but also non-human dimensions. This approach facilitates the exploration of deep and recorded history, as well as hyperobjective time and space scales. By adopting a multiscale perspective, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena that transcend traditional boundaries and temporal frameworks. Moreover, when coupled with non-realist writing modalities, the concept of multiple scale-reading contributes to the dismantling of the human-scale dimension of our worldview. By integrating multiple scale-reading with these non-realist tropes, we can further deconstruct and transcend our limited understanding of the world, opening up new avenues for critical inquiry and imaginative exploration.

1.2.3 Against modern realism's teleology and towards a multiple-scalar reading

Time has always been a pivotal point in the relationship between reality and realism, especially in the modern novel. Vittorini traces the uses of time in modern, modernist, post-modern and metamodern novel. In the former, the representation of time was functional to the purpose of mimetic representation of the story, which in turn became a

signifier of shared precepts of reality. In modernism, on the other hand, the novel tends to want to truthfully represent the inwardness of the subject and thus becomes “an operation on duration, a spell that acts on the passage of time, contracting or dilating it’ and, thanks to its exacerbated melodramatic imagination puts it at the centre of an entirely internalised dramaturgy” (2020: 95). Post-modernism, on the other hand, rails against time as the cornerstone of modern realism and modifies, shapes, misrepresents it in every possible way. The meta-modern tale, on the other hand, is characterised by “a gnoseological effort”. It becomes an exploration of a complex and layered present, using disparate temporal levels to reconstruct a complete picture:

The artifices of order, duration and frequency become the main tools that allow the narrator's exploration, grappling with the complexity, disorder, and incorrigible randomness of reality, to take on the form of an outline that, although multiple, dispersive, hypertextual and fractal, can nonetheless aspire to represent in a complete and intelligible manner <<the infinite number of things that, like grains of sand, cannot be counted >>. (2020: 102)

The interplay of various oscillations within texts highlights a significant discourse between the global and the planetary realms. When considering that the world itself is a construct that encompasses temporal dimensions (Cheah: 2016), the conventional perception of time as a linear and teleological construct becomes insufficient in the context of an un-worlded present and in the time of hyperobjects. In this altered reality, the crisis of the present, as articulated by Chakrabarty, incorporates this scalar dispersion. It navigates between the global and the planetary, engaging with both deep history and recorded history, while also encompassing the human experience within the capitalist world-system, and the human experience as part of a broader species. These collisions and scalar shifts create moments of profound disruption within the texts, defamiliarizing the familiar world by altering its spatial-temporal coordinates. The narratives thus grapple with and evoke a sense of disorientation, challenging established perceptions of the world's dimensions and temporal constructs. Time-space relations have been extremely important in literary studies ever since Bakhtin theorised his idea of “chronotope”, namely: “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (1981: 84). Petra Eckhard rethinks about the idea of chronotope from the point of view of the uncanny and says that:

Looking at the literary uncanny from the perspective of timespace, therefore, reveals not only how the uncanny, as an atmospheric value, is established in a work of narrative fiction but

also, and even more importantly, provides the essential socio-cultural framework in which the uncanny, as a cultural construct, operates at a certain point in history. (2011: 45)

Consequently the current clashes of scales that characterizes the time of the Anthropocene, as described by Chakrabarty and Morton, is reflected in literature by depicting a chronotope which is not linked only to a given moment in a given locale, but which destroys this monodimensional rendering by depicting an enmeshment of time and spatial scales. Contextually, multiple scalar reading enhances the irreality and uncanniness of the text in the way in which they “link nonlinearity – an uncanniness of time – with non-place – an uncanniness of setting” (McGlynn 2021: 57).

Against this background, Timothy Clark’s theory of scalar reading appears to be crucial for our discussion. In 2012, Timothy Clark published an article called *Derangements of Scale*, in which, by analysing the short story *Elephant* by Raymond Carver, he showed how a single text could be read as an entanglement of scales, in which local and interpersonal relationships are shaped and modified not only by global and transnational events, but also by planetary phenomena. In the face of climate change, Clark argues, many of our resolutions for social justice, or environmental justice turn out to be not only extremely anthropocentric, but also dramatically misleading: “As a result of scale effects what is self-evident or rational at one scale may well be destructive or unjust at another ” (2012: 150), and also “climate change disrupts the scale at which one must think, skews categories of internal and external and resists inherited closed economies of accounting or explanation” (2012: 153). In this context – and up to the date of publication of the article – he considers critical approaches to the concept of scale as extremely insufficient:

It is as if critics were still writing on a flat and passive earth of indefinite extension, not a round, active one whose furthest distance comes from behind to tap you uncomfortably on the shoulder. Modes of thinking and practice that may once have seemed justified, internally coherent, self-evident or progressive now need to be reassessed in terms of hidden exclusions, disguised costs, or as offering a merely imaginary or temporary closure. (2012: 156)

Timothy Clark brought forward his discussion on ecocriticism and scalar thinking in his 2015 essay *Ecocriticism on the Edge the Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept*. Here, Clark, after having recollected the major theories on the Anthropocene, continues by stressing the fundamentally monoscalar dimension of commonly lived human experience. In this context our human scale dimension – especially when disjoined from wider scales – proves to be dramatically erroneous. In Clark’s words: “The scale at which one speaks

of oneself as a person with-a-world may be constitutively opaque to understanding beyond a now dangerously narrow spatial-temporal window” (2015: 36). Moreover, within global capitalism, the materiality of our local, contingent surroundings is embedded in the transnational circulation of food, commodities, and energy resources to the extent that: “while immersed in my own phenomenal field of significances, I am also effectively on the other side of the world” (2015: 39). Consequently, our local surroundings become tied to a feeling of epiphenomenality and unfamiliarity:

The daily phantasm of the familiar world is both a completely normal experience but also one constituted in an eclipse of the fact that its very familiarity is more truly ‘the inconceivable, the contradictory, the unthinkable, the impossible’. (2015: 40)

Moreover, Clark underscores how human activities have collectively become a destructive scalar element:

Scale effects underlie the way material and non-cultural elements inhabit and distort what may be presented as purely cultural political issues (...) as emergent, interference phenomena. As a result of scale effects, what is self-evident or rational at one scale may well be destructive or unjust at another. (2015: 73)

Within the realm of literary studies, Clark underlines the urgent need for both novelist and critics to find new ways to relate to the problem of scale:

As the Earth turns into a novel, partly incalculable hybrid entity where human effects interact in emergent ways with partially understood ecological systems, with counter-intuitive interactions that cross the continents, many habitual modes of thought, understanding and action now emerge as constituted by a kind of increasingly anachronistic ‘scale framing’, that is discursive practices that construct the scale at which a problem is experienced as a mode of predetermining the way in which it is conceived. (2015: 74)

In this longer essay Clark repropose a deepened scalar reading of *Elephant*. The short story is read at three different scalar levels: personal, national – with a time frame covering a few decades - and finally, “the whole Earth and its inhabitants, and placing ‘Elephant’ in the middle of a, let us say, 600-year time frame, from 300 years before 1988 to 2288, 300 after” (2015: 100). When confronted with the third scale, both the first and the second appear to be insufficient and incoherent, and the third scale enables the “unframing” of the first two:

Plots, characters, setting and trivia that seemed normal and harmless on the personal or national scale reappear as destructive doubles of themselves on the third scale, part of a

disturbing and encroaching parallel universe, whose malign reality it is becoming impossible to deny. (2015: 104)

Consequently, Clark argues, the apparent minimalist realism of Carver becomes more similar to magical realism when read at the third scale. Let's keep this idea in mind when going through the last two sections of this chapter:

This is to read Carver's kind of US realism as a privative form of 'magic realism'. That is to say, the affective, psychological and material effects and conditions of a high-energy infrastructure thing-agency, so to speak – pervade the whole physical and psychic space of Carver's text but are simply taken for granted there as some sort of inertly given norm, at work in generally assumed expectations of prosperity, opportunity, support and personal mobility in the characters, as well as in the narrator's indignant work-ethic. (2015: 107)

In this respect, still at the global level, works such as Moore's and Federici's can break through that reality norm by showing how those same naturalized processes are based on and entwined with global networks of violence and exploitation. At the same time, while the third scale elucidates the incompleteness of the personal and national scales, it is not complete without the other two and could potentially lead to a depersonalizing and authoritarian interpretation of the text. Moreover, "The broadest scale intervenes to deepen, ironize and 'de-humanize' the others, but not fully to supplant them as some general and repetitive last word about depressing or tragic ecological realities" (2015: 131). Therefore, I argue that more than a Russian-doll scale reading, we should look towards a multi-scalar enmeshment reading, where personal, national, global, and planetary are all intertwined in a given place at a given moment.

In the seventh chapter of the essay, Clark introduces what he calls "Anthropocene disorder" emerging from the overwhelming effects of – even superficial – scale effect awareness. In the author's words:

The phrase is coined to name a new kind of psychic disorder, inherent in the mismatch between familiar day-to-day perception and the sneering voice of even a minimal ecological understanding or awareness of scale effects; and in the gap between the human sense of time and slow-motion catastrophe and, finally, in a sense of disjunction between the destructive processes at issue and the adequacy of the arguments and measures being urged to address them. (2015: 140)

In this respect, scalar reading aligns itself with the collapse of artificial inside/outside borders which represent the structural mapping strategy of the capitalist world-system. Against this background, the collapse of binary assumptions on inside/outside borders brings forward a strong sense of the uncanny. In this respect Donald Kunze states that the

Uncanny: “transcends categories because it goes to the heart of space, which it converts through its reciprocal action of isolation and contamination, constructing distance then collapsing it” (2007: 5). In the last section dedicated to art, Clark strongly focuses on Timothy Morton’s hyperobjective art, which he describes as:

Consequently, the putative new phase of art that Morton suggests is one which stresses disjunctiveness, a being-overwhelmed by contexts in which the human perceiver is deeply implicated but cannot hope to command or sometimes even to comprehend. (...) This putative movement, such as it is, comprises works that strive to shake human cultural frames and scales of perception, revealing our own implication in material dynamics we cannot command and the illusoriness of any would-be sovereign overview. (2015: 184-188)

Following Morton’s insight (which is mainly based on visual art), Clark argues that both literary production and literary criticism should overcome past and formulaic structures embedded in “anthropocentric disillusions”. In this sense scalar readings, and a deeper focus on scalar phenomena within literary production, are considered “liberating, a release from false modes of reality taken as a norm”.

In her essay, *The Disposition of Nature: Environmental Crisis and World Literature* (2019), Jennifer Wenzel aligns with Clark, arguing for a multiscalar reading practice:

One is to consider whether and how the literary can be part of an environmentalist praxis: reading for the sake of the earth. Another is to understand “the planet” (or world or globe) as an interpretive rubric that raises questions of totality and scale. This means reading for images of the world entire: as a conceptual, social, or planetary whole (...) Reading for the planet is not disembodied “global,” cosmopolitan, or universalist reading from nowhere, as in the bird’s-eye view or “God trick” (Haraway 1988, 582) but reading from near to there: between specific sites, across multiple divides, at more than one scale. This multiscalar reading practice shuttles between the microscopically specific and the world-historical, in four dimensions, across space and time—reading (and rereading) as a dynamic process of rescaling. (2019: 2)

Jennifer Wenzel highlights the theoretical friction between discourses about the global and criticism of the planetary and tries to merge the several diverse analytical trajectories into one, more complex network:

At a moment when literary studies dare to envision a “world literature” capacious enough to be worthy of the name, environmental studies see a planet in crisis. Yet, this new conversation about world literature has said relatively little about the earth or the planet. How, then, can we understand contemporary concerns about planetary environmental crisis in terms of postcolonial studies’ interest in histories of political, economic, social, and epistemological inequality, as well as world literature’s interest in readers without borders? How can we think among these terms—globe, world, earth, and planet—to calibrate the globe in globalization with the world in world literature or the earth/planet at risk in environmental crisis? (2019: 2-3)

Both Clark's and Wenzel's theories enter in a dialectical relationship with Chakrabarty's. The last question posed by Wenzel does in fact resonate with Chakrabarty's research question during his latest works. When reimagining scalar thinking in the scope of literature, we must bear in mind Dipesh Chakrabarty's idea of the pivotal importance played by the conjuncture of the Global and the Planetary. Contextually – so as to avoid a static depiction of scale – it's also crucial to keep our reading practice tied to a constant zooming in and out between local cultural references, global interferences of commodities, finance, and economic-driven practices, as well as planetary time and space frameworks. In this respect, Wenzel describes her reading practice as:

Attentive to literature's staging of intersubjective encounters (not always between humans) and its singular intelligence, I tease out its capacity for imaginative and political work in the world. The shape of this teasing-out is more looping than linear; the arguments proceed cumulatively, pursuing unexpected associations and insight. (2019: 144)

Moreover, Clark's idea of "Anthropocene disorder" recalls Chakrabarty's concepts of both "being outscaled" and "falling". In fact, the recognition of several scales both in literary texts and in every-day life engenders a feeling of displacement and uncanniness. Not surprisingly, the title of Clarke's previous essay carries with it the idea of threshold, and the uncanny is also a threshold concept as Kevin Orr points out: "Both abjection and the uncanny are threshold concepts, involving disturbances at the boundaries" (2023: 2015). Also, although I believe (such as in the case of Carver's *Elephant*) that scalar reading could be applied to a vast number of genres, I also argue that certain narrative modalities of non-mimetic fiction not only facilitate the recognition of scale effects, but also heighten the feeling of uncanniness which they produce. In addition, Clark underscores certain aspects which, although tackled already by Morton, become clearer in his theory. Namely, the epiphenomenality of our lived experience within the global network of capitalism, and more specifically, the fact that any material object is hiding a history of fabrication, trade, transport, selling, usage, and disposal. Moreover, Clark's and Wenzel theories enable the reading of the global and planetary scale together, and therefore aim at overcoming what Wenzel's identifies as of one the main shortcomings of world-literary criticism:

For me, the urgent question remains how to calibrate the world-system of World Literature with the Earth system remade in the Anthropocene as well as other vectors of environmental injustice. In his demur to the hegemonic World Literature project, Cheah insists that "the

globe is not a world," by which he means a Heideggerian Welt of becoming and belonging; the uncritical liberalism of World Literature as world market construes literature as a commodity like any other, rather than a mode of worlding that might (following Goethe and Auerbach) spur the emergence of a "universal humanity". (2019: 42)

A scalar reading approach allows for a multiplicative engagement with literary texts, facilitating a departure from personal, localized interpretations that often view events as normative or realistic. By highlighting the limitations of this single, confined perspective, scalar reading broadens interpretive possibilities. This process cultivates a sense of productive uncanniness that, while initially disorienting, ultimately emancipates the reader from a flattened, monolithic interpretation anchored in individual experience. On the personal scale, certain norms and principles may be uncritically accepted as the only feasible solutions, aligning with Mark Fisher's concept of "capitalist realism," where even the most disruptive outcomes are framed as inevitable elements of the system. However, at broader scales, these conventions not only lose their assumed validity but also reveal their underlying destructiveness. Therefore, the uncanny feeling engendered by scalar readings is an overwhelmingly liberating one. In this respect, the incorporation of space-time into my account of the uncanny aligns with Eckhard's idea that:

The literary uncanny, therefore, is neither a genre, nor a fictional neurosis. Rather, it has to be approached as an atmospheric value of threat that is created by the multiple ways of how fictional time and space interact. Uncannily, what comes to mind again is Freud's lexicographic study, which proved that the German *unheimlich*, in fact, has, at its very heart, incorporated this spatial dimension all along. (2011: 39)

In this context, it is crucial to consider the rediscovery of historical depth characteristic of the post-postmodern, or metamodern, period. In this regard, Vermeulen and Van den Akker contrast the "depthlessness" described by Jameson with the "depthness" of metamodernism, where history regains substantial cognitive, interpretive, and exploratory significance. This renewed sense of depth is also evident in the treatment of time within contemporary novels, where, as Vittorini suggests, a "hermeneutic action of connecting, understanding, and accomplishing by returning to what has already occurred" (2020: 34, my translation) is emphasized. It is no coincidence, then, that the relationship between reality and realism in the texts under analysis is anamorphically transformed. This transformation occurs both through the alternating use of genres and shifts between mimetic and non-mimetic modes, as well as through modifications in the representation of time. Another operation also encountered by Gibson is what is called the spatialization of time. Especially in the recovery of earlier pasts, submerged history,

or deep history "the distance between narrative time (present) and story time (lost past) is imagined as a dislocation of space" (Vittorini 2020: 107, my translation)¹⁷. And again, "the narrative uses the representation of space as the correlate of a kind of mnemography, an ingenious device of writing through which the mind represents itself in time, renouncing the discursive introspection of the modern and modernist novel" (Vittorini 2020: 108, my translation)¹⁸. In addition, as Alison Gibson emphasizes: "The historical thinking required to understand climate change, in turn, necessitates narrative thinking; and precisely because anthropocenic narratives call for collective imagination, they are mythic structures or, in other words, grand narratives" (2020: 139). In this sense Gibson aligns himself with Gare who says: "revealing the present as the product of the destructive trajectory of modernity, we can see ourselves in a crisis" and overcoming this crisis "will require a new vision or visions of the future" (Gare as quoted in Gibson 2020: 139). Thus, the representation of continuous oscillation between various temporal planes can be called "heterochrony" (Gibson 2020; Bourriaud 2009) and gives rise to what Morson calls "sideshadowing" i.e. "a concept of time as a field of possibilities" (1994: 119). Gibson adds: "Temporal potentialities are thus re-opened in metamodernist fiction through characters' felt sense of possible futures and the heterochronic present" (2020: 140). Moreover, Allison Gibson points out: "metamodernists texts – whether art, television show or film, or literature – use compositional strategies that were previously associated with postmodernism to point to a reality, even within the context of fictional worlds or pseudo-realities" (2020: 7). In this regard, it is necessary to emphasize how in the hybrid and semi-mimetic narratives that have appeared in the last thirty years (Vittorini 2020), the oscillation between the real and the unreal, between identification and estrangement, is functional to that un-worlding I mentioned in the first part of the chapter. Thus, the uncanny, emerges as an immanent affect and mood which reveals and unboxes the layered, naturalized, hidden dynamics of the capitalist world system, while projecting it onto the bigger scale of the planetary. The uncanny in the texts I will analyse proceeds as a hybridizing technique which progressively, obliquely, anamorphically disrupts the layer of naturalized realism which sets the initial tone to the narrative. It is a process of revelation through disruption from the inside out, a way of exposing and critically

¹⁷ The original text says: la distanza tra tempo della narrazione (presente) e tempo della storia (passato perduto) viene immaginata come una dislocazione dello spazio.

¹⁸ The original text says: il racconto si serve della rappresentazione dello spazio come correlato di una sorta di mnemografia, un dispositivo ingegnoso di scrittura attraverso cui la mente rappresenta sé stessa nel tempo, rinunciando all'introspezione discorsiva del romanzo moderno e modernista.

reflecting the present moment while also relativizing it by setting it against longer, deeper non-human time, and therefore enabling the thinking for alternative futures.

1.2.4 Amitav Ghosh and the call for uncanny narratives for the time of the end

Amitav Ghosh gives a pivotal account of the limits and challenges which literary representations of climate change are currently facing. In his well-known work *The Great Derangement* (2016), he identifies climate change as both a crisis of culture and imagination. Although, as noticed also by Pieter Vermeulen, Ghosh does not engage with the potentialities of non-mimetic genres when talking about the Anthropocene, his contribution is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, not only does he give an insightful guide on the limitations of realism as a genre, but he also underlies the connection between the rise of the novel with the history of modernization, showing how, during a time of the global-planetary collision realism met its huge limitations. Secondly, and most importantly, although Ghosh does not engage with non-mimetic genres as such, he highlights the revelatory powers of uncanniness and of the uncanny as an affect. In this respect it's worth noticing how *The Great Derangement* was then partially republished in 2021 under the name of *Uncanny and Improbable Events*. In this context, Ghosh's contribution contributes to question realism and render its common sensical reality as instead strangely familiar.

Ghosh makes a direct connection between the development of the modern novel with the start of the Anthropocene. The modern novel, in fact, was born not only during the industrial revolution period but also, and therefore, alongside concepts of probability and improbability which were pivotal at the time. Consequently, the modern-novel pushes back all those elements of fantasy and improbability which could be found in most of the previous literary and storytelling traditions, and instead prefers to root its narrative into mundane, daily, real-life details and contingencies. This process, according to Ghosh, developed all-over the world: “Thus was the novel midwifed into existence around the world, through the banishing of the improbable and the insertion of the everyday” (2016: 24). This was achieved by what Franco Moretti calls “fillers”:

fillers function very much like the good manners so important in [Jane] Austen: they are both mechanisms designed to keep the “narrativity” of life under control—to give a regularity, a

“style” to existence’. It is through this mechanism that worlds are conjured up, through everyday details, which function ‘as the opposite of narrative. (Moretti as quoted in Ghosh 2016: 23)

Fillers are an integral part of “the mimetic ambition” (2016: 24) of the modern novel, as well as of its strive for rationality typical of bourgeoisie life. Another striking aspect of the modern/bourgeois novel, was its assumption that Nature was a mere background to human actions, and that every climatic event that shifted from the designed pattern was deemed as something prodigious (2016: 25). This is strictly linked to the same rise of modernity, as also discussed by Chakrabarty. Modernity was rooted in the presumptuous certainty that nature was just an inherent stage given to men so they could set out their human-play. This assumption is at the foundation of the modern worldview, which as we’ve already seen both in Chakrabarty, and especially in Morton, is now being disrupted. Moreover, Ghosh highlights the link between the modern conception of nature as inert and the raise of gradualist theory in geology. The main outcome of gradualist theory was to disregard the idea that nature could make jumps or leaps, and that instead geological and biological life unfolded through gradual, slow processes:

The victory of gradualist views in science was similarly won by characterizing catastrophism as un-modern. In geology, the triumph of gradualist thinking was so complete that Alfred Wegener’s theory of continental drift, which posited upheavals of sudden and unimaginable violence, was for decades discounted and derided. (2016: 27)

Moreover, Ghosh argues that the real irony of the modern novel is the way in which its same depiction of the real is instead a concealment of the real itself:

Here, then, is the irony of the ‘realist’ novel: the very gestures with which it conjures up reality are actually a concealment of the real. What this means in practice is that the calculus of probability that is deployed within the imaginary world of a novel is not the same as that which obtains outside it; this is why it is commonly said, ‘If this were in a novel, no one would believe it.’ Within the pages of a novel an event that is only slightly improbable in real life—say, an unexpected encounter with a long-lost childhood friend—may seem wildly unlikely: the writer will have to work hard to make it appear persuasive. (2016: 28)

Therefore, if one wants to introduce “improbable” events into their narrative, they must work beyond the limits of the modern, realist novel and trespass into the realm of “‘the Gothic’, ‘the romance’, or ‘the melodrama’, and have now come to be called ‘fantasy’, ‘horror’, and ‘science fiction’” (2016: 28). Therefore, it should not be surprising that in the current moment of increasing probability of events which were before deemed far more improbable, non-mimetic genres are becoming more popular again. As we shall see

in the last section of the chapter, the raising presence of “improbable events” breaching through the surface of a mimetic narrative settings, accounts for the overturn of the modern novel realist paradox:

But in the era of global warming, nothing is really far away; there is no place where the orderly expectations of bourgeois life hold unchallenged sway. It is as though our earth had become a literary critic and were laughing at Flaubert, Bankim, and their like, mocking their mockery of the ‘prodigious happenings’ that occur so often in romances and epic poems. This, then, is the first of the many ways in which the age of global warming defies both literary fiction and contemporary common sense: the weather events of this time have a very high degree of improbability. They are not easily accommodated in the deliberately prosaic world of serious prose fiction. (2016: 31)

On the other hand, Ghosh points out that, although genres such as magical realism and surrealism do not comply with the modern-novel tendency towards mimetic realism, their narrative modalities could still be deemed as problematic when it comes to narrating climate change insofar as they undermine the inherent material reality of the phenomenon. Instead, what he recognizes as one of the best ways to describe and narrate climate change is a feeling of uncanniness:

No other word comes close to expressing the strangeness of what is unfolding around us. For these changes are not merely strange in the sense of being unknown or alien; their uncanniness lies precisely in the fact that in these encounters we recognize something we had turned away from: that is to say, the presence and proximity of non-human interlocutors. (2016: 35)

For Ghosh, the feeling of uncanniness emerges when we come to realize that our human lives have constantly been shaped by the co-presence of non-human beings. Therefore, what we thought to be a too familiar reality has instead always concealed a great deal of non-human mechanisms which have nonetheless constantly been part of our lives and decisions. Moreover, as we’ve extensively discussed in the first section, climate change it is not just the representation of some non-human force unrelated to humans. It is, instead the product of a very specific yet unifying human trajectory. From this perspective and in respect to the uncanny Ghosh says:

This is that the freakish weather events of today, despite their radically non-human nature, are nonetheless animated by cumulative human actions. In that sense, the events set in motion by global warming have a more intimate connection with humans than did the climatic phenomena of the past—this is because we have all contributed in some measure, great or small, to their making. They are the mysterious work of our own hands returning to haunt us in unthinkable shapes and forms. (2016: 37)

In the 13th part of his essay, Ghosh traces a parallelism between the setting of a novel and real-life site such as colonial cities all over the world. From his point of view, both site surveyors and novelists base their ideas of place and setting on what he calls “discontinuities”:

a habit of mind that proceeded by creating discontinuities; that is to say, they were trained to break problems into smaller and smaller puzzles until a solution presented itself. This is a way of thinking that deliberately excludes things and forces (‘externalities’) that lie beyond the horizon of the matter at hand: it is a perspective that renders the interconnectedness of Gaia unthinkable. (2016: 58)

In fact, novels have boundaries both in terms of space and time: “It is through the imposition of these boundaries, in time and space, that the world of a novel is created: like the margins of a page, these borders render places into texts, so that they can be read” (2016: 62). This is one of the main characteristics of the modern novel: “But it is precisely by excluding those inconceivably large forces, and by telescoping the changes into the duration of a limited-time horizon, that the novel becomes narratable” (2016: 63). On the contrary, in the age of Capitalogenic Global Warming, and in the time of Hyperobjects, what the novel should look to do is fill those discontinuities with continuities and highlight the profound interconnectedness that lies at the heart of our daily lives. Ghosh also introduces the idea of scale, and underscores the necessity to reintroduce different scalar levels into the novel form:

Here, then, is another form of resistance, a scalar one, that the era of global warming presents to the techniques that are most closely identified with the novel: its essence consists of phenomena that were long ago expelled from the territory of the novel—forces of unthinkable magnitude that create unbearably intimate connections over vast gaps in time and space. (2016: 65)

Moreover, Ghosh highlights how the narration of non-human agency within texts and narrative modalities fell into oblivion with the rise of the modern novel. In fact, earlier literary forms all over the world included the non-human as a matter of fact, its exclusion was not conceivable. Alongside the exclusion of non-human elements from the novel, Ghosh also highlights the parallelism between the rise of an economic model based on the eradication of community (especially in the West) and the proportional exclusion of community representation within the modern novel. The focus instead shifted, even more prominently, onto individual efforts and endeavours (2016: 83).

Finally, Ghosh claims that language, and also literary language, does show a specific kind of resistance to the representation of climate change. For this reason, Ghosh argues:

So if it is the case that the last, but perhaps most intransigent way that climate change resists literary fiction lies ultimately in its resistance to language itself, then it would seem to follow that new, hybrid forms will emerge and the act of reading itself will change once again, as it has many times before. (2016: 87)

In conclusion, Amitav Ghosh questions the mundane, realist novel's power to face and convey the complexities of our times. Instead, those narrative modalities seem to reinstate capitalist, exploitative practices as being the reality norm. On the other hand, Ghosh argues and calls for a deeper exploration of hybrid, uncanny modalities of narration which could break that reality norm and convey the hidden aspects of the current, jointly global and planetary, crisis.

1.3 Wrapping up: a hypothetical analytical framework, Uncanny Realism and an overview of the case study

My analytical hypothesis, which I give the name of Uncanny Realism, merges the various theoretical threads that have emerged so far. Most prominently it accounts for the ongoing dismantling of the modern capitalist worldview based on the Nature-Culture binary, and consequently it identifies as its generative motif the collision produced by the history of Capitalocene between the global and the planetary. And especially, it links the concept of irrealism with the idea of reality in the age of hyperobjects as being inherently uncanny and spectral, and its subsequent aesthetic representation:

Reality in the Anthropocene is becoming more vivid and “unreal,” spectral. (...) This irreducible unreality is a symptom of reality as such with which the weird realisms (speculative realism, object-oriented ontology) are beginning to cope as emergent features of the uncanny intersection of geotrauma and human history. Covered in ash, the human dances, caught in a horrible physicality: physicality without a beyond, without an outside, without presence. (Morton 2013: 194-195)

At the same time, I argue for the necessity of reading between scales, based on Timothy Clark’s scalar reading model, as well as highlighting the historical depthness which it enables. This approach unravels and exposes the long-lasting effects of the history of the Capitalocene. Therefore, Uncanny Realism works on multiple scalar levels in time and space and considers both global social constructs and planetary entities. In fact, it is crucial to build a framework which both accounts for the multiple capitalistic structures which shape and manage our human lives, and for the environmental consequences of those actions which play out at the level of both planetary dynamics and biological matter while enfolding through a deeply unequal socio-economic system. Consequently, different theoretical threads which may have seemed at odds with one another, can be merged into a dialectic relationship. In fact, as we’ve seen in the last paragraph, theories which focus on different time scales, can convey a deeper, specific, detailed, and multilayered insight not only on the current moment in time, but also, and especially, on how literary texts register it. The doubling, recurrence and mixture of scalar layers and relative implications, enhances the uncanny feeling of displacement which Timothy Clark defines as “Anthropocene disorder”, and it also helps break the barrier of reality as a norm.

As we’ve seen, according to Ghosh, realistic/mundane novels fail to convey the planetary crisis we find ourselves in. A similar opinion is given by Clark:

Can the Leviathan of humanity en masse, as a geological force, be represented? No, at least not in the realist mode still dominant in the novel. Its effects are global and non-localizable. Its modes of appearance as a totality are only in graphs, statistics and computer projections and modelling – of CO2 emissions, population figures, waste generation, proportion of the Earth's land surface used and so on. (2015: 73)

Our times defined by a heightened scalar collision, allows for the discernment of the inherent conjuncture of Nature-Culture, and therefore can bring back that hybridism which was purified during the rise of the modern novel:

How, then, did the provinces of the imaginative and the scientific come to be so sharply divided from each other? According to Latour the project of partitioning is always supported by a related enterprise, one that he describes as 'purification', which is intended to ensure that Nature is consigned entirely to the sciences, remaining forever off limits to Culture. This entails the marking off and suppression of hybrids—and that, of course, is exactly the story of the branding of science fiction, as a genre separate from the literary mainstream. The line that has been drawn between them exists only for the sake of neatness; because the zeitgeist of late modernity could not tolerate Nature–Culture hybrids. (Ghosh 2016: 74)

This is why Uncanny Realism focuses on novels which surpass the limits of genre, which through their hybrid and multilayered structure provoke a feeling of uncanniness. The uncanny, in fact, is not a genre; it's both an affect and an ontological status of reality, and especially of how reality presents itself today, when the coordinates of our worldview have become unhinged. This was already highlighted by Mark Fisher when he said that the uncanny, as well as the weird and the eerie are "affects and modes" (2016). It is not, especially, a literary genre, in fact, it resists the borders of genre, it is a floating affect:

Freud's essay demonstrates, with insistent energy and at moments comical lucidity, that the uncanny is destined to elude mastery, it is what cannot be pinned down or controlled. The uncanny is never simply a question of a statement, description, or definition, but always engages a performative dimension, a maddening supplement, something unpredictable and additionally strange happening in and to what is being stated, described, or defined. (Royle 2003: 16)

Uncanny Realism considers novels with a semi-mimetic narrative structure which results in multi-layered narrations characterized mainly by the shift between recognition and estrangement. Following the WReC it also mostly focuses on semi-peripheral areas, where the contradictions of the capitalist world-system are more clearly shown. In the past twenty years many hybrid texts have emerged which elude the limits of genre. Although I have noticed the presence of such characteristics in novels of various geographical provenance, in this thesis I will use a corpus of five novels and two short

stories written during and after the Celtic Tiger period in Ireland as my case study. This corpus will allow for an in-depth exploration of planetary and global concerns, while also emphasizing their development within culturally specific contexts. Ireland will serve as a key case study to examine how the dynamics of the capitalist world-ecology manifest at a local level, as well as how these dynamics are represented in the literary texts produced within that environment. Contextually, this study will focus on a specific period in Irish history, namely the economic boom known as the Celtic Tiger and the subsequent economic crash. By applying the framework of Uncanny Realism to this historical moment and its geographical setting, the study maintains a focus on local specificity, which is crucial for understanding how the capitalist world-ecology impacts distinct material geographies. This framework not only registers the localized consequences of global economic forces but also highlights the global networks in which the site is embedded, offering insights into broader planetary dynamics. Analyzing novels and short stories written during and after the Celtic Tiger through the lens of Uncanny Realism allows for a multiscalar reading of these texts. Such an approach reveals how these works engage with the tensions between local and global forces, capturing the complexity of Ireland's socio-economic landscape while also contributing to a broader understanding of capitalist world-ecology. The analysis will focus on three interrelated scales: first, the local (post-)national economic, social, and political transformations that Ireland experienced during the Celtic Tiger and its aftermath; second, Ireland's semi-peripheral position within the capitalist world-system; and third, its inescapable embeddedness within the planetary dynamics of the environmental crisis. Each of these scales frames and exceeds the others, providing a layered and multi-dimensional perspective. Through these different lenses, Ireland emerges as a complex, "strangely familiar" site—one that challenges established beliefs and perceptions. The shifting perspectives between the local, global, and planetary levels destabilize fixed narratives, while simultaneously deepening our understanding of the intricate interplay between national development, global capitalism, and environmental crisis. This approach not only sharpens our awareness of the specific Irish context but also broadens our comprehension of the wider dynamics at stake across multiple scales. Declan Kiberd characterizes Ireland as functioning as a historical "middle term," a nation marked by contradictions and deeply entangled in global networks (1995). It occupies a liminal position, both colonial and, at times, complicit with British imperialism; profoundly Catholic while also steeped in superstition; European and postcolonial; intensely rural yet advanced in technology;

divided by two linguistic identities; and caught between globalization and tradition. Moreover, since the proclamation of the Irish Free State, Ireland has undergone a series of sudden changes which have periodically transformed the country's economy, societal structure, identity, and representation. One of the most recent of all was experienced during the fourteen-year period known as Celtic Tiger, and its aftermath. During the Celtic Tiger (as we will extensively explore during the second part of the thesis) by pushing forward the neo-liberal policies which were initiated at the end of the 1950s, the country experienced a sudden, extreme economic boom. The boom, the Celtic Tiger, or the "Irish economic miracle" was mostly based on foreign direct investment from North American multinationals, and on the lending of wholesale funds for an immense number of mortgages. It also caused the restructuring of the country's double internality through the expansion of new energy frontiers. During those years, a new, Americanized way of living based on lending and spending money in an unregulated consumeristic frenzy was adopted. Nonetheless, the very sudden bust of 2008, exposed the immaterial basis of the Celtic Tiger and left Ireland to the bailout of the IMF and the European Union.

The Celtic Tiger and the subsequent economic collapse produced a vast response in terms of literary production. Although the texts written during the period belong to a wide variety of genres, a conspicuous group of them stand out for their hybrid and layered nature, characterised among other things by the mixing of mimetic and non-mimetic narrative structures, mainly realism, science fiction and gothic, by the unreliability of the narrative and by narrative fragmentation. Many scholars such as Eóin Flannery (2022), Mary McGlynn (2022), Sharae Deckard (2014), and Adam Kelly (2020) have identified the presence of 'unrealistic' structures, drawing on the Warwick Collective's (2015) model of "irrealism", within the Celtic Tiger and post-crash novels. Furthermore, many of the novels of the period, although rooted in the historical social context of the Celtic Tiger, take into consideration the global and planetary dynamics in which they are implicated, often taking a transnational stance. In fact, the collapse of the Celtic Tiger serves as a critical juncture through which the complex, multifaceted crises of the present have become distinctly visible. Within this context, the theoretical framework of Uncanny Realism extends the analyses offered by the aforementioned scholars, facilitating a deeper examination of the intersection of local, global, and planetary dimensions. These intersecting forces are particularly evident in Ireland during the aftermath of the Celtic Tiger era and its literary legacy.

Even though the second part of this thesis will be dedicated to the analysis of the selected corpus of text through the lens of Uncanny Realism, it's worth anticipating the titles of the works so that they can serve as examples for the outlining of the modalities of Uncanny Realism. The works I will take into account are: *Notes from a Coma* (2004) and *Solar Bones* (2016) by Mike McCormack, *Nothing on Earth* (2016) by Conor O'Callaghan, *The Devil I Know* (2012) by Claire Kilroy, *Is Stacey Pregnant? Notes from the Irish Dystopia* (2014) by Tomás Mac Síomóin, *The Fjord of Killary* (2010) by Kevin Barry and *The End of the World is a Cul de Sac* (2022) by Louise Kennedy.

1.3.1 Why Uncanny Realism?

Let's dwell for a second on the name Uncanny Realism. As I've mentioned before, it is not a genre but an analytical framework and reading practice which can be used in the exploration of hybrid texts which fall outside genre definition. It expands thanks to the case study which considers and adds layers of complexities, points of view, and cultural specificity. The uncanny as we have extensively explored, is one of the main affects of our times. The uncanny resurgence, characterized by the return, repetition, and doubling of events, entities, and experiences once obscured by our naturalistic worldview, now manifests with revelatory potency (Van Aken 2020). Furthermore, literature emerges as a privileged domain for the manifestation of the uncanny, particularly through thematic and formal hybridity. Such literary modalities facilitate a profound revelation of concealed dynamics essential for comprehending our worldview and, consequently, for envisaging potential alternatives for the future. Realism is instead used in a polysemic way. Firstly, it refers to the real-life rootedness of the events narrated in the novels, which, as we've explored, are not set in any alternative world, but are instead deeply rooted in the mimetic layer of the narration which is systematically breached through by other formal and thematic structures. The novels which I take into account don't undergo a world-building process and therefore differ from sci-fi, dystopian and post-apocalyptic novels. Moreover, they take into account local specific references, contingent to the material geography of the characters. Additionally, realism also accounts for that meaning of the term which stands for accepting a certain status of things as it is. Accepting the uncanniness of our times is key to understanding them and to finding alternative solutions. It means to accept and to face the unsettling consequences of capitalogenic activities beyond denialism. In

a certain respect, Uncanny Realism analyses texts which are liminal, and reside in-between what could be considered as 'reality as a norm' and 'speculative fiction'. It mirrors our same present moment, in which a wide range of events, climatic, political or economic, are felt as uncanny against the backdrop of a fake, obsolete reality norm which is progressively fading away. It therefore calls for the conceptual undoing of our naturalist worldview and for the reimagining of humans and non-humans outside that paradigm (Van Aken 2020). The realization of the inherent uncanny essence of our times also contrasts the 'capitalist realist' idea that there is no alternative, or that "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism" (Jameson 1994). If this is so, it is because the same idea of world considered in the sentence coincides with the world (the globe) of capitalist modernity (Halberstam 2023). Thus, Uncanny Realism aims at analysing literary texts in order to identify the hidden, obscure dynamics at work in our world on many scalar levels, what Fisher calls "the Real(s)". Consequently, although it can provoke a feeling of disorientation and of "being outscaled", the uncanniness which emerges has a strong revelatory power and it therefore can help to overcome inertia and fear, to understand the present moment and to supposedly start to imagine alternative ways of conceiving the world.

1.3.2 Is this real or not? Hybridism of genre and form

Uncanny Realism engages with literary texts characterized by a semi-mimetic narrative structure that evokes in the reader a simultaneous sense of recognition and estrangement, producing a sensation of 'strange familiarity.' This effect of the uncanny provokes persistent doubt about the nature of the 'real': what constitutes reality? What elements, present and true in the here and now, elude my comprehension? This doubt enables the reader not only to push beyond the bourgeois conception of reality, but also to continually question the very notion of familiarity itself. What we commonly define as real is, in fact, a narrow, anthropocentric representation of reality, confined by the limits of human cognition. Accordingly, the analytical framework of Uncanny Realism seeks to capture and interpret our multilayered reality by examining a range of formal and thematic features present in hybrid novels that frequently transcend conventional genre boundaries. First, the fusion of realistic or naturalistic plots and settings with elements of gothic, science fiction, and older local modes of narration is central to this analysis. These texts

also engage in a process of partial rewriting, often referencing specific, well-known novels. The incorporation of gothic and sci-fi elements, either alternately or together, is not unexpected given the intertwined histories of these genres. Likewise, the inclusion of pre-modern narrative forms recalls both WReC's concept of irrealism and Amitav Ghosh's discussion of the persistence of magic in early modern literature. In the act of reading, even when a particular trope is recognizable, its entanglement with other narrative styles hybridizes it to such an extent that it becomes oblique, and in some cases, nearly unrecognizable. Similarly, not all readers will be familiar with the diverse narrative techniques employed within these texts. While genres such as sci-fi and gothic are almost universally identifiable, others are deeply rooted in the local traditions of the text's country of origin. Moreover, these genres and narrative forms exist as spectral presences within the novel, haunting one another, transforming the text into a mesh or collage of haunting elements. Even the 'mimetic' layer can be understood as a spectral presence—the ghost of a particular genre, namely realism. In this respect, as shown by the dominance of modern novelistic modes of narration, particularly epistemological realism (Watt 2001 [1956]: 9-35) (which became the predominant form in the West and subsequently spread globally (Ghosh 2016)), realism conveys a specific, abstract worldview. However, this worldview has been continually challenged by irrealist narrative forms. Thus, the numerous spectral layers of these novels reveal successive waves of capitalist exploitation, extractivism, and cultural fabrication. The mimetic layer symbolizes an entrenched norm of reality—a widely accepted construction of the world that needs to be dismantled to expose its flawed, partial, and misleading representation. This layer represents the locus of the modern worldview, and its amalgamation with other narrative elements signifies its progressive erosion. From a formal perspective, Ian Watt, in his seminal work on the rise of the modern novel, argued that one of its defining features was its resistance to outdated narrative forms. Instead, it aspired to forge a wholly original narrative grounded in the fabric of real life itself. Essentially, Watt posits that the modern novel's insistence on perpetual originality stemmed from its commitment to faithfully portraying reality, leading to a conflation of the concept of "originality" with realism itself (Watt 2001 [1956]: 14). However, this paradigm appears to be inverted in the novels examined within the framework of Uncanny Realism, as they intricately weave their narrative structures and plots across multiple layers. This departure from the conventional notion of originality reflects a haunting legacy inherited from both modernist and postmodernist traditions, as elucidated by Jameson and subsequently by the WReC.

Nevertheless, the spectre of the modern novel persists within these texts, with its enduring notions of reality, originality, progress, and naturalistic worldview serving as narrative obstacles that demand subversion. In fact, the novels under analysis show a highly level of hybridism which constantly works against linear realism. For example, novels such as *Nothing on Earth*, *Solar Bones* and *The Devil I Know*, are imbued with gothic references, while *Is Stacey Pregnant?* and the *Fjord of Killary* present apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic tones, *Notes from a Coma*, instead, uses sci-fi tropes, and *The End of the World is a Cul de Sac*, points to folkloric beliefs.

Undoubtedly, one of the most efficacious ways to demystify realism is to subvert its time-space coordinates. As we have widely discussed earlier following Chakrabarty, Ghosh, Morton, Clark and Wenzel, the disorienting, uncanny effect provoked by the scalar collision of local, global, and planetary proves to be an efficacious way to unhinge some cemented beliefs on our worldview.

1.3.3 Which scale is the realest?

Uncanny Realism examines the scalar effects depicted in the texts by emphasizing time and space scales that transcend capitalism's one-dimensional presentism. Central to this approach is the argument that the separation of such scales is not a given or natural fact, but rather one of the consequences of capitalism's foundational Nature-Culture binary. The depiction of scalar collisions in these novels serves to destabilize the capitalist worldview by disintegrating its normalized time-space coordinates, an effect that can evoke in the reader a sensation akin to Timothy Clark's concept of Anthropocene Disorder.

One of the primary modes through which scalar effects are portrayed in these texts is the manifestation of hyperobjects. This often, though not exclusively, coincides with an intensified use of sci-fi and gothic tropes. Hyperobjects bring to the surface and reveal hidden dimensions of daily existence, such as the agency of non-human elements, while simultaneously exposing the epiphenomenality of human experience when enmeshed in global and planetary dynamics. These two realms are never truly distinct, as they are intertwined within a complex, multifaceted relationship that often transcends simple cause-and-effect dynamics. In addition, novels set in rural or non-urban geographies

frequently privilege settings that uncannily foreground Nature (understood as a modern abstraction), while simultaneously exposing the exploitation of these same landscapes. The juxtaposition of Natural environments with environmental degradation in these texts reveals the ongoing exploitation of nature, highlighting the deep entanglement between capitalist extraction and ecological destruction. At the same time, these novels illustrate how non-human agency extends beyond global power relations, suggesting that forces outside human control shape both local ecosystems and broader environmental dynamics, further challenging anthropocentric perspectives.

Some examples are the energy culture shown in the depiction of bog areas in *Is Stacey Pregnant? Notes from the Irish Dystopia* (2014) by Tomás Mac Síomóin, where the narrative while projecting you into the millenary history of the formation of bog lands in Ireland also shows how bogs and turf have been part of the shaping and reshaping of the country's "double internality" of energy extraction. Moreover, the novels create images, figurations in which the history of the planet and evolution suddenly merge with the current new-extractivism of commons, and of planetary resources (Federici 2022).

One of the most striking examples amongst the texts that I will analyse is the depiction of JJ O'Malley's brain in *Notes from a Coma* by Mike McCormack, in which the evolution of the human brain, as explored by David Lord Smail in *Deep History and the Brain* (2008), is put into the service of a new, undescriptive technology. Against this background, the same human body is uncannily doubled: humans are part of Nature, of the constant reshaping of the double-internality, and of the strife for new extractive frontiers (Chakrabarty 2022; Moore 2018; Federici 2004; 2022).

Consequently, at a thematic level, Uncanny Realism maintains a strong focus on investigating and exposing the concealed dynamics of exploitation, frontier expansion, violence, and subjugation, as outlined in the historical models of Moore, Patel, and Federici. These dynamics form a crucial part of the texts' uncanniness, and their emergence and exposure impart a potent, revelatory uncanny force. This force has the potential to shape critical thinking, deepening our understanding of the often-hidden mechanisms that underpin our worldview and the global world-system.

Another recurring aspect is what I call 'clusters of uncanniness', which coincide with the representation of the depletion of what Moore calls the seven cheap things which the modern capitalist system is based on. These material elements, assumed to be infinite, are reappearing as progressively more scarce, thus provoking the opening of new frontiers

of expansion hinging on ever greater violence on humans and non-humans alike. Contextually when things such as nature, energy, food, care, money, work and lives appear as scarce instead of infinitely available, the characters of the novel and the readers experience a sort of uncanny realization. In fact, the depiction of resource exhaustion coincides with a heightening of non-mimetic tropes in the narrative. For example, in *Is Stacey Pregnant?* The exhaustion of both food and energy goes hand in hand with the intensifying of gothic, spectral elements. The same can be found in *Nothing on Earth*, in which the progressive scarcity of food, money and energy experienced by the family is parallel with the gothic trope of bodily disappearance and spectrality. The depiction of resource depletion is also accompanied by a heightened display of violence, both on humans and non-humans. A striking example is *Notes from a Coma*, in which the opening of a new resource frontier, namely cognitive data extraction, causes the rupture of the local community and the use of JJ as a cheap natural resource.

Moreover, another aspect which is strictly linked to scalar-collision and multiple scale reading, is the recurrent presence of ‘uncanny objects’. Uncanny objects as also analysed by Stark et al. in their edited volume *Uncanny Objects in the Anthropocene* (2018), are all those objects which defy the border between human and non-human but also between local, global, and planetary scale. Consequently, Uncanny Objects move between various time and space coordinates, often following counterintuitive representation patterns. Especially, the novels often dive into images of deep past and far futures starting from the description of what at a first sight could appear as a daily, normalized object. Some examples from the novel are, JJ’s brain in *Notes from a Coma*, the bog in *Is Stacey Pregnant?* as already mentioned, but also Sarah’s ghost estate in *The End of the World is a Cul de Sac*, or the permeant presence of dust in *Nothing on Earth*. Moreover, other uncanny objects are the flood in *The Fjord of Killary*, or Marcus’ numerous dismantled objects in *Solar Bones*.

1.3.4 Who is telling the truth? Narrative unreliability

Uncanny Realism engages with novels characterized by what can be described as an unreliable narrative method. This is achieved not only through the presence of explicitly unreliable narrators but also through the fragmentation of narrative structure, its non-

linearity, and the merging of various narrative layers. In this respect, the overall unreliability of both the narration and the narrators challenges the modern novel's assumption of the world's knowability by the subject, an assumption rooted in Cartesian philosophy (Watt 2001 [1956]: 11). In this respect, the "reliable" narrator was widely questioned within modernist and post-modernist tradition, and even before, especially in gothic novels (Zerweck, 2019: 227). For what concerns the peak of narrative unreliability during the 20th century, Bruno Zerweck, in his essay *The 'Death' of the Unreliable Narrator: Toward a Functional History of Narrative Unreliability* (2019), states: "it's in the age of fully-fledged epistemological and ontological scepticism that narrative instability and ambiguity have become the norm rather than the exception. In the course of the twentieth century, unreliable narration can be said to have become a default mode" (2019: 228). Nonetheless, the ways and modalities of unreliability in contemporary fiction seem to move away from their theorization within those contexts. In his essay Zerweck, by declaring the death of the unreliable narrator in contemporary fiction, argues for a reimagining of the concept itself, and of its function in our current times. Something that needs to be stressed and which, according to Zerweck, has characterized narrative unreliability since Wayne Booth introduced it into literary criticism discourses, is its rootedness into every day, real-life events:

That unreliability depends on real-life frames becomes most obvious when we realize that it only makes sense as a deviation from a default value: unreliability is always based on some, in all probability unspoken, understanding of reliability. In real life communication, a departure from such a default value or benchmark will be regarded as a sign of ambiguity and/or cognitive instability, undermining notions of reliability. (2019: 224)

In this respect, Uncanny Realism, echoes Zerweck when he states: "In a culture that has undermined our stability, unmasking the hitherto solid bases of knowledge, epistemology, ontology, and norms as mere phantasmagoria of pre-modern blindness, we need – perhaps more than ever – new ways of mediating ambiguity between the real and the imaginary" (2019: 234). In this respect, unreliable narration emerges as the only plausible mode of storytelling, because the most basic coordinates of our worldview have become unhinged and uprooted. Following Latour, we are in the "time of the end," a period characterized by the unravelling of our established worldview. Consequently, since no other recognized or accepted cosmology has yet supplanted ours, the narrator can only be unreliable. The unravelling of our worldview signifies an epistemological crisis. The narratives produced in this context reflect the disorientation and ambiguity of this crisis. Unreliable narrators

embody the difficulty of discerning truth and meaning in a world where traditional markers of reality have become unstable.

Furthermore, many of the characters in the novels put themselves at the same level of the reader, while trying to understand and give meaning to what is happening. The use of unreliable narration engages readers in an active process of interpretation. As readers grapple with the inconsistencies and ambiguities presented by the narrator, they are prompted to question their own assumptions and engage more deeply with the text. This interaction mirrors the broader societal need to critically examine and reinterpret the world around us. In this context many of the characters in the novels reason in a way which could be termed as “rhizomatic”, following Deleuze and Guattari, or their thinking process resembles Morton’s idea of ecological thought which I explored in detail in the concluding paragraph of the previous section. In fact, following Wenzel:

In the shadow kingdom of risk, those who accept things in their ordinary appearance are naïve; only those capable of imagining the unseen can understand what may really be going on. This oscillation between the matter-of-fact and the occult feels new, but in a familiar way. It is another chapter in the story of modernity and modernism; as Fredric Jameson writes, ‘genuine realism . . . is a discovery process’ that attends to ‘the hitherto unreported, unrepresented, and unseen,’ thereby (like modernism) ‘subvert[ing] inherited ideas and genres’(2012: 476)”. (2022: 20)

Moreover, the complex and multi-layered nature of Uncanny Realism pushes the reader towards a complex reasoning process, challenging them to connect the parts into a big, complete picture. This process echoes the concept of Epochal Consciousness theorized by Karl Jasper, which served as the basis for Dipesh Chakrabarty’s lecture *Climate Change as Epochal Consciousness* which was given on February 18, 2015. Epochal consciousness, says Chakrabarty, regards how we relate to the world in a time of global crises, especially challenging generalized, monological and western thought trajectories. Moreover, it helps in overcoming specificities of disciplines and concepts in order to contemplate the combined and interrelated nature of things (2021: 68). This complex thinking process also stands against the ‘cognitive inertia’ or ‘unthinkingness’ which Wenzel sees as preventing us from finding alternatives to capitalism’s environmental destruction. At the same time, gaining awareness doesn’t push the thinking process to the other extreme side of the spectrum, which Wenzel identifies as the inability of thinking about nothing but climate change, which reflects in the prospect of an eco-apocalypse (2022: 30-33). Moreover, narrative unreliability is often reached through multiple

narrative voices and perspectives which give multifaceted opinions and versions of the events narrated in the plot. Another important aspect of narrative unreliability in the analytical framework of Uncanny Realism is the fact that on many occasions the narration seems to be addressed to an external auditor, either an interviewer, as in *Notes from a Coma*, or a judge, as in *The Devil I Know*, or a police officer, as in *Nothing on Earth*. In this respect, following Royle, the same act of hearing, puts in question what is true and what is not and especially: “The figure of the ear becomes a way of describing, accentuating, and analysing the fact that texts (...) are capable of a ‘double interpretation’” (2003: 64). In this respect, the truth that the narrator, or the cohort of narrators convey is always put under scrutiny by an external hearer. Moreover, Royle says:

The ear is uncanny, for example, because it is double: it can be at once open and closed; receptive and unresponsive; source and destination. The ear is the ear of the other. The ear of the other is an “eerily” dismembered ear. The ear is that form which the very possibility of speaking and writing comes from, it is the one that does not answer, for example when Derrida asks, and I now ask in turn: who is listening to whom right here? (2003: 35)

Another aspect of narrative unreliability is the proneness towards a certain degree of humourism. In fact, it can happen that the texts leap into the realm of satire, parody and hyperbole thus creating uncertainty on whether what is being told is real or not, and consequently heightening the degree of uncanniness in the texts. In fact, according to Royle: “the uncanny is never far from something comic: humour, irony and laughter all have a genuinely ‘funny’ role in this topic” (2003: 13). Royle also notices the role played by satire in Freud’s essay, and more specifically in his analysis of Hoffmann’s *The Sandman*:

The Sandman perhaps becomes more uncanny. Its recurrent moments of laughter, comedy and satire are not to be separated out in the way that Freud appears to assume is possible. They too play a part in “the unparalleled atmosphere of uncanniness evoked by the story. (2003: 47)

Moreover, Anne Weston says:

The comic uncanny, in particular, disturbs and unsettles; it opens us to the encounter with death but also more generally that which lies beyond human comprehension: engagement with a much deeper sort of mystery than any straightforward detective plot could offer. Comedy creates potential distance from overwhelming matters and, potentially, loosens the bonds of clutching attachment to entrenched patterns of thinking. For the readers if not necessarily the characters, the comic uncanny introduces space, and even lightness, where

there might otherwise only be room for the desperate attempts to avoid our unspeakable fears. (2017: 119 120)

This is a prominent aspect of especially *Is Stacey Pregnant?* *The Fjord of Killary* and *The Devil I Know*.

1.3.5 Who's dead? The blurring of the life-death boundary

Another aspect that the novels have in common is the fact that most of the characters live in a liminal space between life and death. The blurring of the death-life boundary proves to be one of the main features of the uncanny in the texts, in fact, following Clotilde Landais:

The feeling of the uncanny taken in its Freudian understanding is thus essential to fantastic fiction. Such a feeling can notably rise from specific character representations, such as ghosts or vampires. These characters often have in common the fact that they transgress some kind of boundaries, like the one between life and death. (2017: 6)

Or moreover, “It is in that “gap” between life and death, in which uncanny figures are to be found, that solidarity between human and nonhuman occurs” (Rae 2020: 117). Moreover, if we go back to Derrida’s *Spectres of Marx* (1994) it is worth mentioning how, according to the philosopher, it is in that space between life-and death, injected by the bygone past and by the future yet to come, that we learn to live. And learning to live means to live with ghosts and spectres, attuning to them, finding the generative force of that liminal, precarious experience:

If learning to live-remains to be done, it can happen only between life and death. Neither in life nor in death alone. What happens between two, and between all the "two's" one likes, such as between life and death, can only maintain itself with some ghost, can only talk with or about some ghost [s'entretenir de quelque fantome]. So it would be necessary to learn spirits. (1994: XVII)

Several novels analysed in the second part of this thesis exemplify the blurring of the boundary between life and death. In *Notes from a Coma*, JJ is placed into a coma aboard the Somnos ship, which functions as a liminal space—a neoliberal free-market zone used for an international experiment. As a result, JJ exists in a state of liminality, both in terms of his life cycle and his geographical environment. In *Is Stacey Pregnant?* while the characters are physically alive, both their human bodies and their cars—symbolic

projections of their identities—are severely threatened by the depletion of food, water, and fuel. Additionally, the characters are trapped in the liminal space of a bog, further emphasizing their state of uncertainty and precariousness. In *The Devil I Know*, Tristram is rendered 'undead,' having been resurrected by Mr. Deauville, which positions him in a liminal state between life and death. Similarly, in *Solar Bones*, the protagonist Marcus returns to the world of the living on All Saints' Day, a moment of spiritual and existential liminality. In *Nothing on Earth*, the characters live in an almost death-like state, reinforcing themes of suspended existence and the blurring of life-death boundaries. These examples illustrate how Uncanny Realism employs liminality and altered states of existence to challenge normative concepts of time, space, and subjectivity, ultimately destabilizing the linear logic of capitalist and modernist frameworks. Quoting the sociologist Avery F. Gordon, Eóin Flannery says: “haunting raises spectres, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present and the future” (2022: 116). The liminal spaces of the characters make them an apt metaphorical conjuncture not only between past, present and future, but also between local, global and planetary phenomena. In this context spatial and temporal scales merge and co-shape. The in-betweenness of the characters proves to be the perfect place to observe and see this conjunction, while additionally heightening the uncanniness and un-homeliness of the narrative as well. The blurring of the life-death boundary could be analysed from both a planetary and a global perspective. On one hand, as it was already stated in the very first part of the chapter, one of the strongest connections between the idea of the uncanny and the Anthropocene it's the collapsing of inside/ outside borders, or as Morton says, the collapse of backgrounds and foregrounds which the same conception of “world” is built upon. In this respect, it is during that life-death in-betweenness that hyperobjects happen and propagate, between the past and the future: “The strange strangeness of a hyperobject, its invisibility—it's the future, somehow beamed into the ‘present.’” (2013: 92). Moreover, by existing in a state between life and death, the characters find themselves at a crossroad between the cultural and the natural realms. On one hand, they are defined by cultural markers such as their capacity for thought, encapsulated by *cogito ergo sum*, alongside their material properties—class, race, and sexual identities. On the other hand, their bodies, composed of living flesh and tissues, are inevitably destined to become corpses thus decomposing and dissolving into biological matter. This dynamic evokes Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject, where the corpse represents the ultimate manifestation of abjection. The corpse, as a site of decay and dissolution, disrupts the

boundaries between the self and the non-self, the human and the inhuman, exemplifying the uncanny tension between cultural identity and natural materiality:

The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us. (1982: 4)

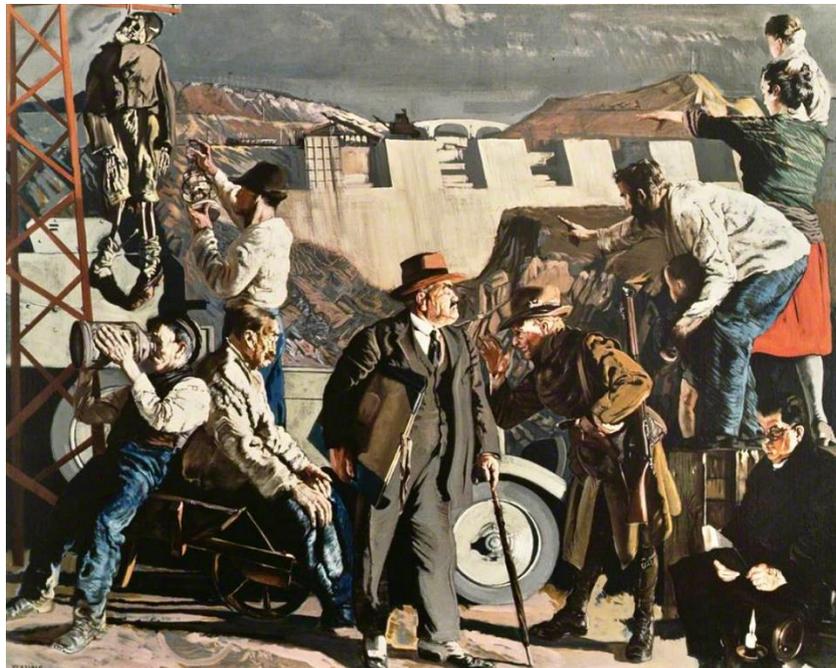
This aspect also reveals the hidden but nonetheless inherent embeddedness of what was once recognized as Culture within nature. There are no separation margins: the two form a continuum of earthly, biological matter. Furthermore, this in-betweenness reflects some of the dynamics of capitalism, which evolves and unfolds within the Nature-Culture continuum while simultaneously negating it. The concept of the un-dead, as we've seen in the very first part of the chapter, is one of the major characteristics of the Gothic novel and, as shown by McNally, it mirrors the manifold dynamics of extractive capitalism. Moreover, the in-betweenness of the characters, as shown by Eóin Flannery, also mirrors the neoliberal subject of the "indebted person" (2022: 132). Debt is a form of neoliberal economic domination which is not limited to the control of the present moment, it shapes and undermines future lives and possibilities. Futures are no longer imaginable in the neoliberal paradigm; future opportunities have already shrunk before they are even conceived. Alongside economic indebtedness, we can place what could be termed "environmental indebtedness". In fact, capitalistic and neoliberal mechanisms environmental costs will be repaid by future generations in various ways. While environmental indebtedness will come at a high economic cost, the stronger consequences will be the displacement of people and community, a strengthening of vulnerability and inequalities. In this respect, the future projection which is an essential part of life is undermined to such a degree that people, and the characters of the novels in our case, are stuck in a death-like unpredictable present where every step needs to be precisely calculated. Furthermore, the liminal space occupied by the characters demarcate the conjuncture between past debt-generative behaviours and present and future perspectives undermined by those same processes. This aspect also reflects how, capitalism with its debt-credit immaterial abstraction undermines past and future lives and casts its long shadow onto future decisions and agency. Contextually, the in-betweenness and liminality of both the time-space setting of the novels, and the un-dead ontological status of their protagonists, allows for the creation of inter-worlds. An inter-world can be defined as a

conceptual or physical space that exists between distinct worlds, realms, or states of being. It embodies characteristics of liminality, transition, and hybridity, acting as a bridge or intersection where elements of different worlds overlap and interact. This space is often characterized by ambiguity, fluidity, and the potential for transformation. The inter-world is inherently liminal, existing in a state of in-betweenness. It is neither fully part of one world nor the other but occupies a space that is transitional and often unstable. This liminality makes the inter-world a site of potential change and redefinition.

The forthcoming chapter will undertake an exhaustive examination of the Irish Celtic Tiger era and the subsequent economic downturn, alongside an analysis of literary works crafted during this tumultuous period. Ireland's historical trajectory will be scrutinized through the lens of semiperipheralization, reaching its apex with the collapse of the economic boom. The collapse of the Celtic Tiger serves as a pivotal juncture, illuminating the interconnected crises of contemporary times. Within this context, a significant portion of literature produced during this era emerges as a pertinent case study for the application of Uncanny Realism.

2. The Irish Celtic Tiger: historical, sociological and literary insights, and Uncanny Realism

The hydroelectric plant is set into the current of the Rhine. It sets the Rhine to supplying its hydraulic pressure, which then sets the turbines turning. This turning sets those machines in motion whose thrust sets going the electric current for which the long-distance power station and its network of cables are set up to dispatch electricity. In the context of the interlocking processes pertaining to the orderly disposition of electrical energy, even the Rhine itself appears to be something at our command. The hydroelectric plant is not built into the Rhine River as was the old wooden bridge that joined bank with bank for hundreds of years. Rather, the river is dammed up into the power plant. What the river is now, namely, a water-power supplier, derives from the essence of the power station. (Heidegger 1977: 16)



Night's Candles are Burnt Out, Seán Keating 1928-1929, oil on canvas.

Before looking at the Celtic Tiger, it is worth analyzing and discussing the past historical moments that preceded the economic boom of 1994 and its dissolution. Namely, the history of colonization, and of pre-Celtic Tiger Ireland in general, become important especially if we take into consideration the will to “forget the past” (McGlynn 2022), which characterized the 1994-2008 period. It seems, that in order to embrace modernization what had come before had to be erased from the collective memory.

Nonetheless, many events which traced the history of colonization in Ireland come back in post-Celtic Tiger texts in an uncanny way, bringing back something which should have been forgotten according to the new modern imperative. In fact, the traumas and disruption of colonialism in Ireland function as a warning against the unthoughtful embrace of what has been analysed as neo-colonialism, during the Celtic Tiger (Flood 2018).

If, as Keohane and Kuhling remind us, history is made up of ebbs and flows, it is complicated to find a starting point. In this sense, they help us connect the historical present with the 'recorded history' of myth and human archetypes. Their historical vision carries much of the uncanny we discussed in chapter one. It is a history of anamorphic reminders and acknowledgements in which the past sheds light on the present and vice versa:

Where should we begin to tell this story? Authoritarian neoliberal globalization's political-economic consensus post-9/11; or post-1989? The Reagan/Thatcher revolution; or the eclipse of Keynes by Hayek and Friedman? The successful gas drilling in 1999; or exploration and knowledge of reserves in the 1980s, or 1970s? Changing natural resources development legislation in the 1990s and 1980s; or the legislation of the 1970s? Ireland declining to emulate Norway in the 1970s, or the political culture from the foundation of the Irish state, enshrined in the Constitution as the preference for private over public ownership; or the long historical experiences of colonial dispossession and the Nativist and Catholic social relations of status and class from which that ideology emerged? Or further back still? Or sideways, into the baroque micro-world of Fianna Fail in Mayo with its rogues gallery of colonial mimics, 'cute hoors' and the endemic culture of petty corruption grown up to become the Celtic Tiger's crony capitalism? (Keohane and Kuhling 2014: 76)

Consequently, within the historical ebbs and flows we can recognize some topical moments in which certain dynamics in their repetition are configured as a cyclical development of the same way of conceiving and organizing the world. All this takes on significance within Jason Moore's historical conception of capitalist world-ecology. Contextually, Irish history can be read in its leading up to the Celtic Tiger as a history of constant semi-peripheralization, within which certain topical moments emerge. Specifically, I will refer to the arrival of Cromwell in 1649, to the great famine of the years 1845-1849, and the neo-liberalization that started in the 1950s. Although these events will be analysed in greater detail, the wider historical background to which they belong will not be disregarded. The second paragraph, which focuses on the Celtic Tiger, will give insight into the socio-economical aspects of the period as well as focus on its material consequences which became widely visible in the management of the land,

natural resources and construction industry. Afterwards I will delineate the effects of the 2008 economic crash, and especially the consequences of the troika and austerity measures. Relatedly, the effects of the Celtic Tiger and of the economic crash are still felt today. In fact, the adoption of neoliberal practices still exercises its influence even after its inner flaws were exposed by such a disastrous event as the global economic crash (Keohane and Kuhling 2014).

Moreover, the last part of the chapter will give an overview on how literary production in Ireland has engaged with the Celtic Tiger period and the crash as well as with the global and planetary concerns in which they are implicated. Major focus will be given to the employment of non-realist and semi-mimetic narrative techniques that act as a critical counterpoint to the reality principle imposed in Ireland during the Celtic Tiger. Furthermore, the theory explored in the first chapter will help to shed light on the significance of non-realist/semi-mimetic fiction in times of multiple conjoined crises. The last paragraph will elucidate how the theory discussed in the first chapter finds correspondence in the recent trajectory of Irish studies. Consequently, I situate my own analytical framework within this debate, especially in the analysis of a cohort of novels and short stories which escape strict gender norms and literary realism.

2.1 A history of (semi) peripheralization

Keeping in mind the theoretical references of the first chapter, the first step when looking at Ireland would be to place its history within the *long durée* of capitalist temporality. As underlined by Eóin Flannery in his introductory chapter to his study of Irish postcolonial theory, scholars from various fields have tended to focus on either post-colonial or modernization theory, while often lacking a joint perspective of the two dynamics (2009). At the same time, Ireland's place within the postcolonial paradigm has been challenged in many respects, either for its geographical position within Western Europe, for its anomalous jurisdictional state, or for its partaking in British colonial enterprise, and Catholic Church led evangelization overseas (Cleary 2007). In his book *Outrageous Fortune, Capital and Culture in Modern Ireland* (2007), Joe Cleary readdresses the question of Irish post-colonial status, by highlighting the cultural inefficacies of many of the aforementioned criticism. On the other hand, in line with critics such as Roberto Swartz and echoing Immanuel Wallerstein's world-system theory, Cleary states that the

profound analytical value of Irish postcolonial studies today lies in their potential to identify Ireland's place within "an international process through which different parts of the globe were differentially integrated into an emergent world capitalist system" (2007: 45). In this respect, and with our understanding of Uncanny Realism within the Irish context, we can see how Jason Moore's Capitalocene theory and especially his *History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*, gives us a general framework within which to situate the Irish experience. Cleary further states:

(...) the determination of a specific national configuration must be conceived as a product of the global: to borrow Neil Larsen's phrase: the part must be thought through the whole and not vice versa (...). From such perspective, the national arena still remains a crucial site for social struggles, but a true understanding of those struggles can only be grasped contextually within a wider global frame. (2007: 45)

In this context, Ireland, as any other nation in the world-system, emerges as the conjuncture of the global and the local, as a consequence of the long capitalist durée. It is not surprising then that in the novels we will analyse, Irish and global histories will oftentimes surface joined with references to the different capitalist and world systemic waves that have shaped and reshaped the country.

The Irish colony was, presumably due to its proximity to England, the area of the empire where many colonization strategies were experimented: above all, the naturalization of the Irish population as the wild-Irish, which became a source of cheap labour for the empire. More specifically, Ireland became "a laboratory, conveniently proximate to expanding Britain, in which to trial techniques of privatization and expropriation" (Deckard 2016: 150) and the place where the idea of "the savage and the civilized" was first set out as a tool for conquest (Moore 2018: 43): "the English have presented themselves to the world as controlled, refined and rooted; and so it suited them to find the Irish hot-headed, rude and nomadic" (Kiberd 1995: 10). This is particularly evident in the extermination of the Irish wolf and the identification of the Irish people as sub-human werewolves:

The destruction of the wolves' oak forest habitats drove them out of the woods into human habitation, where they were systematically exterminated to extinction by professional hunters, altering the eco-system so that humans, not wolves, became the dominant predator. At the same time, imperialist rhetoric used werewolves as an ethnic discourse to vilify the native Irish and naturalise them as 'sub-human', pointing to the significance of the wolf in pre-capitalist Irish culture, registered in geographical names for 'wolf ridges' and surnames of chiefs meaning 'wolf-head' or 'son-of-the land'. (WReC 2014: 102)

Moreover, Ireland was at the forefront of the religion-based strategy of *divide et impera*, according to which religion became a marker of identity after the “conquest (or reconquest)” (Mac Síomóin 2014: 75), of Ireland by the Tudors and especially Henry the VIII. In fact, although 1169 marked the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in Ireland, their presence on the island took a quite different form compared to the subsequent reconquests which have occurred since the Tudors. In fact, the Anglo-Normans, if on the one hand integrated some of their military and agrarian techniques to the ones already present on the island, on the other, fully merged with the native population, adopted the catholic faith and their loyalty to the kings was generally only nominal (Breathnach 1988: 124-125). During the Tudors’ reconquest of the island, Protestantism became identified with the oppressor while Catholicism was perceived as an identitarian mark for the Irish natives (Mac Síomóin 2014: 75). Since then, both the Irish people and the Irish landscape were subjugated under protestant rule (Deckard 2016: 150). In fact, while the Irish were seen as werewolves or unruly wild people, the land was considered as disgracefully underutilized and therefore both land and people needed to be put at work under the utilitarian imperative of the British empire. This resulted in dramatic changes in the Irish landscape, most prominently in the massive deforestation of the Irish forests which served the needs for cheap wood as a building material for the English navy, and as fuel for its nascent industry. This process was pushed to the extent that in 1906 only 1.5% of Ireland’s original forests were still left intact (Shokouhi 2019: 20). Ireland was the source of cheap construction material and fuel provided by the Irish forestland which since the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in 1169 shrunk from 80% of the Irish territory to a mere 1%. The exploitation of Irish forest land accelerated during the 16th century, when it became an official colony of the recently reformed British crown:

The industrial development of the fuel-hungry British Isle, the growing demand for cheap timber used for shipbuilding purposes, and the inefficient and corrupt system of forest administration in Tudor England put the pressure on Ireland as a suitable target for invasion, both strategically and economically. (2019: 6)

Some pivotal steps in this process were represented by Henry the VIII’s 1543 Forest Act and successively by the Elizabethan plantations. During that time the idea that trees “were the favourite refuge of the natives” became popular and therefore “the Irish could never be tamed while the leaves were upon the trees” (Lecky as quoted in Tierney & Pilz 2015: 74). The changes in the Irish landscape are still powerfully registered in place names,

which hold the ancient presence of native trees, woods, fjords, and hills. Alongside with the changes in the landscape, an entire worldview, with its language, rituals and ways of relating to the natural habitat and to other people disappeared under the pressures of colonialism, followed by Catholicism and modernity afterwards (Shokouhi 2019; Mac Síomóin 2014; Braa 1996). The deforested Irish land was then distributed amongst the British and Scottish planters, which came to own 1.5 out of 2 million total acres (Shokouhi 2019: 9). Especially, the politics of transplantation brought forward after the Cromwellian reconquest of Ireland, shed light on the nexus which colonialism created between the “naturalized” people of Ireland and their native land. In this context, Oliver Cromwell’s renowned saying “To hell or to Connacht!” refers to the forced transplantation of the native Irish population from the east (the Munster, Leinster and Ulster regions) of the island to the West (Connaught) in order to clear the eastern and more fertile land for the new British protestant settlers (O’Callaghan 2000). The land that was assigned in Connaught to the Irish population was mostly unfit for farming and cultivation which tied the peasantry to a potato-based diet. The potato was brought to Europe and Ireland during the early modern period as a result of what Alfred Crosby in 1969 termed as “the Colombian exchange”, namely the movement of plants, animals, microbes, and various living organisms across the Atlantic sparked by Columbus’ arrival to the Caribbean in 1492. In this respect both the arrival of the potato in Ireland and the almost imposed dependency on it as the sole source of food, should be understood under the logic of colonial, British mercantilism (Braa 1996: 195). Therefore, the eradication of Irish forests, the scarcity of crop diversity alongside with the absenteeism of British landlords resulted in a tragic combination between 1845 and 1852 during the years known as *an Gorta Mór*, the Great Irish Famine, which caused the death of one million people and the emigration of almost two million others. The famine was caused by the fast spreading of *Phytophthora Infestans*, a fungus whose spores were scattered by the wind around the countryside. It is worth noting that the potato blight also arrived in Ireland through the Transatlantic trade, and especially it is thought to have been carried by “bird guano (excrement) which was used as nitrogen-rich fertilizer (...). Thirteen million tons of the popular and inexpensive guano were transported by ship from islands located off the coast of Peru” (Kuntz 2022 online). The import of bird guano became necessary in order to face

the depletion of the soil due to British industrial agriculture (Foster & Clark 2012: 71)¹⁹. Nonetheless, as highlighted by Braa: “The Great Famine was perceived as an inevitable, natural phenomenon that would result in advantageous economic adjustments instead of the result of a brutal colonial conquest and exploitation. This was a powerful ideological legitimization of capitalist expansion” (1996: 204). Moreover, the Great Irish Famine not only could have been prevented, but the material basis for the starvation of around one million people did not subsist, they were instead created by the predatorial British export-bound capitalist agrarian regime. In fact, “at least 100,000 tons of grain (wheat, oats, barley) were exported from Ireland during each of the worst famine years - 1846, 1847 and 1848” (1996: 212). In this respect, Keohane and Kuhling trace a direct connection between the Great Famine and the birth of modern Ireland during the Celtic Tiger:

The Famine (in Irish *an Gorta* meaning “hurt”, “injury”, “wound”) is the collective historical mortal wound that killed traditional Ireland, and the same time *an Gorta Mór* – the great wound – is the primal scene of pain, horror and torment that gives birth to Modern Ireland. (...) The Great Hunger lies at the base and at the heart of modern Ireland. The ambivalence which contemporary Irish people feel towards the Great Famine is apparent in President Mary Robinson’s 150th anniversary Famine commemoration as celebration: the recollection of the Famine became the affirmative moment of historical continuity, and the primal scene of the new birth, a second birth of modern Ireland, and the birth of the Celtic Tiger. (2004: 173-174)

The Great Hunger then, represents the original apocalypse which separated “traditional Ireland” from what was meant to come after. Moreover, especially through the diaspora which followed the famine, Ireland tightened its connection with the United States, which then became extremely evident during the Tiger: “It was the Great Famine of the mid-nineteenth century and subsequent mass migrations that, supposedly, converted Ireland from an Atlantic country to an American one” (Fagan 2002: 134). As I will widely show during my analysis of Celtic Tiger and post-crash novels, the Great Hunger is a recurrent element of the narrative inasmuch it functions as a revelatory element which sheds light on the disruptive continuity of diachronic phases of world capitalism. It also, as we will soon return to, acts as a critical stance against the Tiger’s imperative to “forget the past”, which meant the obsolescence of the history of colonization, struggle, diaspora and trauma in order to embrace a shiny future of unfettered capitalism and economic deregulation. In this respect, modern Ireland, following the insights of Flannery and

¹⁹ For a better understanding of the guano trade read Foster’s and Clark’s: “Guano, the global metabolic rift and the fertilizer trade” in *Ecology and Power Struggles over Land and Material Resources in the Past, Present and Future* (2012), edited by Hornborg, Alf, Clark, Brett, Hermele, Kenneth.

Cleary, emerges as the juncture of both colonial and capitalist history, which took specific Irish shape in the progressive semi-peripheralization of the country²⁰. As masterly explained in Maurice Coakley's volume *Ireland in the World Order, a History of Uneven Development* (2012), under British rule, and within the unevenly developing capitalist world-system, Ireland's economy was deeply underdeveloped, since it was characterized by profound under-industrialization and reliance on export-bound agrarian monoculture. Maurice Coakley's book puts under scrutiny the same idea of "underdevelopment" in Ireland, shaping his thinking on Wallerstein's pivotal intuition of the systemic and necessary unevenness of the capitalist world-system. If we think of Irish history from a diachronic perspective, we can clearly recognize the three phases of "primitive accumulation", "expanded reproduction" and "accumulation by fabrication", highlighted by Jenny Schapiro (2019). Where the third, as we will widely discuss later, could be represented by the financialization of the Irish economy which peaked during the Celtic Tiger. In an article from 1988, and which therefore predates the economic boom, Breathnach underlines how Ireland was subject to all three phases belonging to the peripheralization process. Firstly, in the phase of mercantilism most Irish products were destined for the market of the American colonies, which was subject to more swings and fluctuations compared to the English and Irish markets. Secondly the integration of the first into the international division of labour especially with the aim of supplying England with products no longer available locally due to rapid industrial growth. During this period attempts to develop an Irish-based industry, especially in the sectors of wool, breweries and refineries, with the exception of linen, were stopped by interest driven mercantile laws which sought to undermine Irish commercial competition. Thirdly, the integration within the newly reformed international labour division, after a period of economic protectionism following national freedom in 1922. This period was characterized by outward economic openness leading to an extensive increase of foreign capital in the country which remained disconnected from domestic economic growth: "On the other hand, foreign firms also import over 80% of their material inputs, thus confirming that they are using Ireland as a classic export platform, with very limited

²⁰ One of the first accounts of Ireland's peripheralization given by texts, letters and speeches by Marx and Engels collected in the volume *Ireland and the Irish Question* in 1972. Amongst various issues, Marx and Engels highlighted the transformation of Ireland into a British stockpile for food, cattle, wood, and cheap industrial and military labour. The depletion of Irish soil was also analysed in the volume through the Marxist theory of metabolic rift: "England has indirectly exported the soil of Ireland, without even allowing the cultivators the means for replacing the constituents of the exhausted soil".

linkages with the domestic economy (1988:134)". In this respect, Peadar Kirby identifies Ireland as a NIC (newly industrialised country), differentiating it from other, highly developed, and industrialised Western European countries (2010:16). Moreover, Kirby, aligns his thought with Barry's, who sees Ireland as a "high-income developing country". Both Coakley and Kirby's volumes not only trace a parallel between Ireland's position in the Atlantic trade and other sites of the global division of labour, such as India, Chile and Argentina, but they also set the foundation to interpret and read Ireland's position within today's global neoliberal regime. After Ireland's independence in 1922, Kirby recognizes three different phases of the Irish economy, namely: "comparative advantage from 1922 to 1932, protectionism from 1932 to 1959 and liberalisation from 1959 to the present" (2010: 16). The first period was a continuation of agrarian, dairy based economy which had already characterized the country under British rule. Instead, the shift from what Peadar Kirby has defined "developmental nationalism", which strongly sustained protectionist policies, was registered in 1959, upon the resignation of Eamon De Valera as Taoiseach, and his substitution with Seán Lemass, also part of the Fianna Fáil political party. In this respect, Kirby says:

Lemass and Whitaker have come to symbolise the swift liberalisation that then set in based on three elements: the use of grants and tax concessions to encourage export-oriented production, the attraction of foreign manufacturing firms and dismantling protection so as to gain greater access to markets abroad. (2010: 20)

1959, was also the year when the world's first tax-free zone was created in Shannon Airport, in county Limerick. According to sociologist Kieran Keohane, the event marked a pivotal moment in the mythical account of neoliberal globalization: "the tax-free zone was an Irish invention. Shannon was the world's first. But the model quickly proliferated and metastasized. Mimicked and emulated, it spread worldwide" (2017: 208).

Since the 60s "the Irish state has assumed 'the role of "hunter and gatherer"' of foreign direct investment (FDI)" (Ó Riain & O'Connell 2000: 315, as quoted in Kirby 2010: 36). This state policy continued through the 70s and the 80s, and reached a peak in around 1994, when the country started to experience its 14-year long economic boom known as 'the Celtic Tiger'. At the same time still following Deckard's and Shapiro's understanding of neoliberalism, it is important to stress how the three different phases of Irish history are in fact strictly linked to each other. Kieran Keohane and Carmen Kuhling state:

The contemporary experience of accelerated change in Irish society has resonances and resemblances to earlier periods of dramatic transformation: around the Act of Union, in 1800; around the famine in 1840; around the 1920s with the Independence and the Civil War; in the 1970s with the end of economic protectionism and entry in the EEC. For each period (...) the content is unique and peculiar (the institutions and practices, the cultural phenomena, the events are historically peculiar) but the form (the collective experience of transformation – liminality, disruption, anomie, the feelings of ambivalence provoked by change) are common to all. (2004: 2)

In the next section we will look into closer detail at the Celtic Tiger and the subsequent economic crash, which should be understood as one of the phases of the Irish progressive (semi) peripheralization within the capitalist world-system.

2.2 The Irish Celtic Tiger and the economic crash

Sharae Deckard in her article *World-Ecology and Ireland: The Neoliberal Ecological Regime* (2016) says:

Ireland's integration into the neoliberal ecological regime has been characterized by peripheral dependency on foreign capital investment, the tendency towards financialization and housing speculation rather than industrial production, the intensification of earlier monocultures formed under colonialism (such as the beef and dairy economies), the formation of new monocultures organized around new commodity frontiers in biocommodities, and the drive to enclose remaining commons (as in water, oil and gas). (2016: 156)

Numerous scholars have highlighted the accuracy of the term 'neoliberalism' when referring to Irish governmental attitudes since the 60s (McGlynn 2022; Flannery 2022; Deckard 2016; Kirby 2010). In this respect, Kitchin & al. look at Ireland's entrance into the neoliberal regime as part of what could be identified with the capitalist long durée. Specifically, they say:

Ireland's interlacing with neoliberal ideology has been mediated largely by institutions operating at the level of the nation-state and within a particular political culture and system inflected by the long history of Anglo – Irish relations and the country's emergence as an independent postcolonial state. (2012: 1305)

Moreover, they highlight how, as opposed to Thatcherism and Reaganomics, the Irish government largely refrained from declaring its trajectory as openly neoliberal. Therefore, the representation of neoliberalism, although practically effective, was largely hidden, silenced, and banned from public discourse (2012: 1306). Nonetheless, Ireland's integration into neoliberal ideology escalated from the 60s, and peaked during the

economic boom known as Celtic Tiger. In this respect, the Celtic Tiger was based on low corporate tax, 10%, to attract FDI (foreign direct investments), low public sector investments, and a high reliance on wholesale founding: “The Irish adaptation of the Black-Scholes equation (a formula for credit-based growth) saw borrowing as the quick fix for an ailing economy and drew heavily from the liberalizing methods of the Chicago and Austrian schools of economics” (McCann 2013: 111). The Celtic Tiger can be divided into two periods (Kitchin et al. 2012: 1033; McCann: 2013). The first one which lasted until the dot.com crash in 2001 and was based of FDI from multinationals belonging to the 3Cs sector, namely: “computers, chemicals and cola concentrates” (Murphy as quoted in McCann 2013: 106). The second phase was characterized by “a property boom mainly consisting of Irish developers capitalized by Irish banks who, in turn, were borrowing from European banks” (Kitchin et al. 2012: 1033). The Celtic Tiger and the recession were widely characterized by the adoption of American (USA) models in terms of economic and behavioral models (McGlynn 2022: 33) which also necessitated the integration of speculation and risk as an integral part of the process: “If the Tiger was not a stable moment of national, cultural, and economic transformation, the boom now comes to represent how globalization incorporates risk and speculation as a part of everyday life” (Buchanan 2017: 51). This attitude, together with the waning of community and public welfare continued the tangible possibility of recession from the start into the same process of booming:

I want to emphasize less the shift from supposedly healthy growth into irrational exuberance than the fundamental assumptions that unite both, calling attention to their debt to an ethos of speculation – of risk – and personal identity, factors that meld in what gets packaged as a “free market” ideology that decries government ownership, regulation, or even taxation. (McGlynn 2022: 33)

Moreover, and in respect to the Americanization of Ireland during the Celtic Tiger, Honor Fagan stresses how:

Whether the economic growth of the Celtic Tiger set the scene for the cultural makeup of Ireland or the cultural makeup set the scene for the economic growth, we have here an argument that Ireland can be historically and economically placed as an American country or outpost. (Fagan 2002: 135)

During the Celtic Tiger, Ireland became the poster child of neoliberal globalization (Fagan 2002) and was seen as a model for the future growth of other peripheral and semi-peripheral countries (Kirby 2010). Moreover, Fagan analyses “the cultural economics” of

Ireland by highlighting how the Tiger was characterized by the export of the Irish identity itself, and especially by an identity invented within, through and thanks to the American lead globalization process:

What passes for Irish culture today-the musical dance show Riverdance, the supergroup U2, or the ubiquitous global Irish pub-does not spring from the eternal wells of the Irish soul. Rather these phenomena are, to a large extent, manufactured by the global cultural industry. They reflect fully all of the hybridity, syncretism, and even arguably the postmodernism typical of the cultural political economy of globalization. If globalization can be said to have produced a "world show case of cultures" (Featherstone 1995: 13), then on this stage, Ireland has achieved a paradigmatic position. (Fagan 2002: 138)

Within the context of the Irish Celtic Tiger and after the economic crash, Ireland's semi-peripheral position within world capitalism was reaffirmed, as well as the logic of profitable frontier expansion and neoliberal ecology. Kitchin et al., show how the Celtic Tiger developed on both an international and national scale, where the second heightened the role of local clientelism, and was sustained by the new collective myth represented by the Celtic Tiger itself:

The Irish state's moves towards neoliberalisation, then, could be seen to operate at two scales: the international level, whereby the state attempted to create a vibrant and open economy which would attract FDI due to the ease of conducting business and generating profit, and the national/local level whereby the state pandered to political allies by cultivating the conditions for a property boom, which was equally characterised by a lack of spatial selectivity. As the property sector began to take precedence over FDI as the major generator of state revenue, and due to reliance on indirect taxes from this sector, an economic model which could only perform adequately in a situation of perpetual growth was created. This need for perpetual growth was ingrained both structurally, in the state's taxation system, and discursively, in the Celtic Tiger myth itself. (1306: 2012)

The symbol of the new Irish neoliberal trajectory can be seen in the International Financial Service Centre (IFSC) which was founded in 1987 in the Dublin docks. Keohane and Kuhling describe the centre as: "the onshore offshore bank where global corporations syphon off profits made in EU markets, tax free; it has been the sinkhole of Europe" (2015: 67). In this respect Sharae Deckard says:

The advent of informational capitalism and the development of special tax breaks and financial services via the new Irish Financial Services Centre positioned Ireland as an "export platform" for foreign capital in the electronics and IT industries, with nearly every high-profile transnational with an IT portfolio establishing a European base in Ireland. (2014: 6)

If the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) stands as a tangible representation of Irish neoliberal policies, the public discourse that emerged during the

Celtic Tiger era played a pivotal role in shaping a new collective identity. This identity was intricately linked to the imperatives of spending and buying, fostering a pervasive consumeristic attitude within the broader societal fabric. The public discourse that unfolded during this period contributed to the construction of a collective ethos that prioritized material acquisition and economic affluence, mirroring the zeitgeist of rapid economic growth and prosperity. This consumeristic ethos not only shaped individual behaviour but also became ingrained in the cultural narrative, influencing how Irish society perceived itself and its place within the global economic landscape:

While some of the higher family incomes were used to purchase basic goods and helped many in Ireland achieve a higher material standard of living, much of the wealth of the Celtic Tiger was used for conspicuous consumption on items like big cars, electronic goods, and even helicopters. (White 2013: 97)

Keohane and Kuhling analyse consumeristic practices in Ireland as the intermingling of traditional communitarian gift relations and post-modern expenditure practices, and therefore define the consumeristic trend as a collective gift relation (2004: 111). Kieran Keohane and Carmen Kuhling's volume *Collision Culture, Transformations in Everyday life in Ireland* (2004) represents an insightful entry into the discussion on how the Celtic Tiger and the economic crash have impacted Irish society at large. This volume draws on various every-day life examples and media culture and extrapolating some pivotal concepts underlying the Irish economic boom. Namely: the understanding of the Celtic Tiger as accelerated modernization, the definition of "collision culture", and the description of Ireland's Celtic Tiger transformations as "the localization of the global" and the "globalisation of the local", and the understanding of the Celtic Tiger as a collective representation.

First of all, the two sociologists position Ireland's Celtic Tiger into a spectrum of definitions and theories such as Bauman's "late-modernity" (1993), Jameson's "post-modernity" (1991), and Beck, Giddens and Lash "reflexive modernization" (1994). Consequently, they support O'Toole's statement that "Contemporary globalized Ireland is a society that became post-modern before it ever quite managed to be modern" (1999: 5). Ireland was caught into world-wide globalization dynamics that necessarily sped up its modernization process which, as we've seen, has followed quite a different path compared to most Western European countries. In a certain sense, Keohane and Kuhling, echo Chakrabarty's concerns about NICs strive for modernization, especially when they say:

We are like Faust: the desire for development is our own desire, and that desire is full and unlimited development, wherever it may lead us, even and up including our own destruction. (...) Goethe's Faust symbolizes the aspirations of modern people for full and unlimited development and their often terrible and beautiful unforeseeable consequences. (2004: 168-169)

This passage presents notable points for consideration. Firstly, it draws a parallel between Chakrabarty's apprehensions regarding the environmental repercussions of rapid capitalist extractivism and modernization. This parallel aligns with our prior examination of Sharae Deckard's research, which has demonstrated that these concerns manifest as one of the ramifications of the Celtic Tiger. More importantly, these consequences extend across local, global, and planetary dimensions, particularly when contemplating the collective global anthropic actions as the underlying catalyst for anthropogenic ecological crises. Secondly, this symbolic choice circles back to the first chapter, irrealist writing was scrutinized in relation to the dynamics of modernization. In this context, Goethe's oeuvre emerges as a pivotal point of reference, marking a transformative shift in the manifestation of the supernatural within literary discourse. This point will be further developed in relation to Kilroy's novel, *The Devil I Know*, which uses and shapes its narrative around Goethe's. Moreover, the two scholars coined the term "collision culture" to describe the period, with which they mean collisions between: "vestigial traditionalism and accelerated modernization, between the local and the global, between the values and organizing principles of action of community and society" (2004: 11)²¹. This is well embodied in the same term Celtic Tiger, which the sociologists identify as a collective representation. The term was originally coined by economist Kevin Gardiner in 1994 and was based on the model of the Asian Tigers of the 80s. The term came to be a new totemic, and collective representation which included the new imperatives of economic strength, consumerism and historical forgetfulness. In this respect, Keohane and Kuhling state how the pair 'Celtic' and 'Tiger' forms an oxymoronic term. On the one hand, the term 'Celtic' brings to life a series of images linked to traditional, pre-colonial Ireland, as well as primordial and pre-national history and the reunification with Celtic culture at large

²¹ Although, as stressed by Fennell (2014) Ireland went through other, numerous and prolonged times of collision between tradition and modernity. Especially he stressed how the 19th century was particularly poignant in this respect: "Nineteenth-century Ireland, then, was a zone in which the traditional and the modern were almost equally matched in strength (...) the tug-of-war between them was happening against the backdrop of one of the most dramatic transitions from tradition to modernity in the history of Western Europe" (2014: 40).

(Scots, Welsh, Britons and Continental Europeans). It represents the desire to leave the past behind, namely colonization, poverty, Catholicism and to reconnect with the Celtic traits of being wild, free and passionate: “In an era of globalization and transcendental homelessness, or permanent liminality, the collective representation ‘Celtic’ expresses the desire for particularity; for authenticity of lineage, desire to be native – born and bred, or born again Irish” (2004: 148). On the contrary, the term “Tiger” instead refers to Ireland’s economy and invokes the rhetoric of competitive individualism and its attendant ideology of the survival of the fittest. The Tiger is aggressive, unscrupulous and it is notably a male tiger, not a tigress. In this respect, then the term Celtic Tiger shadows the history of British colonization as also stated by Mary McGlynn in the introductory chapter of her 2022 book titled as *A Horse Called Forget the Past*, and also hides “the continuities between an earlier aristocracy and a contemporary ruling class” (2022: 2). Moreover:

it represents the collective desire to “leave the past behind us”, that past being the history of modern Ireland, colonialism in the nineteenth century (and its legacies throughout the twentieth century), nationalism, Catholicism, and to repudiate their failures and their ethical practices of repressive self-sacrifice and asceticism. (Keohane and Kuhling 2004: 146-147)

By leaving the past behind then, Ireland could follow a new ethos based on borrowing and buying and being punished for non-participation (Keohane and Kuhling 2004: 144).

In addition:

The social narrative of the Tiger was dominated by descriptions of the boom as miraculous, irrational, and exuberant. It was considered the era when Ireland could finally shrug off the history of colonialism and embrace a new vision of itself as a nation with wealth and global influence. (Buchanan 2017: 51)

Another aspect of widespread, fast-speeding societal change during the Celtic Tiger, and afterwards was the distancing from Catholicism. Partially in line with modernization theories that identify Western modernity as progressively secular, the Celtic Tiger accounted for a significant decline in traditional religious practices. This was due to both accelerated modernization and the scandals that arose in connection to the Catholic church. In fact, during the period many of the obscenities perpetuated by the Catholic church in terms of sexual abuse on both women and children were exposed together with the ongoing violence that took place in state-run religious institutions such as the Magdalane Laundries and the Mother and Baby Homes. We will look at this aspect in more detail in the next paragraph. Contrary to a general deterministic view of modernity as secularization, Carmen Kuhling, highlights how in Ireland, the progressive waning of

Catholic faith went alongside with a progressive adherence to a wide array of other religious faiths and beliefs, thus demonstrating how Ireland at the turn of the nineties was both “pre-secular, secular, and post-secular” (2014: 174). Moreover, basing her discussion on Weber’s idea of “modern disenchantment”, Kuhling underscores how the disenchantment towards Catholic beliefs also coincided with a new enchantment towards consumption related activities which: “led to the somewhat accurate claim in the media that Irish spiritual life has shifted ‘from the parish hall to the shopping mall’” (2014: 180). Moreover, banks, investors and real-estate developer became almost “God-like figures”, that led controlled, and somehow protected the miraculous boom that Ireland was experiencing:

This belief in the magic, God- like characteristics of the market and unquestioned faith in the high priests of finance justified the “light touch” regulation in Ireland as well. (...) . In many ways, the unquestioned faith in the texts, apostles, cathedrals and rituals associated with Catholicism have simply been superseded by unquestioned faith in texts, apostles, cathedrals and rituals associated with consumption, and which are bound to the mythologies of economism and neoliberalism. (2014: 180)

Nonetheless, when the global crisis occurred in 2008, its effects were felt in Ireland in a way that no other European country experienced, which showed the unsustainability of its economic model based on the extreme reliance on FDI and volatile bank loans. In that period Ireland hosted the headquarters of 13 out of the 20 most important pharmaceutical companies worldwide and US investments grew from 36 billion to 86 billion from 2000 to 2008. Foreign investments also attracted companies such as Google, Facebook and Yahoo. Moreover, as anticipated above, after the 2001 dot.com crash²², Ireland’s seemingly perpetual economic boom was kept alive by a predatorial, speculative real-estate market. During the Irish property boom an outstanding, unparalleled number of housing units were built, namely 553,267 between the years 1996 and 2005 (Kitchin et al. 2012: 1308). This was accompanied by a raise in housing and land ownership prices by (both in Dublin and in the rest of the country) between 382% and 551% (Kitchin et al. 2012: 1308). Particularly, the Irish property boom was characterized by a “cannibalising form of capitalism (not unlike the practices which took down the international financial markets) which evolved through a solipsistic financialised logic: house prices rose while

²² The 2001 dot-com crash, also known as the dot-com bubble burst or the Internet bubble burst, was a significant financial downturn that occurred in the early 2000s. It was primarily associated with the collapse of many technology and internet-based companies that had experienced rapid and often speculative growth in the late 1990s.

(counterintuitively to market logic) houses were built to excess” (Kitchin et al. 2012: 1310). The fourth chapter, dedicated to the analysis of literary work set in domestic spaces, will delve into more detail on the topic of housing development in Ireland. In this context, the Irish construction industry became entangled with the USA lead 2008 real-estate speculation frenzy:

Securitization was supposed to create a virtuous cycle: banks could grant loans to previously unqualified buyers while diluting the risk by reselling those loans as securities to speculative investors around the world. However, by transferring credit risk to very minimally regulated intermediaries, securitization also created opportunities for high-risk activities like arbitrage (the practice of taking advantage of small price differences) and leverage (the practice of borrowing to fund investments) and radically altered the use of structured finance techniques by consumer banks. (McClanahan 2017: 146)

Eventually, when the global bubble burst, its effects in Ireland were disastrous:

From 2007 onwards, as the global financial system collapsed, so too did Ireland's economic miracle, leaving in its trail mass unemployment (peaking at 14.6%), large scale emigration (net emigration of over 122,000 since April 2009), a broken banking sector (the country's 6 principal banking institutions were, at least partially, nationalised), an indebted government (government debt standing at 117% of GDP) and public (1 in 8 households with a mortgage in arrears of 90 days or more), and a wrecked housing market (prices having dropped over 50% for houses and 60% for apartments) up to April 2013. (Kirby 2010: 1).

After the crash the country embraced and adopted austerity measures through the EU-ECB-IMF bailout. Ireland’s goal was to regain its competitiveness, by reinstating through the adherence to austerity measures, its loyalty to the neoliberal paradigm. If during the Tiger Ireland had become the “poster child of neoliberal globalization” (Fagan 2002), then after the crash it became “the poster child of recovery through austerity” (O’Callaghan et al. 2014: 124). The economic crash was followed by a progressive narrative of ruin and ruination, which culminated around the arrival of the International Monetary Fund on the 10th of November 2010 (Crowley & Linehan 2016). As argued also by Mary McGlynn, it is crucial to understand the economic crash not as a watershed or rupture but as being intrinsically part of the same worldview and logics, which promoted the boom: austerity measures are not only part of the structuring and restructuring of the capitalist world-system but are also functional to the survival and reproduction of its dynamics: In this respect, O’Callaghan et al. stress how:

Although the 2008 global financial crisis (GFC) heralded a “Berlin wall moment” for neoliberal capitalism (Peck, Theodore & Brenner, 2010), the wellspring of evidence suggests this system has emerged resurgent. Financial institutions were ‘bailed out’ while

governments turned to harsh austerity measures in attempts to cut public spending and restore national 'competitiveness'. (2014: 121)

As stated by Crowley and Linehan: "In both historical phases – boom and bust – the modernisation of Irish society during the Celtic Tiger and its subsequent demise was a 'spatial drama' involving transformation in the material landscape and the imaginative representation of the island" (2016: 5). Moreover, although "The structuring of the terms of the 2009 bailout imposed a retroactive narrative on the boom and bust, one that underscores a world view driven by nonstate economic actors and suggests an absence of alternatives" (McGlynn 2022: 34), it is also important to notice that the consensus to the reinstatement of neoliberal economics, was not general and complete. In fact, the 2008 crises functioned as a rupture of the teleological temporality imposed by the modern paradigm of progress at all costs and showed its inherent fallacy: "during periods of crisis it is precisely these symbolic fictions of linear progress that are disrupted" (O'Callaghan et al. 2014: 124). As also stated by Crowley and Linehan, the economic crash disrupted the narrative of the State as a perpetual agent for growth, and instead it laid bare that:

the narrative of progress was a fabrication based on a kind of 'casino capitalism', where the Government effectively absconded from its duty to protect the State's economic sovereignty by permitting the banking sector to borrow without limits and the property sector to build new developments and inflate prices regardless of demand. (2016: 3)

The Irish economic collapse is a likewise multifaceted phenomenon characterized not only by the implementation of austerity measures of considerable consequence for civil society but also by the dissolution of the reality principle that had hitherto been established during the Celtic Tiger era. This reality principle notably corresponds with the embracement of logics and practices scrutinized by Jason Moore, which form the foundational underpinnings of the capitalist world-ecology. The collapse, a result of and co-production with the global economic crisis, lays bare the inherent fallacy of the American-centric globalism elucidated by Mary McGlynn (2022). Simultaneously, it is imperative to recognize that the Irish economic downturn does not necessarily denote a fundamental departure from the policies of the Celtic Tiger. Rather, the Irish government persists in its heavy reliance on foreign capital influx (McGlynn 2022; Deckard 2016). However, the potency of the collapse critically undermines the erstwhile confidence that could be vested in this system, rendering it a simulacrum—an undead entity (Keohane & Kuhling 2016). Furthermore, the global financial crisis aligns itself with the escalating

apprehensions regarding environmental degradation attributable to the capitalist world-ecology. As deliberated upon in chapter one this alignment is evident in the discourse surrounding the Anthropocene underscoring the interconnectedness of economic and environmental concerns on a global scale.

Without doubt, the attitude towards land management represents another line of contiguity between the Celtic Tiger and the post-crash attitude. During the Celtic Tiger years, the landscape changed in many other ways. Cities began to grow, enlarging into vast suburban areas which started to phagocytise the countryside, and many natural areas. The cities changed a lot themselves, and especially Dublin, where the centre, especially around the dockland area, became a symbol of the new, modern neoliberal Ireland, and was given the satirical name of “Silicon Docks”. Moreover, many hotels started to be built in the cities to accommodate new waves of tourists attracted to the country through its brand-new approach to tourism marketing. Additionally, the Irish countryside changed significantly. During the Celtic Tiger years countryside areas started to be developed with houses and infrastructure fuelled by the real estate and building frenzy. Nevertheless, a great deal of the Irish rural population moved to the city where most of the work resided. The Irish countryside, therefore, started to become a mixture of housing and infrastructural development, with rural areas and a lack of public goods such as links to the main cities and healthcare services.

Furthermore, Deckard shows how the Irish State adapted environmental policies to satisfy the needs of foreign multinationals seeking to relocate the environmental costs of their actions to a country with low regulation standards:

is crucial to a macro-ecological understanding of Ireland’s role in the world-ecology is the inextricability of its financial role as a tax haven and secrecy jurisdiction zone from its environmental function as a semi-peripheral pollution and water haven. (2016: 148)

Moreover, Deckard places under the spotlight another two aspects which clarify the environmental costs of the Celtic Tiger in the context of “the nexus of climate change, petroleum consumption, and pollution” (2016: 159), namely: the cheap appropriation of water resources by multinational corporations, and the over-polluting grazer economy (2016: 158-161). The latter has been a key element of the Irish economy ever since before the twentieth century, and it should not be analysed as either a sign of backwardness or as idyllic pastoralism. The over reliance on the export bound cattle industry in Ireland is

instead a sign of the uneven development of the country within the capitalist world-system (Deckard 2016: 161). Moreover, Ireland's economic policies did not change after the crash, and it was instead characterized by a series of short-term actions still strictly bound to neoliberal logic (Kitchin et al. 2012). Similarly, Ireland's environmental policy did not become a more sustainable one, and it was instead redirected towards the opening of new ecological frontiers:

water via the privatization of domestic water provision; oil via the sale of offshore petroleum exploration licenses to transnational oil companies; natural gas through onshore hydraulic fracturing; fish through the development of mass aquaculture and intensification of salmon-farming; and bio-commodities through the development of biotechnology industries in pharma, food, and energy. (Deckard 2016: 164)

The exploitation and resource extraction within the Irish landscape aligns according to Bresnihan and Brodie (2023) with a colonialist approach and practices. They especially analyse this aspect in connection with the idea of boglands as wasteland, in relation to the need of energy extraction to propel the increasing presence of data centres in Ireland, which are expected to use up to 25% of the country's energy by 2030:

The large-scale, transformative projects of 'smart' and 'green' eco-modernity represented by data centres, wind farms and carbon sequestration evoke discourses from the 18th and 19th centuries, when efforts to drain and reclaim these semi-aqueous territories were driven by moral as well as economic imperatives. These colonial logics and their spatially transformative enactment have endured in how politicians, climate scientists, industrialists and spatial developers alike see bogs as somewhere that must be made valuable for capitalist accumulation at the expense of existing ways of life. (2023: 364)

In this respect, Bresnihan and Brodie seem to align with Vijay Kolinjivadi's stance that green ecology reinstates and is based on colonial models such as the plantation economy. This calls for a de-colonization of green economic policies (2023). These environmental policies rooted in colonialist perspectives on land usage, reflect both pre-Celtic Tiger, Celtic Tiger and post-Celtic Tiger years. I will elaborate on this subject during the next chapter by focusing on novels set in the West of Ireland, and especially in coastal and bogland areas.

Moreover, the collective representation of the Celtic Tiger, as well as its description as "miraculous", shadowed and hid a large share of the population which did not benefit from the boom, and were therefore excluded from the public representation of the time.

As we will see in the next paragraph, women, migrants and the working classes did not share the wealth of the Tiger, as other groups of the population did. It is worth remembering how within the one same country dynamics of centralization, peripheralization and semi-peripheralization coexist and are distributed amongst the various layers of the population recreating the same un-even development which sustains the capitalist world-system at large.

2.2.1 Celtic Tiger for all? Immigration and Feminization of the workforce

Although the Celtic Tiger was generally presented as the best of times, especially under the idea that Ireland never had it as good, the public discourse generally overshadowed the high rate of inequality which persisted within the country. In a certain sense, the Celtic Tiger phenomenon was underpinned by a form of magical thinking, as expounded by McGlynn (2022: 167). Magical thinking acted as a cognitive shield, dissuading individuals from questioning the robustness of the economic boom and impeding their recognition and subsequent response to numerous warning signs that proliferated at the time (White 2013; Kirby 2012; Fagan 2002). The prevailing sentiment was such that merely entertaining doubts about the actual efficacy of the economic boom was perceived as a potential threat capable of precipitating its failure. This collective mindset fostered a reluctance to critically assess the sustainability of the boom, contributing to a pervasive blindness to the signs of an impending economic downturn. At the same time, differently from the narrative presented by the public discourse and media, which represented a sort of imposed reality principle, or “social fact” (Keohane and Kuhling 2004: 142), a fair share of the population was excluded from the economic benefits of the Tiger:

The implication of a prosperity in which ‘a rising tide lifts all boats’ masks the growth of poverty and inequality and generalises what is, in fact, only a restricted experience of newly found wealth, within a broader context of class and gender stratification and regional underdevelopment. It also masks growing racism within Irish society. (Loyal 2004: 74)

During the Celtic Tiger, Ireland became the destination country of economic immigration from all over the world, and by 2007 10% of the population resident in the country was foreign born. Ireland which witnessed mass migration and the diaspora of its own people until and during the mid80s and 90s, had become the land of opportunity. In 2004 a public referendum changed the 27th amendment that guaranteed *ius soli*, Irish citizenship to

everyone who was born on the island restricting the right to kids who have at least one parent with Irish citizenship. The referendum showed how Ireland differed from how it had depicted itself before, namely “the land of a thousand welcomes”:

the celebrated liberal values of freedom, choice and opportunity, which are supposedly intrinsic to the cultural renewal ushered in by the ‘new Ireland’, is the harsh reality of capitalist production, exclusionary nationalism and growing xenophobia, in relation to both the state and the general populace. (Loyal 2004: 74)

Furthermore, migrant workers have been extensively utilized in unskilled sectors, running in parallel to the support and reproduction of skilled work sectors, particularly within high-tech industries. The influx of migrant labour has played a crucial role in sustaining and fuelling the labour force in sectors requiring less specialized skills. This dynamic not only addresses the demands of unskilled labour but also indirectly contributes to the viability and expansion of skilled work sectors, especially those entrenched in advanced technology and innovation. The interdependence between unskilled and skilled labour sectors, facilitated by the employment of migrant workers, underscores the intricate and symbiotic nature of the labour landscape during the Celtic Tiger period:

Capitalist economic expansion has led to the formation of a dual labour market structure in Ireland’s Celtic Tiger, which juxtaposes secure, permanent, highly skilled and well-paid jobs, on the one hand, with unskilled, low-paid, insecure jobs, on the other. Specifically, the expansion of highly skilled, well-paid computer and information technology work can be contrasted with the expansion in the unskilled services sector. The latter has generally been characterised by difficult, unpleasant and low-paid work. The marked increase in need for office cleaners, dishwashers and fast-food operatives, agricultural workers, factory workers, nurses, builders and waiters and waitresses has meant an increase in vacancies in these areas. (Loyal 2004:82)

Moreover, even though the Celtic Tiger was characterized by an unprecedented increase of women within the workforce, inequality in the wealth-share was widely experienced by the female population. In fact, women played a huge role in the economic development of the period, although the phenomenon was not devoid of contradictions. As Kelly (2007), Gunne (2012) and Negra (2013) point out, the introduction of women into the workforce needs to be understood from the point of view of the constant restructuring of the patriarchal capitalist world-system. Moreover, although women could enter the workforce, many of them preferred part-time jobs since it would give them time to carry out the unpaid care work which was still a predominant female duty in a patriarchal society (Gunne 2012). In fact, the secularization of the Irish state and of the Irish family

did not undermine the subjacent patriarchal structure neither on the private level of the family nor on that of the state. In this respect, women's lives and bodies were still under strict control of the state:

The traditional family is no longer the norm: marriage is at a record low, and most women today have a waged job or even two, even when they have young children. But we are paying a high price for the relative autonomy we have gained. Nothing has changed in the workplace. As we know, most jobs assume that workers are free from family commitments or have someone at home taking care of housework. (Federici 2020: 36)

Furthermore, the feminization of the workforce did not happen equally amongst different social classes. Working class women, often remained with their lower paying jobs, and also “The lack of state-sponsored childcare and its privatised provision discriminate against working-class mothers and force them out of the workforce” (Kennedy 2003: 97). Moreover, as Claire Bracken underlines, neoliberal post-feminism became another, equally close-ended, identitarian marker of the Celtic Tiger woman. In this respect she states:

The futurities that inflect and experience of the Tiger can in fact be harnessed for regressive gendered paradigms, notably the dominant, popular symbol of the post-feminist woman: that is upper middle class, white, young, and heteronormative, supposedly empowered by her consumer potential. As neo-liberal symbol of gender progressivity, this is an emptied-out vision of futurity, all too knowable in its shapes and contours. (2022:13)

In this context, post-feminism marks women's value and potentiality through a consumeristic attitude alongside an overt sexualization of their bodies. In this respect, Celtic Tiger women, and post-crash women also, are stuck between two, equally close-ended and prescriptive futures: the mother/carer or the post-feminist. More often than not, these two paradigms are joint and inextricable, inasmuch as:

Women's oppression has its roots in the contradiction between social production and privatised reproduction. Childcare remains the responsibility of the individual family and, overwhelmingly, of the female parent. Even most non-parental carers are women. (Kennedy 2003:107)

Quite noticeably, notwithstanding the human rights progresses marked by the 1993 decriminalization of male and female homosexuality, the 1995 legalization of divorce and the 2015 legalization of same sex-marriage, it was not until 2018 that abortion became legal in Ireland. The Eight amendment of the Irish Constitution was overwhelmingly overturned in May 2018 by public referendum, won by 66.6% against 33.4%. The 8th

amendment was in place since 1983 and stated: “The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right”²³. Therefore, reproductive prescriptivism enforced by the Catholic Religion and the State through the abortion ban continued to assure that women would: “reproduce the next generation of workers, ensures that there is a constant replenishment of labour power, which is cared for, educated and socialised to enter the marketplace” (Kennedy 2003:107). It is not a case that the abortion ban remained throughout and long after the crash of the Celtic Tiger, in fact, as stated by Silvia Federici “procreation has a huge economic value which does not at all diminish with the raise of capital’s technological power” (2022:26). Instead, technological growth necessitates that the population grow together with the heightening of systemic inequalities (2022: 26-29). Contextually, as highlighted by Anne Sexton:

In Ireland, neoliberal politics, postfeminism, and a commercialized media have all facilitated regressive gender stereotypes. Neoliberalism, with its stress on market forces, ensures that the most profitable constructions of gender prevail; sexism is repackaged as ironic or somehow progressive, and the rhetoric of free choice is employed. (2013: 226)

As Bracken underlines, the question of female futurity during and after the Tiger becomes central especially in the search for non-prescriptive, open-ended future alternatives. The next paragraph will explore how the works of fiction which emerged both during, and especially after, the Celtic Tiger register the complexities of the period.

2.3 Post-crash fiction: a realism-irrealism continuum

The novels emerging in the wake of the enduring repercussions of the Irish economic collapse manifest a discernible process of uncanny un-worlding, as conceptualized in the first chapter. The prevailing worldview that had solidified during the Celtic Tiger era, analogous to the vision scrutinized by Jason Moore as foundational to the extended Capitalocene, undergoes a self-implosion. The disruption of the reality principle imposed during the Celtic Tiger acts in the novels as a point of fissure, through which awareness of the global and planetary dimensions in which the economic crash

²³ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Constitution of Ireland, <https://fra.europa.eu/en/law-reference/constitution-ireland-4> (Last access 19/07/2024).

was imbricated emerges. Deckard in her essay titled *IFSC as a Way of Organizing Nature* (2015), describes the characteristics of the Irish economy as “neoliberal ecology with Irish characteristics” (2015: 4). The title of the essay draws explicit inspiration from a prominent work by Jason Moore, namely *Wall Street as a Way of Organizing Nature* (2012), underscoring Ireland's adherence to the capitalist-neoliberal paradigm, in his essay Moore says: “Wall Street...becomes a way of organizing all of nature, characterized by the financialization of any income-generating activity” (Moore 2012: 2). This alignment, however, should not be construed as a radical departure from the historical trajectory of the Capitalocene; rather, it signifies its most recent phase. Notably, this temporal juncture is marked by a discernible inclination towards literary expressions that deviate, to varying degrees, from the conventional confines of literary realism. Such departures serve to rupture the veneer of reality imposed by the prevailing public discourse during the Celtic Tiger, subsequent troika interventions, and the contemporary guise of newfound prosperity. At the same time, the use of non-realistic techniques within the narrative also coincides with the phenomenon that Kehoane and Khuling describe as Collision Culture, namely as we’ve have already discussed, the collision between: “vestigial traditionalism and accelerated modernization, between the local and the global, between the values and organizing principles of action of community and society” (2004: 11) especially responding to the set of feeling which characterizes life in contemporary Ireland as “living in an in-between world, inbetween cultures and identities, an experience of liminality” (2004: 14). In this respect, Eóin Flannery in his book *Form, Affect And Debt In Post-Celtic Tiger Irish Fiction* (2022) analyses the limits of literary realism when representing the Celtic Tiger and post-crash period in Ireland:

The imaginative ‘work’ undertaken by the reader of literary realist fiction, then, furnishes them with both an openness, and a capacity, to engage with and to accept, the ‘imaginative’ and ‘fictional’ work required of the emerging capitalist credit economy. Such arguments rehearse well established arguments regarding the mutuality of literary realism and neoliberal capitalist social relations. (2022: 51)

Especially, Flannery criticises the formal realism employed by Dermot Bolger in his 2015 novel *Tanglewood*: “Bolger’s formal realism merely incarnates the rigidity and conservatism of its ethical and affective impulses – it does not accommodate the ‘intensity’ or ‘disruption’ that might habilitate ‘another way of thinking ethics and politics’ (Probyn 2005: 73)” (Flannery 2022: 59).

Adam Kelly, in his chapter *Ireland's Real Economy: Postcrash Fictions of the Celtic Tiger* (2020), engages with the need to analyse Ireland's economic development and the power relations in which it is part by especially combining the two analytical trajectories of "a new articulation of the (...) notion that literature speaks truth to power, or a detailed engagement with the more modern idea that cultural forms can tell us something crucial about economic and material life" (2020: 197). In this sense he notices how novelists particularly interested in exploring the material reality of contemporary Ireland do engage with, question and challenge the same idea of "the real" itself. Especially finding "an oscillation between the real and unreal, a structure of feeling that affects their characters and the formal dimensions of their art" (2020: 197). In light of these considerations, Mary McGlynn analyses a cohort of texts from this temporal epoch through the analytical lens of the Warwick Research Collective's (WReC) irrealism and through the idea of 'ungrammaticality'. In elucidating her approach, McGlynn remarks:

The ongoing semiperipheral status of Irish works and continuing uneven capitalist development make the last twelve years fertile ground for irrealist novels in Ireland, featuring a variety of formal irruptions in largely mimetic texts. (...) We see irrealist elements in novels activating genre conventions from thriller to the speculative to the magical. (...) My primary goal in discussing irrealism is to connect it to crisis austerity and imbalanced recovery. (2022: 10)

The corpus of texts examined within her volume predominantly comprises realist narratives punctuated by interludes of irrealist elements. Notably, the scholarly landscape has witnessed a proliferation of studies in recent years that engage with contemporary texts through the prisms of neo-marxism and ecocriticism. A noteworthy example is Flannery's exploration in *Ireland and Ecocriticism Literature, History and Environmental Justice* (2016), wherein he posits that the Celtic Tiger era constitutes a pivotal juncture heralding the inception of an ecocritical approach to textual analysis. He outlines the potentialities of ecocritical approaches when trying to envision alternative ways of relating to landscape and community: "Thus, if figures of the Celtic Tiger, and its subsequent demise, were feelings of betrayal amid a frenzy of irresponsibility, then the critical resources of ecocritical thinking can offer at least a partial alternative to such mind-sets" (2016: 3). Flannery's scholarship holds particular significance in the context of contemporary Irish studies, particularly in its nuanced treatment of scalar representation. Grounded in the theoretical frameworks advanced by Chakrabarty and Clark amongst others, Flannery delves into the works of authors such as Timothy Robinson

and Derek Mahon, thereby contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the intricate interplay between ecological concerns and literary expression. In this context he alligns with the idea that:

a radical re-imagination of humanity's historical consciousness is warranted if we are to arrive at a rigorous comprehension of the unfolding ecological crisis – its root causes, our long-term implication in this crises, and our inescapable future investment in the alleviation of its worst excesses. (2016: 7)

Another pivotal collection in this respect is *A History of Irish Literature and the Environment* (2022) which gives a fundamental contribution to a historical understanding of environmental concerns in Irish literature. Often times, as in Flannery's and McGlynn's work, materialist and ecocritical approaches are combined in various ways and degrees. This is particularly evident also in the work of Sharea Deckard, as we've already discussed, as well as Simon Workman (2023), and Malcolm Sen (2019). Sen states: "Irish literature, written in the shadow of the Celtic Tiger's demise, is self-evidently conscious of the ramifications of such entanglements and provides a sustained reflection on the precarity of individual life in the face of national and planetary challenges" (2019: 13). Workman instead, identifies the non-realist trend of contemporary Irish fiction as one that:

(...) bespeaks a troubled awareness of the country's accelerating subsumption within an ever-intensifying web of global processes – economic, ecological, geo-political – that have engendered a postanthropocentric *Weltanschauung* and a reduced feeling of individual, communal or national agency. (2023: 364)

The aforementioned materials, coupled with the theoretical foundations established in the inaugural chapter, serve as pivotal instruments in the forthcoming chapters dedicated to the analysis of a selected group of novels. Of particular significance to my examination, and in consonance with the themes explored in the first chapter, is the convergence of environmental preoccupations interpreted through a materialist critique. The crux of the analysis lies in discerning how contemporary literary production navigates and engages with the singular yet multifaced crises that we are living through (Klein 2014). This is accomplished through the adroit utilization of formal techniques that intentionally depart from the confines of literary realism. Such deviations, serve the purpose of unraveling the reality principle/common sense inherent in literary realism:

In such an instance, in which ideology is being rendered as “common sense”, we can see fiction as a space in which the pillars of common sense are rattled. The direct line between novel and political action is rare, but, in looking at a cross-section of recent fiction, both B-format and mass market, we can discern patterns that both respond to and reconfigure the status quo. (McGlynn 2022: 36)

Having extensively expounded upon concepts of scale, hyperobjects, capitalist world-ecology, as well as the notions of scalar reading, irrealism, and historical depth, these ideas converge within the analytical framework that I have denominated as Uncanny Realism. The application of Uncanny Realism aims to illuminate the intricate dynamics inherent in these literary works, unraveling the tensions between faithful representation and deliberate estrangement, thereby enriching our comprehension of the intricate relationship between literature and the socio-economic and environmental contexts within which it emerges. Indeed, the analysis of these literary trends necessitates an examination that extends beyond the confines of the local Irish context. This imperative is underscored not only by the inherent nature of the theories employed but also by works that deliberately position Irish literature within a broader global framework, as in the case of *Where Motley is Worn: Transnational Irish Literatures* (Tucker & Casey: 2014). The theoretical underpinning of Uncanny Realism, by its very nature, invites a consideration of literary phenomena within a broader context, acknowledging the interconnectedness of local, global and planetary dynamics. As such, a comprehensive analysis of the identified trends requires a discerning lens that accounts for the interplay between local and global influences, thereby enriching the understanding of the multifaceted dimensions inherent in contemporary Irish literature.

In contextualizing the forthcoming analysis, it is pertinent to elucidate the positioning of the novels I choose to analyse within what could be identified as a realism-irrealism continuum. As previously discussed, the literary landscape during the Celtic Tiger and the subsequent Collapse is distinguished by a pronounced surge of irrealism interwoven into the narrative fabric. Even in ostensibly realistic novels, discernible fractures of irrealism are identified, serving as pivotal and illuminating elements.

An illustrative example in this regard is Anne Enright's *The Forgotten Waltz* (2011), a work that has attracted extensive scholarly attention. In this novel, a seemingly realistic narrative is intermittently disrupted by images such as:

The place was going up by seventy-five euro a day, he said, which was – he did the calculations under flickering eyelids – about five cents a minute. Which didn't seem like much, I thought. Which seemed piffling, after all we had been through. Still, you could almost feel it, a pushing in the walls; the toaster would pop out fivers, the wood of the new-laid floors would squeeze out paper money and start to flower (2012: 14).

These instances of irrealism, as observed in Enright's work, underscore the permeation of fantastical elements and/or set of images within narratives that outwardly adhere to a realist framework. The critical examination of such ruptures becomes imperative for a nuanced understanding of the intricate interplay between realism and irrealism in contemporary Irish literature.

Conversely, situated on the opposite end of the continuum, a cluster of novels gravitates towards genres such as post-apocalyptic, sci-fi, dystopian, and steampunk. Foremost among these works is Kevin Barry's *City of Bohane* (2011), followed by Nial Burke's *Line* (2021), the post-apocalyptic narrative of *Last Ones Left Alive* (2018) by Sarah Davis-Goff, or Louise O'Neill's *Only Ever Yours* (2014), *Modern Times* by Cathy Sweeney (2020), and more recently, Paul Lynch's *The Prophet Song* (2023).

It is crucial to note that this proclivity towards the supernatural and the realm of unreality within the Irish context is by no means an exclusive feature of contemporary literature. This trajectory of literary exploration into fantastical and speculative realms has historical antecedents within the broader scope of Irish literature. Irish literature has

a long tradition of gothic²⁴ and sci-fi literature²⁵ that somehow differs from the canonical tradition of such genres for its own characteristics. The contemporaneous manifestation of such tendencies reflects not only the socio-economic and environmental challenges currently faced by Ireland but also a broader engagement with global themes and the evolution of literary expression in response to contemporary realities. The texts selected for analysis are positioned along the spectrum between literary realism and overtly

²⁴ In this respect, although the gothic has for long attracted the attention of scholars' and academics, this tendency can be recognized in sci-fi scholarship just during the last few years. Regarding Gothic Irish literature the first works that come to mind could be Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872), Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth the Wonderer* (1820) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). In this context, McCormack in the second volume of the Field Day anthology dedicated to Irish gothic, states that the most prominent difference between Irish and British gothic is the former's almost complete indifference towards the medieval period. Instead, Irish gothic seems much more preoccupied with contemporary events and problematics: "Irish gothic fiction is remarkably explicit in the way it demonstrates its attachment to history and to politics" (1991: 833). In this respect, it is worth underlying how recent scholarship on the gothic genre in Ireland, and more prominently the work of Christina Morin, has shown how the Irish gothic production was more layered and complex than how it seemed before. Morin in this respect goes against the trend to distinguish between Irish Gothic and gothic literature at large, by placing it at within a wider, transnational tradition (2018). By doing so she challenges the general understanding that "Irish Gothic' thus speaks of fiction that explores the mixed fears and desires of a minority Anglo-Irish population threatened – imaginatively if not actually – by the unsettled native Catholics over whom they maintained precarious control" (2018). And, by looking at works of writers such as Elizabeth Griffin, she understand the genre as: "Not just an allegorical expression of its Anglo-Irish writers' fear of the repressed past and its people (the Catholic majority), the Irish literary gothic in this period proves a dynamic, cross-sectarian, and cross-cultural enterprise" (2018). In this respect, Khuling and Kheoane reading of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, seem to somehow alliterate with that multilayered perspective. In fact, onto one hand it feeds into the interpretation of Ireland as a semi-peripheral country in which "Ireland's place in the symbolic order and imaginative structure of the British imperium: backward, dark, Catholic, still ruled by a landed gentry that the peasants hold in awe and in dread" (2014: 7). While on the other they shed a parallelism between *Dracula* as *drochfholla*, a bad blood, blood sucker un-dead creature, and the new Irish born *drochfhollas*. Consequently, the two scholars, also following 2011 McNally's study on the vampire as a prominent metaphor for capitalist extraction, underline the contiguity between Anglo-Irish landlord, and Irish born "gombeen" man in their vampiristically profit driven mindset.

²⁵ For what concerns science fiction, Ireland boasts a longstanding tradition that has regrettably remained somewhat obscured in academic discourse. Recent scholarly endeavours, notably the work of scholars like Jack Fennell, have been instrumental in rekindling interest in and shedding light on the richness of Ireland's science fiction and speculative literary heritage. In this respect Fennell's book *Irish Science Fiction* (2014), is pivotal in this respect. More specifically, Fennell considers Irish sci-fi as produced by that clash of "tradition" and "modernization", which produced a sense and a fear of outside infiltration in the country: "the ongoing collision between modernity and tradition has shaped an indigenous SF largely characterised by insecurity and the fear of infiltration from outside" (2011: V). Moreover, Irish sci-fi largely reflects the popularization of science through modernization, which is reflected in the use of pseudo science as the fictional basis of science fiction. Fennell starts from an analysis of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), which is still linked to that early modern period in which literary genres were mixed, especially in their fine line between realism and the fantastical. He then goes on by analysing other works of Irish sci-fi which have been seldomly analysed by academic scholars such as: Fitz-James O'Brien, Robert Cromie, Cathal Ó Sándair and Flann O'Brien but also more contemporary writers such as Kevin Barry. This re-evaluation underscores the need to acknowledge the depth and diversity of Irish literary contributions across various genres, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the nation's literary landscape.

speculative fiction²⁶. They are situated precisely at this juncture where established literary genres and the certainties of the represented reality reach their limits, giving way to an oscillation between mimesis and estrangement, doubt, and revelation. The selection of novels which I am going to analyse, align with the analytical framework delineated in the first chapter, thereby incorporating elements of literary realism, gothic and sci-fi literature as well as unreliable narrative techniques, dissolution of life-death boundaries, portrayal of diverse scales disrupting teleological presentism, satirical elements, and fragmented narrative structures. Moreover, these novels are imbued with a pronounced sense of historicity, resonating with the concept of metamodern depthness as articulated by Vermeulen and Van Den Akker. The interplay between historicity, unreliability, scalar collision and speculative elements further positions these novels as dynamic expressions of the complexities inherent in navigating the socio-economic, environmental, and cultural landscape of post-Celtic Tiger Ireland. Indeed, the intricate interplay between mimesis and estrangement within these novels begets a profound sense of uncanniness. This uncanniness is rooted in the notion that a novel which while at first glance appears to be intended to reflect our reality, instead presents us with an anamorphic and distorted representation. This departure from a straightforward mirroring prompts a reevaluation of the underlying logics and values that sustain our world. By introducing elements of estrangement, the novels challenge readers to question established norms and assumptions, inviting critical engagement with the socio-economic, environmental, and cultural paradigms that shape contemporary global and Irish society. The uncanny quality, therefore, becomes a catalyst for a deeper interrogation of the familiar, fostering a reflective and critical perspective on the intricacies of the world represented within the literary narratives, which echoes Collins and Jervins claim that “The uncanny is an experience of disorientation, where the world in which we live suddenly seems strange, alienating or threatening” (2008: 1). In doing so, the novels give voice of space to Fisher’s Real(s), by bringing to the fore those events and dynamics which remain hidden under the surface of the common sensical reality conveyed by a public discourse which allings

²⁶ Bolger's *The Journey Home* (1990) could be considered as a predecessor within the Irish literary sphere of this trend. The novel presents a constant shift between realism and gothic tropes, unreliable narration, a deep concern with the political situation both at a global and at a local level. In the novel the friction between rural and urban life, globalization in both the shape of the opening of the economy and the global struggle against it takes the form of a sense of displacement from the same concept of home. The characters in *The Journey Home* do embody the fragmentation of modern existence theorized by Fredric Jameson, but also, and even more strikingly, they suffer from a sense of “transcendental homelessness”, as described by Lukacs.

with the logics and world view inherent in the capitalist world-system. The novels I analyse therefore, operate a rupture against the reality principle spread during the Celtic Tiger, exposing the personal, social and environmental costs of what was genreally accepted as a miraculous process of accelerated modernization. The process of accelerated modernization in Ireland alligns with the broader tendency that Jack Fennell recognizes as: “This progress was less an organic development than a consciously pursued ideal, a vehicle whose means of propulsion was the abjection of that which had come before” (2014: 23). Especially noteworthy within these narratives is the re-emergence of the history of English colonialism in Ireland, which not only acts against the imperative to forget the past which characterized the 1994-2008 period, but also serving as a poignant commentary on the reality principle embraced during the Celtic Tiger era. The historical spectre of the Great Famine resurfaces frequently and in various forms within post-crash texts, as elucidated in Jason Buchanan's essay *Ruined Futures: Gentrification as Famine in Post-Celtic Tiger Irish Literature* (2017). The contemporary period witnesses a renewed interest in the theme of the Great Famine, and its analysis as an apocalyptic moment becomes particularly evident in works such as Paul Lynch's *Grace* (2020). Furthermore, the contemporary storytelling landscape is enriched by the infusion of local genres, including the Big House Novel, as explored by Kelly (2020), Flannery (2022), and McGlynn (2022). Additionally, there is oftentimes a deliberate blending with Irish folklore, exemplified in Louise Kennedy's *The End of the World is a Cul de Sac* (2021). This confluence of historical critique, genre exploration, and engagement with folklore contributes to a nuanced and layered representation of Ireland's past and present, fostering a dynamic dialogue between the literary narratives and the socio-cultural realities they seek to interrogate and reinterpret. All the elements outlined in the previous chapters collectively contribute to the literary representation of a profound sense of uncanniness—a disconcerting experience arising from when the familiar world one believed to be living in is instead portrayed as threatening, incomprehensible, and unwelcoming.

While some of the novels I decided to analyse such as *Notes from a Coma*, *Solar Bones*, *The Fjord of Killary* and *The Devil I Know*, have received wide academic attention, others, especially *Is Stacey Pregnant?*, *Notes from the Irish Dystopia*, *Nothing on Earth* and *The End of the World is a cul de Sac*, lack extensive studies. By placing these works together, I aim at identifying and then analyse the in-between state of these texts which blur the line between realism and speculative fiction through the framework of Uncanny

Realism. My study aims, amongst other things, to fill in this gap by underlining the very fine line between reality and un-reality, mimesis and estrangement, which I identified as a sense of uncanniness, and which reflects in literary texts our current local/global/planetary time of multiple conjoined crises.

I'll divide the novels in three chapters which will give me the opportunity to analyse at a close level how the texts engage with their setting. More specifically I have titled my chapters as follows: "Fjords, bogs, brains, countryside, bohemia and motorways: *Notes from a Coma* by Mike McCormack, *Is Stacey Pregnant? Notes from the Irish Dystopia* by Tomas McSimon and *The Fjord of Killary* by Kevin Barry". "Urbanization, worlding and un-worlding in *Protection* by Molly McCloskey, and *The Devil I Know* by Claire Kilroy" and "Spectral homes, geo-engineering and disappearing bodies in *Solar Bones* by Mike McCormack and *Nothing on Earth* by Conor O'Callaghan, and *The End of the World is a Cul de Sac* by Louise Kennedy". Consequently, the three chapters, by complementing each other, are constructed as a textual geography of Ireland during the years between 2004 and 2021, which especially expose the fallacy of the neoliberal policies adopted during the Celtic Tiger by operating a process of un-worlding of the reality principle imposed during those years and after. Specifically, the analytical framework of Uncanny Realism will help investigate the inherent irreality of the status quo, by way of its defamiliarization.

The rural, domestic or urban setting of the novels will allow us to explore how environmental and political concerns unfold in different material geographies. In this context "the material and imaginative management of Irish space remains central to contemporary cultural, social and political entanglements" (Crowley & Linehan 2016: 4). In this respect we should keep in mind the dialectic relationship which stands between centre, periphery and semi periphery within various nation states. Most notably, in the case of Ireland: "the transformations wrought by the boom and its aftermath re-made place, reframed the qualities of social life, altered the landscape, fractured the national space and expanded social and economic relations of society into an ever-widening global network" (Crowley & Linehan 2016: 4).

Moreover, focusing on a specific setting, allows to delve deeper into certain historical, economical, and political factors. In the third chapter, for example, I will

examine in detail how the West of Ireland, often depicted in dominant discourses as the idyllic, traditional part of the country, has in fact undergone centuries of peripheralization. This process was exacerbated during the Celtic Tiger era and after the crash through practices of environmental extractivism and resource depletion. In the fourth chapter, I will look at how domestic spaces in Ireland during and after the Celtic Tiger have been the material and symbolic catalyser of discourses of collapse, crisis, and the lack of personal and communitarian security. This is especially true if we consider the widespread phenomenon of the ghost-estates. Moreover, the house as a traditional vehicle of the uncanny becomes a fruitful space through which examine the crumbling of inside-outside borders, and environmental crisis. Lastly, in the fifth chapter, I will focus on urban and urbanizing spaces by showing how the links between financial flows and environment building create spaces which are both material and immaterial, alive and spectral.

Despite my decision to divide my exploration of the texts into three distinct chapters, it is important to note that they inform one another, and their settings often intermingle. Therefore, issues addressed in the third chapter naturally resonate in the fourth and fifth chapters, and so on.

3 Fjords, bogs, brains, fields, bohoreens and motorways: *Notes from a Coma* by Mike McCormack, *Is Stacey Pregnant?* *Notes from the Irish Dystopia* by Tomas Mac Síomón and *The Fjord of Killary* by Kevin Barry

This chapter focuses on the analysis of two novels and one short story written just before and after the crash of the Celtic Tiger in Ireland. The choice for grouping these three texts together resides in their spatial setting. In fact, all three are set in the Western part of Ireland, especially county Mayo, and in the bog areas of the midlands. Their peripheral and liminal settings, far from the urban core, represented by the city of Dublin, will give the opportunity to interrogate centrality and peripherality in Ireland, and therefore to question the idea that the centre is the catalyser from which modernity propagates. On the contrary, the accelerated modernization in Ireland, mirroring the bigger picture of the capitalist world-ecology, is created by and through a dialectic relationship between local periphery and local centre, while the Republic of Ireland as a whole, as we've extensively explored, configures as a semi-peripheral country in the world-system. At the same time, the local-global relationship is analysed in connection to planetary phenomena.

In terms of the formal structure and themes adopted by the novels, they do not differ from those that will be analysed in the next two chapters. Nonetheless, their spatial setting enables reflection on aspects which are not central to other novels and vice-versa. The three texts, as will be widely exposed, merge various literary genres, namely realism, and, respectively, sci-fi, apocalyptic tale and gothic tropes. Moreover, the texts extensively employ unreliable narration methods, which are heightened by both fragmented points of view and the presence of external listeners. Moreover, the main characters of the narratives find themselves between life and death, either because they face life-threatening situations, or because they reside in a liminal comatose space. In addition, the novels present a deep concern with the history of their specific locale, and most prominently with the history of British colonialism and the catastrophic effects of the Irish famine.

The West of Ireland has been represented as a refuge from modernity, even since W.B. Yeats suggested young John Millington Synge to: "Give up Paris; (...) Go to the Aran Islands. Live there as if you were one of the people themselves: express a life that has never found expression" (1961: 325). It is not by chance then that Synge's production

in the Aran islands was interpreted within the international current of Primitivism. The term “primitivism” is associated with the need to escape from the artificialities of modern society to discover a more genuine and sympathetic way of life that can be found only far away from cities and industries, in places untouched by artificial and industrialized modernity, and in a closer relationship with nature. Synge’s primitivism overlaps with the concurrent Irish Revival, which amongst other things sought to push forward the cultural development of Ireland, by looking at the past, and to build up its national awareness starting from what was felt as being the ancient core of the nation that had been hidden by the cultural predominance of England. Therefore, even since Synge’s and Yeats’ time, the West has functioned as a space against and thanks to which Irish modernity could be created. In this context, the stereotyped vision of the West of Ireland continued through the decades, also fuelled by American film representation of staged – Irish movies such as *The Quiet Man* (1952). In this respect, photographer Anthony Haughey in his investigation of the visual representation of Ireland, and especially the West, links the stereotyped depiction of American-addressed production to a wider commodification of the landscape, which also functions as a point of reference for the diasporic community overseas:

These dominant visual representations of Ireland, which continues to be exported and proliferate through propagandist imagery—including advertising, industrial recruitment, films, and postcards— attempt to remove all signs of modernity and complex cultural contestations in favour of an oversimplified rural idyll, images described by Luke Gibbons as “enclosed within a circuit of myth and romanticism.” These are images that have been marketed by Fáilte Ireland for consumption by a diasporic community that successive governments have failed to economically sustain. The historical and political reality hidden behind these photographs and depopulated landscapes is a history of forced migration.

This becomes evident in his 1996 picture *American Tourists, County Kerry*:



In the picture, a group of American tourists is getting off the bus to look at a young boy who is probably transporting turf with his donkey. The “modern” clothes of the American tourists collide with the old-school “traditional” ones of the boy, and the picture looks as if the tourists have embarked in a space-time travel and landed sometime in a forgotten past. What the picture, as well as the touristic campaigns, hid, is the systemic uneven development of the West of Ireland within statal and global policies throughout the centuries: “The historical and political reality hidden behind these photographs and depopulated landscapes is a history of forced migration” (2017: 56). Relatedly, Kuhling and Keohane highlight in a chapter called *Between the Mountaintop and the Marketplace: New Age Travellers Lifestyle Politics and the Critique of Consumer Culture*, how the West of Ireland has attracted a wide number of what they call “refugees from modernity”, or people who grew up and lived in highly urbanized areas and which seek a more authentic “pre-modern” way of living. Resultingly, the West of Ireland has been constructed by the tourist industry as a *locus amoenus* and “has been an object of the ‘romantic gaze’ by both urbanised Irish and non-Irish people. In a variety of ways, the Irish landscape has been commodified and sold to tourists through walking tours, photographs, and so on”

(2004: 124). Contextually, something that must be highlighted is the peculiar relationship, which is created between locals and tourists, where the former shouldn't be considered as only a passive actant. In fact, although "in addition to historical or heritage attractions, the people of Ireland and their lifestyles are seen as a key component of the cultural tourism product" (Kneafsey 1998: 112) both tourists and locals shape and co-shape the identity of a place (O'Connor & Cronin 2003). This is particularly true in the current moment in which cheap flights and platform capitalism driven global businesses such as Airbnb (Srnicsek 2016), configure people as alternatively tourists and locals. Nonetheless, the latest development of global tourism has been analysed in its destructive force as extractive tourism by academic Vijay Kolinjivadi (2021). In this context, Kolinjivadi, traces a parallel between mining industries and energy farms with the tourist business:

Like a gold rush to the latest discovery of untapped ores, a panoply of hotel chains, foreign tour operators, online booking agencies, airlines, real estate speculators and multinational construction companies quickly rush to capitalise on any curiosity that a visitor might have towards any site of historical or natural value. (2021 online).

The West of Ireland has been subjected to the opening of several extractivist frontiers in the last few decades (Bresnihan & Brodie 2020). This aligns with Silvia Federici's idea of the continuous ongoing of primary capitalist accumulation, as well as (as highlighted by Jason Moore) the constant strive for new energy frontiers prompted by the near end of the four cheaps. One of the most striking examples of this trend has been the Shell to Sea Corrib Gas project, off the coast of North-Mayo. It is important then to stress how coastlines are often both elected for fracking projects, as well as being (and this is particularly crucial for Ireland) highly impacted by the sea level rising effects of climate change (Hickey 2011). The Corrib gas was discovered in 1996, and it was estimated to contain around 870 billion cubic feet of natural gas; Enterprise Oil was the original operator for the project until it was bought by Shell in 2002 (Slevin 2019). The project shed light on complex and multifaced dynamics between local communities, the state and international multinationals. The Irish state's management of gas and natural resources mirrors its broader neoliberal trajectory. Slevin notices: "Ireland's approach to the management of its gas and oil was shaped by occurrences in the capitalist system, internally and globally as the state became further integrated into the global economy" (2019: 528). Statal reaction to the protestors against the construction of the Corrib pipeline was identified by Slevin as part of the inherent reactionist policies of neoliberal

states. Slevin's research is based on the investigation of the Corrib Gas controversy and on the peculiar shape that resistance took against it. She recognises the people who went against it as the "community of resistance", which included both people living in the area, and people from other places which shared the same political views and values. On the other hand, other people, both locals and non-locals supported the project embracing what sounds like the reinstating of the capitalist reality principle, which sees any sort of project as highly needed in what was by them considered an isolated and backwards area. Conversely, the 'community of resistance', argued that the project would not only bring little to no benefit for both local communities and the Irish territory at large, inasmuch as most of the gas would be sold on international markets at a competitive prize, but it would also expose the area to social, environmental and health risks such as: "pipeline risks; toxic waste issues; risk of accident in a rural area without emergency services; human rights abuses which included compulsory acquisitions orders against residents, low tax, terms and Shell's poor track record in Nigeria and other countries" (2019: 521). What is interesting in the context of analysing the connection between realism as reality principle and irrealism as a critique to it, are the reactions, collected by Slevin, Keohane and Kuhling from both the people in favour and against the project. In fact, while the former, reacted with comments such as:

Seamus (a Shell employee) 'campaigned to ensure that the gas ... came ashore in Mayo' as he felt there 'would be spin-off benefits from it.' Andrew (businessman from a town over 50 km east of Ballinaboy) said he was 'very supportive of any project that would help job creation.' Fr Adam (priest in a parish approximately 20 km from the terminal) endorsed the project as it had 'the potential to help social and economic development of this region.' (Slevin 2019: 521)

The people who went against it, according to Slevin felt as if they were being invaded by an external entity:

Several interviewees conveyed a sense of a foreign entity being imposed on the area; Ted (retired teacher) described summer 2000 as the start of the 'invasion' when 'the suits [Enterprise staff] were in the pubs buying booze for people and coming on with their models [of the project infrastructure] ... the invasion has started.' (Slevin 2019: 520)

This passage resonates with Jack Fennel's theory that much of Irish sci-fi catalyses a "siege like" attitude, which reflects the worry of being invaded from the outside (2014). In respect to the local community's reaction towards the project Keohane and Kuhling fieldwork within the line of the protestors, sheds a stronger light on the potentialities of

the semantics of the unreal when it comes to unveiling and acting against the capitalist reality principle:

This discursive frame composed of elements drawn from the realm of reality and the register of fantasy (...) enables people to construct narratives that link local events with the most globally far-flung; the banal and seemingly innocuous with the most complex, obscure and sinister. (2016: 70)

At the same time, the two scholars underline how many protestors were able to connect the local event of the Shell project to the global dynamics of the capitalist world-ecology, thus blurring the strict, abstract line between local/global and planetary:

Eastern European muscle, former army conscripts, bully-boys – sure that’s how Shell do the dirty work all over the world – Nigeria, South America . . . Oh they know all about that – Foreign Affairs, the Army – that was completely set up. And the cover-up afterwards – deny everything, spin it: ‘he was only a gobshite’, ‘a fantasist’. Not at all! We knew what he was, and the Bolivians knew too (Ethnographic fieldnotes by authors, June 2009). (2016: 70)

This links the Corrib Gas project not only to the wider capitalist world-ecology but also with both recorded Irish history and planetary time:

Common across historical periods and industrial transformations in Ireland is a clash of scale, whereby the technoscientific mastery that characterises large-scale state and corporate strategies comes into friction with or has trouble accounting for the life, ecologies and practices of local communities. (Bresnahan & Brodie 2023: 364)

In this respect, the Corrib gas controversy sheds light on the multi-scalar embeddedness hidden by the abstract Nature-Culture divide (Moore: 2018) which denies what Timothy Morton calls “the mesh”. The events linked to the Corrib gas controversy will represent a point of reference for the analysis of the three texts in this chapter, alongside with the usage of boglands as wastelands, which I’ll expand during the analysis of *Is Stacey Pregnant? Notes from the Irish dystopia*. On the other hand, the first two texts share the same spatial setting, namely the area around the fjord of Killary, between county Mayo and Galway. The spatial setting of the fjord creates the chance to explore our time of multiple crises in a specific locale.

Renowned landscape writer Tim Robinson begins the second volume of his Connemara Trilogy, *Connemara: The Last Pool of Darkness* (2009), with a dizzying account of the geological history of the area around the Killary fjord. The very sight of

the bay has the power to immerse the observer in its million-year-long geological past. Fascinated by this profound and sublime experience, Robinson enlisted geologist Kieran Ryan to guide him through the fjord's geological history. Killary Harbour, named from the anglicized version of *An Caoláire Rua*, meaning "the red sea inlet/fjord," was formed at the end of the Quaternary period when retreating glaciers left a narrow valley that later filled with water. To qualify as a fjord, the water within the inlet must be higher than the inflow from the sea. Although the most prominent features of the site were shaped during the last ice age, their origins date back millions of years.

That time was almost half a billion years ago, in the geological period known as the Ordovician (...) There was at that time an ocean comparable to the present-day Atlantic, the Iapetus; (...) Ireland was not yet a whole; what is now the north-Western portion of it was a sector of the Laurentian shores of Iapetus, while the south-eastern portion on the other side of Iapetus formed part of Eastern Avalonia, a minor continental fragment close to Baltica. (Robinson 2008: 10)

From this point forward, Tim Robinson, together with Kieran Ryan, embarked on a contemplative exploration of Connemara's deep history. At the conclusion of their "day's travels across abyssal time and clashing continents" (2008: 10), Tim and Kieran emerged from their "strata-deep cogitations" (2008: 10) to find themselves facing a privately owned salmon farm. This farm, initially seeming like a familiar human intervention, began to appear profoundly uncanny and irrational when considered against the backdrop of the area's million-year history. This reflection on Ireland's deep past underscores the scalar tension between the global and the planetary discussed earlier. Robinson remarks:

I shall have much to write about the intensity of feelings, the conflicts of interest and the small daily struggles of saints against the father of evil that humanize such phenomena as the Salrock fault, the Rosroe formation and the rest of the stark and stony features, from Killary Harbour to Slyne Head in the extreme south-West, that make up Connemara's Atlantic face. (2008: 14).

Robinson's work in the words of Eóin Flannery includes accounts and reflections from "historical, botanical, folkloric and linguistic information" (2016:94), while also encompassing several time-space scales. Consequently, the same landscape he sets out to analyse and write about evokes a sense of awe and deep connection with the land, and its geological development: "Time is a concept we cannot elude when confronted with the pre-human histories of geological formations and evolution of these Atlantic islands". Moreover, Robinson is not indifferent to contemporary speculation-driven practices used during the Celtic Tiger nor to the increasingly rationalistic management of the landscape,

which, as we've seen in the first chapter with the case of the Irish forestry, is not unique to our current neoliberal era. Robinson's work helps envisioning with more clarity the simultaneous local, global and planetary dimension of both the narrative and real-life experience of the West of Ireland, and to understand them as a unicum, as a continuum of experiences which enfold through a specific material locale. Flannery notices further:

though much of Robinson's writing is preoccupied with and sustained by, the deep historical and human historical traces and narratives of Connemara and Árainn Mhór, across his work he exhibits a long-term environmental investment in the contemporary well-being of these landscapes. (2016:97)

Moreover, and which will be a pivotal insight for the rest of our discussion "we see the co-location of Irish ecological degradation and a broad ecocritical assertion of human responsibility for the environment" (2016: 97). In this respect, the specificity of environmental degradation and extractivism in Ireland will be framed and understood, also following Jason Moore's ideas, within the broader global context in which collective human actions on various levels, have become a climate-altering, geological force. In Ireland these trends are evident before, during and after the Celtic Tiger, and they become especially clear in connection to the real-estate boom, to the sell-off of resources (as exemplified by the Corrib gas project controversy), the spreading of data centres and the application of low environmental regulation standards (Deckard 2016). Moreover, it is crucial not to disjoin the present, current environmental concerns from the long history of Capitalocene to which they pertain. In fact, as it emerges in Robinson and as it will emerge in the three novels which I set out to analyse during this chapter, the West of Ireland brings the mark of the long history of colonization, displacement, violence, and land appropriation which in their specific Irish locale signalled a proto stage of our current neoliberal present. The novels I will analyse are particularly apt for the subversion of the depiction of the West as primordial and untouched by modernity, on the other hand they will be seen as an efficacious space in which to question the disruptive action of capitalism both at a local, global and planetary level.

3.1 *Notes from a Coma* by Mike McCormack: black holes, brains, fjords, bacteria and weird experiments

In my account of pre and post Celtic Tiger novels and the way they construct uncanny worlds which unveil the dynamics of the capitalist reality principle, *Notes from a Coma* could serve as a good, initial stepping stone. In fact, the novel, which was originally published in 2005 by Jonathan Cape, posits some of the foundational insights for the reading framework which I call Uncanny Realism²⁷. Given this, a short introduction to the plot is due. In Mike McCormack's *Notes from a Coma* (2005), the narrative follows JJ O'Malley, who was purchased as a young child from a Romanian orphanage for 2000 dollars by Anthony O'Malley, a farmer from Louisburgh in County Mayo. Anthony, facing the devastation of his herd due to mad cow disease, sought solace in adopting a child. Growing up in the tight-knit community of Louisburgh, JJ displays remarkable intelligence from an early age, characterized by his propensity for what would later be termed "mindrot meditations" (McCormack 2005: 42) – a reflection of his keen, obsessive, curiosity about the interconnectedness of the world and his own place within it. As the story unfolds, Louisburgh and especially the area around Killary harbour emerges as the setting for the Somnos project, an experimental endeavour aiming to explore a novel form of incarceration by inducing a deep coma in four volunteers aboard a ship off the harbour's coast. However, it becomes apparent that the volunteers, including JJ, are unwitting participants in a broader, unidentified neurological study. JJ's decision to join the project follows the tragic death of his best friend (Owen) and he seeks respite from his inner turmoil, by stating "I want take my mind off my mind for a while" (2005: 103).

As the author Mike McCormack, who is also from Louisburgh, notices, the West of Ireland is never considered when someone wants to imagine "the future" (De Loughry 2019). It is most often thought of as a place where tradition and immobility are cast in stone, and where nothing 'futuristic' ever happens. Conversely though, as we've already explored, the West of Ireland was always a place where the 'future' happened, but often, that came in the form of famine, extractivism and emigration. Therefore, following the

²⁷ On a more personal note, it was during the reading of this novel that the idea first sparked, and that guided me through the research of other texts from the same period which could have been reunited under a similar rationale.

need to subvert the common narrative, one of McCormack's goals in his writing is to demonstrate how the West of Ireland is a site where the future happens, and in which the present is not disjointed from the grid of capitalist dynamics, especially in the systemic exploitation of peripheral areas (De Loughry 2019). In this respect, Mike McCormack describes his writing style as: "a hybrid of science fiction and Irish domestic realism. It's John McGahern meets Philip K. Dick" (Nolan 2013: 95). The combination of those two elements, results in the mixture of a naturalistic narrative with sci-fi and speculative elements, which the author calls "augmented realism". Consequently, Treasa De Loughry's assessment of McCormack's central themes proves deeply explanatory:

His fiction can be interpreted in light of a theory of capitalism as the 'force field' which connects the 'the accumulation of capital, the pursuit of power, and the production of nature' (Moore 2011: 42) through often speculative literary modes that probe the interaction between culture, modernisation, and infrastructural modalities. The environments represented in his works are sites for the weird and uncanny, including near-future realities of offshore clone labour and robot citizenship, machinic fetishism, cloud seeding, and the technological sublime. (2019: 105)

Moreover, when writing about *Notes from a Coma*, Jack Fennell highlights how, despite the presence of a weird, estranging experiment, the novel is not configured or thought to be sci-fi at all:

Notes From a Coma does not seem to be SF at all. It is set at the time of its writing (pre-recession, Celtic Tiger Ireland), and most of it is written in a style that mimics straightforward reportage. Aside from the background plot element of the Somnos project, the only traces of SF appear in the footnotes. This is an instance in which Angenot's concept of the absent paradigm proves very useful in determining a text's genre. The narrative world presented is only slightly estranged from our own, but nevertheless, it is estranged. (2012: 281)

Although I don't necessarily agree with Fennell's explanation for the root of this estrangement, which he recognizes as: "an absent paradigm that looms large in the anxieties of many Irish citizens – the image of an out-of-control European Union" (2012: 281), his description of the novel as a world which is similar yet estranged from ours, is very useful. In fact, as we will explore in the next paragraph, the novel presents us with a world which is slightly skewed, but which does not leap into the realm of sci-fi. In response to Fennell's second statement, I would agree with his idea of there being an invasion from the outside, not from the point of view of a conspiratorial/anti-European stance, but more in line with the feeling described by the "community of resistance" when talking about the Corrib Gas project. As stated in the introduction, and following Wallerstein, Moore and Quijano, local, statal, and super-statal entities can't be thought

outside of or non-linked to the capitalist world-ecology at large, as well as the environmental threats that it posits. The novel by means of constructing an uncanny, familiarly strange narrative, defamiliarizes the naturalization of the capitalist discourse, by bringing forward the hidden violence of extractive dynamics and neoliberal propaganda. These dynamics penetrate communities, subjectivities, places, and bodies, tightening a new relationship of double internality. In this respect, my thoughts are aligned with Van Aken when he says:

Community disorientation and the feeling of invasion of one's own place, along with the defensive and trench-like responses we are witnessing, are caused today by multiple concomitant factors that we gather under the term globalization. (...) It is the very dimension of place that has become unrecognizable in globalization, where "that elementary right to feel reassured and protected" (Latour 2018: 19) re-emerges, leading to the trade of a little freedom for a little temporary security. (2020: 88, my translation)²⁸

Against this background, if some of the characters in the novel, especially Kevin Barrett, the politician, sustain and support that narrative, and others accept it as the status quo through a capitalist-realist attitude, the novel configures itself as a dialectic dismantling of those propositions. Consequently, it seems that the novel is characterized by both a movement of capitalist world-making and uncanny un-worlding. In fact, considering the novel's publication during the Celtic Tiger, the text seems to reinforce the same reality principle imposed in those years. Conversely, it also questions the close-ended futurity that that reality principle imposes on the characters, the community, the state, the globe and the planet at large. In this respect Tom Moylan says: "McCormack challenges Irish complacency through both the form and content of this work and opens the way to a new sense of possibility and hope in doing so" (2023: 350). Consequently, I will widely put in place the scalar reading practice which is part of my analytical framework of Uncanny Realism. I argue that the geographical and temporal backdrop of the text facilitates the utilization of irrealist and speculative elements to depict the Irish neoliberal ecological regime. Furthermore, it sets the stage for a distinctive scalar upheaval resulting from the intersection of the global and the planetary. This scalar confluence is depicted not only through the continuous zooming in and out, as described by Chakrabarty, but also through the creation of imagery where disparate scales converge into a single, indivisible entity.

²⁸ The original text has: "Il disorientamento comunitario e il sentimento di invasione dei propri luoghi, con le risposte difensive e di trincea a cui assistiamo, è causato oggi da molteplici aspetti concomitanti che raduniamo sotto il termine di globalizzazione. (...) è la stessa dimensione di luogo a essere diventata irrecognoscibile nella globalizzazione, dove riemerge "quell diritto elementare di sentirsi rassicurati e protetti" (Latour 2018: 19) che porta a barattare un po' di libertà per un po' di sicurezza temporanea".

Additionally, the semi-speculative nature of the text prompts essential reflections on our future, both as individuals and as a species, fostering critical discourse about the trajectory of humanity and life itself.

3.1.2 An anamorphic, fragmented, multi-scalar, uncanny structure

In terms of structure, *Notes from a Coma* adopts an unreliable and fragmented narrative style, divided into two main sections. In the primary narrative, JJ's story is conveyed through the perspective of five different narrators, four of whom are members of the town community, while the fifth is a politician. These narrators interpret and recount the protagonist's tale, with JJ's own voice remaining conspicuously absent. The plot is then expanded upon through a series of footnotes labelled "Event Horizon". As we will see, the two sections of the novel are placed in an anamorphic relation. This is perceived visually at first, as the footnotes constantly double the main body narrative at the end of the page. And thematically as well, in the sense that the events narrated in the main part are expanded, reshaped, and reanalysed under a different light within the Event Horizon, as Moylan puts it:

Instead, the sf notes with which the book begins and ends, and which therefore frame the apparent "main" narrative, not only reflect on the events of that narrative but also interrogate and challenge the limits of Irish naturalist writing and indeed of Irish consciousness. (2023: 351)

The main-body-narrative-against-footnotes device creates an uncanny doubling, whereby the reader not only is estranged by the description of Louisburgh as strangely familiar, but also because the same body-narrative plot is constantly brought into question by the information contained in the Event Horizon. Kunz highlights how anamorphism is an uncanny device which questions the Enlightenment's dichotomic distinction between inside/outside, subject/object, familiar/strange (Kunz 2005), which we've extensively discussed in the first chapter. It is not a coincidence that anamorphisms developed alongside and in contrast to linear or classical perspectives (Collins 1992: 73). Collins argues that the view of anamorphic images takes up what he calls an eccentric point of view: "The vantage point of the eccentric observer is not a refutation of a centric viewing position -it is its shadow. It is the flip side of the classical construction of vision in which the viewing subject stands at the node of a homolographic, mathematically coherent

universe” (1992: 75). In this way, if the main body has the pretence of being a sort of journalistic, reliable, matter-of-fact narrative, the Event Horizon reverses it by showing what is hidden and non-visible in the main text. In a certain sense, the Event Horizon constantly haunts the main narrative.

The main body narrative is constructed in a highly recognizable way. Namely, it resembles a journalistic report, one of those which could be broadcasted on tv on a momentarily hot topic. Secondly, it gives to the reader real-life, recognizable time-space coordinates: a town in the West of Ireland around the last few years of the Celtic Tiger. Moreover, the characters talk in a highly mimetic way, resembling the speech of that part of the country. It could be said then that the main body of the narrative is shaped around an unreliable structure disguised by a pretence of reality and reliability. The narrative is part of the broader media coverage which is carried out on the Somnos project and on JJ’s involvement in it. The bulk of the narrative is JJ’s story, from his childhood to the present, and, although his voice is completely absent, five other narrators construct and put together his story through their memories and points of view. The narrators are Frank Lally (a family friend), Anthony O’Malley (JJ’s father), Gerard Fallon (JJ’s teacher), Sarah Nevin (JJ’s girlfriend), and Kevin Barrett (TD politician involved in the Somnos project). The first four characters are part of the local community of Louisburgh, which is described, accordingly to McCormack’s intention (De Loughry 2019), as a rural community made up of decent, helpful people, who have each other’s backs and wouldn’t want to see anyone stuck. It seems apt to connect the gift-giving exchanges when JJ enters the community as that residual traditional communitarian aspect highlighted by Keohane and Kuhling. In fact, as Anthony O’Malley stressed various times over the course of the novel, it wouldn’t have been possible for him to raise JJ without the help of his community. Consequently, it appears that the traditional community-based gift-economy, especially embodied by Owen’s mother and family, is occurring simultaneously with a global economy in which the reproduction of life comes at a monetary cost. The clash is particularly evident when the Somnos boat is placed in Killary fjord. Concurrently, the intrusion of mass media coverage within the local community of Louisburgh heightens the sense unsteadiness and precarity which have seeped in since Owen’s death and JJ’s participation into the Somnos project. The reader has a clear feeling that the characters are being interviewed by someone external to the local community, which both indicates

the final intrusion of an external judge into the town and the display of shame and guilt by the people of Louisburgh. As Flannery states:

The intrusion of metropolitan journalist and accompanying photographer are references to the multi-scalar nature of the narrative and suggest the ways in which localities became aggregated and normalized into a national narrative of progress and affluence. (2022: 85)

Moreover, we never hear the voice or the questions of the interviewer. Their presence is most of all registered by the video interview structure of the chapters which alternate the voices and the perspectives of the narrators. We recognize the presence of an external auditor mostly by means of the *medias res* start of the chapters which resembles video montages. But also, from the narrators' colloquial way of narrating JJ's story, and from the usage of starting sentences such as:

Gerard Fallon: The altar boy from hell? – yes, I remember that. (McCormack: 2005 40)

Kevin Barret TD: Why JJ you ask? Let me say from the beginning that I am glad once and for all to go on record and clear up some of the misunderstandings which have arisen in the public mind over this project. (2005: 101)

In this respect, not does only the external auditor create a void, but also an uncanny projection onto an unknown listener: “The ear of the other is an “eerily” dismembered ear. The ear is that from which the very possibility of speaking (or writing) comes, it is the one that does not answer, for example when Derrida asks, and I now ask in turn: “Who is listening to whom right here?” (Royle 2003: 64). But also, the video-montage structure of the narrative makes the reader question its truth, also because it presents itself already as a double of reality, which blocks our direct access to it (Royle 2003). It seems in fact, that the story is built and scaffolded through post-production montage techniques, in which one-character finishes and compensates the narration of another, and in which neither the real opinion of the characters nor the actual story of JJ can be grasped. In this respect, JJ's voice is completely absent throughout the novel, which creates a void around which the narrative is shaped. Therefore, silence, as much as voice and sound plays a huge role in the narrative. Since the main part of the novel is built on the oral form of the documentary interview, JJ's silence appears as even more striking. Therefore, JJ is constantly present yet constantly absent, hence located in an in-between space, which, as we will explore in the next section, configures the blurring of the life-death, presence-

absence, nature-culture dichotomies. In this respect, Royle identifies the role of silence in Freud's work as a clear, hunting death-drive presence:

Freud's theory of the death drive could be said to change the very idea of silence. It prompts a quite different sense of workings of silence, not only in social, political, and religious organizations, for example, but also in works of art (above all, in literature, film and music). If silence is golden, there will have been something deadly about its glitter. (Royle 2003: 85)

This central empty bulk, mirrors, as we'll see in the next section, the void created by the Event Horizon, which is configured as a dark, yet enlightening presence which somehow responds to the unspoken, hidden silence which pervades the main body narrative. Moreover, since JJ can't confirm nor deny what the narrators say, the story is configured as necessarily partial, fragmented, and artificial. As we will see in the section about JJ, this narrative structure is functional amongst other things in the process of myth creation (Bartes 1976) which involves the protagonist. Therefore, in *Notes from a Coma* we witness to the dramatic intrusion of the public-global scale, into a local community which disrupts and fragments personal agency and choice. Individual agency in this context extremely is weakened. And at the same time, the story is being scattered around global media, in which fragmented pieces are placed together in different combinations and to convey different implied realities. This idea echoes the media coverage which took place during the Corrib gas controversy, and it echoes Keohane and Kuhling's description of the event. They especially make a connection between the Irish tradition and:

the present mythic age of globalization where in comparison to immense, techno-sublime global powers our stories have become small, multiple, fragmented; dissimulated and drowned out in a white noise of news bulletins, soundbites, emails and twitters; an ecstasy of communication in which all too often mere raw information is misrecognized for knowledge digested and institutionalized in forms of wisdom and lore. (2013: 75)

Further, the media coverage on the JJ/Somnos case echoes Baudrillard's description of mass media as:

Mass communication excludes culture and knowledge. There is no question of real symbolic or didactic processes coming into play, since that would be to compromise the collective participation which is the meaning of the ceremony, a participation which can only be enacted through a liturgy, a formal code of signs meticulously voided of all meaning content. (1998: 104)

This compounds when in the Event Horizon, we read: “The images are by now familiar, part of the nation’s dreaming. Shot in real time and relayed across five countries and four time zones they come across, even in memory, as pure theatre” (McCormack 2005: 33).

Expanding the discourse, it is worth noting that, the main body of the narrative is constantly out-scaled by the Event Horizon. This out-scaling power seems to be one of the main properties of the Event Horizon as an uncanny, anamorphic device. And some explanation can be found starting from the term ‘Event Horizon’ itself. The term is borrowed from astrophysics, denoting the boundary that delineates the region of space surrounding a black hole. The Encyclopaedia Britannica describes it as the:

boundary marking the limits of a black hole. At the event horizon, the escape velocity is equal to the speed of light. Since general relativity states that nothing can travel faster than the speed of light, nothing inside the event horizon can ever cross the boundary and escape beyond it, including light. Thus, nothing that enters a black hole can get out or can be observed from outside the event horizon. (n.d.)

Within the novel, ‘Event Horizon’ incorporates various linguistic registers, including scientific, journalistic, dream-like, science fictional, elements of the techno sublime. In the novel, the Event Horizon comes to signify the network of events, facts, situations, ideas and hypotheses whose consequences we can’t grasp by means of our cognitive capacities, either because they are too complicated to comprehend or connect to, or because we are simply unaware of them. Nonetheless, despite our incomprehension, those dynamics shape and co-shape our lives and existences (Hinton 2007: 435). In the novel, the Event Horizon is placed at the bottom of the page like footnotes, although Mike McCormack calls them ‘contingent-riffs’: “I sometimes call these notes “contingent riffs” in that they’re contingent on whatever the person is talking about. They illuminate some distant aspect of the universe” (McCormack as quoted in Nolan 2013). This device alters our viewpoint of the narrative, transporting us into the story through alternative temporal and spatial dimensions. The Event Horizon plays part in an interplay between light and dark, silence and sound, which is dialectically carried out with the main body narrative. Especially, although the Event Horizon is part of a black hole, and therefore belongs to the semantics of darkness, its power is a revelatory, enlightening one: “It is not so much darkness itself, (whatever that might be), but the process of ceasing to be dark, the process of revelation or bringing to light, that is uncanny. (...) The uncanny is what comes out of the darkness” (Royle 2003: 108). This use of the Event Horizon resonates with Hinton’s

idea that “Encountering the ‘black hole’ in its various significations can be at the core of shifts in awareness, the creation of new signifying elements, of new images and metaphors, of radical changes of perspective on individual and culture” (2007: 436). At the same time, although the characters do not experience the Event Horizon, the reader has access to its uncanny revelatory power: “The experience of the ‘black hole’ disrupts this sense of complacent embeddedness. It ‘foments’ an opening that can make the emergence of the human subject possible, along with increased dimensions of freedom and creativity” (Hinton 2007: 435). Essentially, the reader herself is placed in a position between the main body of the narrative and the Event Horizon, which is a constant haunting whisper. It functions as an especially critical stance against the teleological, extractivist Somnos project which is presented in the main section. The novel opens with a long footnote, which relativizes the journalistic structure of the main body by both repositioning JJ’s place within the narrative and by exposing the dehumanizing, profit and ideology driven dynamics of propagandistic mass media discourse:

Event Horizon †...because he is now both stimulus and qualia. His name, blurring through the nation’s print and electronic media, is also one of those synapses at which the nation’s consciousness forms itself. Firing in debate and opinion polls, across editorial maunderings and the antiphonal call-and-response formats of radio phone-ins, his suspended mind is one of those loci at which the nation’s consciousness forms itself. (McCormack 2005: 1)

Therefore, the Event Horizon delves deep into what is not visible in the main section. In the context of JJ’s cerebral activity, in the main section we learn that he is an astoundingly bright person, that his rhizomatic reasoning process is called “mind rot” and that, tortured by his continuous spin of thoughts, he wants to silence his mind for a while. In the Event Horizon, we not only have access to JJ’s cerebral activity, but also, on how the deep history of the human brain is being subsumed by a new capitalist project. The narrative draws the reader in with a sense of alienation, as the juxtaposition of “stimulus and qualia” not only reduces JJ to his cerebral functions but also muddles the distinction between cause and effect. “Stimuli,” typically triggering a specific response, and “qualia,” the subjective sensations experienced by an individual following an event, become intertwined. This notion resonates with Timothy Morton’s idea that in the era of hyperobjects, the boundary separating cause and sign is blurred: “Hyperobjects are so big that they compel us toward this counterintuitive view. Interobjectivity eliminates the difference between cause and sign (...) idea that causality is the machinery in the basement and the aesthetic is the candy on top (...) is now obsolete” (Morton 2013: 89-

90). At the same time JJ is reconfigured as the mental cognitive space in which the Irish nation, in its striving to reassert the reality principle inherent in the Celtic Tiger, needs a further boost to unthoughtfully embrace the capitalist restructuring that is displayed in the novel. Nonetheless, another footnote of the Event Horizon sheds light on how, this restructuring, although aesthetically different from previous capitalist structures and dynamics does not differ from them in its subjacent logic, which can be traced diachronically in the history of the Capitalocene: “And while they are unlikely to play out the classic scenarios – stripping the planet of natural resources, conscripting our womenfolk into some ghoulish reproductive project – they have already started to assimilate a whole culture” (McCormack 2005: 31). Against this backdrop, we are presented with another scalar collision when we are introduced to the sight of Killary harbour, in fact, in the main body part we only read from Anthony O’Malley’s section that: “Not a day’s gone by, not an hour, when I don’t think of him lying out there on that ship in the Killary” (2005: 5). The footnotes tell us more about the site:

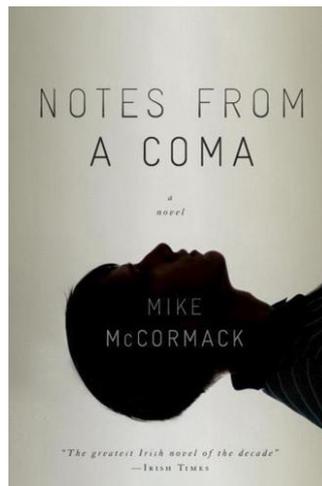
A child’s geography book will tell you that the Killary is the only proper fjord on the Irish coastline. Running six kilometres West–east through Ordovician sandstone and Silurian quartzite it forms part of the Mayo–Galway border. At one time its steep sides and sheltered waters called out for mineral prospecting, cheap holiday accommodation, mussel farming and marine leisure activities. Now hemmed in by protective legislation, it is the focal feature of an extensive national park and is marked down in tourist guides for sightseers travelling in this part of the world. What no tourist bumf will tell you is that this inlet is suffused with an atmosphere of ineffable sadness. Partly a trick of the light and climatic factors, partly also the lingering residue of an historical tragedy which still resonates through rock and water down seven generations of fretful commemorative attempts and dissonant historical hermeneutics. Now think of grey shading towards gunmetal across an achromatic spectrum; think also of turbid cumulus clouds pouring down five centimetres of rainfall above the national average and you have some idea of the light reflected within the walls of this inlet. This is the type of light which lends itself to vitamin D deficiency, baseline serotonin levels, spluttering neurotransmitters and mild but by no means notional depression. It is the type of light wherein ghosts go their rounds at all hours of the day. (2005: 5-6)

This section links the placement of the Somnos ship off the coast of the harbour with the geological, deep history and recorded history of the place. The same geographical space of the bay, at the extreme end of non-continental Europe underscores the intention to hide and distance commodity frontier expansion from the core. In the Event Horizon, McCormack introduces the fjord of Killary as a place where the global and the planetary meet, and where nature is simplified to accommodate the shifting needs of the market. The description highly resonates with Tim Robinson’s, as we’ve outlined in the chapter’s introductory paragraph. It is significant that the footnote brings testimony to “a historical tragedy which still resonates through rock and water”, which although not explicitly

mentioned, refers to the Great Famine. Considering the gothic-tone of the last sentence of the footnote, Eckhard's statement on the highly recurrence of history seems apt: "Even though long dispossessed from its former function, the place suddenly shed its dark light of the past onto the present (2011: 10)" and it comes back as a warning. Furthermore, the last sentence resonates with another by Eckhard when she states: "They trigger in us uncertainty, disturbance, and doubt as the boundaries between the living and the dead are heavily blurred. They challenge rational modes of knowledge because they confuse the spatial (inner/outer) and temporal (past/ present) dimensions of reality" (2011: 10). Therefore, the fjord of Killary is a liminal space where the boundaries between present, past, death and life are blurred, opening a new space for reflection. Contextually, the same Event Horizon represents the textual space where those boundaries are erased. In fact, by introducing the reader to other scales and information, it not only out-scales and relativizes the main body narrative, but also evokes the feeling which Chakrabarty refers to as "falling" and Clark names "Anthropocene disorder".

3.1.3 JJ O'Malley as a liminal figure beyond conceptual borders

In the context of our discourse, I propose that JJ's establishment serves as a symbolic representation for the unsettling phenomena characteristic of the crisis of the Capitalocene, as elucidated in our initial chapter. This epoch challenges the conventional understanding of human detachment from nature, revealing instead an intrinsic interconnectedness between humanity and what has been categorized as nature. Consequently, individuals, particularly those marginalized and peripheralized, are not perceived as cultural entities but rather as exploitable resources within the broader natural landscape. Life, in this context resembles what Rosy Braidotti calls *bios*: "the opportunistic trans-species commodification of Life that is the logic of advanced capitalism" (2013: 60). Within this analytical framework, JJ himself, particularly his cerebral faculties, emerge as a locus where multiple scales converge. At the narrative's outset, three pivotal events coalesce to form its trajectory: the proliferation of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) in Ireland, the collapse of Nicolae Ceausescu's regime in Romania, and Anthony O'Malley's strategic decision to capitalize on these occurrences by acquiring a child from a locale where such transactions were both feasible and economically advantageous.



On the cover of the 2005 Soho press edition of the novel, the dark profile of a boy, supposedly JJ, is placed horizontally, and facing up against a clearer greyish background. You can't see the facial features of JJ, his eyes or expression, but still, he dominates the cover. This is an apt visual representation of the novel. In fact, JJ is always present and absent, haunting the narrative throughout the novel, while at the same time, being so ungraspable that, he is characterized by a magmatic in-betweenness: he's both human and non-human, both dead and alive, both God and guinea pig. During the next sub-paragraph, we will navigate this in-betweenness.

3.1.3.1 JJ as God and guinea pig

The first step in exploring JJ's in-between position is analysing him as both a God-like figure and a guinea pig/ lab rat for the Somnos experiment. During the novel we can trace what we can call a "Christology" of the character of JJ. JJ shows both a deep attraction to and repulsion from the Catholic religion, and especially towards its philosophy and world view. In this respect, this Christological reading of the text aligns with Kuhling's elucidation about the disenchantment felt towards religion in Ireland, and the subsequent enchantment towards consumeristic practices during the Celtic Tiger²⁹. There is one specific chapter that really sets the tone for this discourse, especially in the contrast between the main body of the narrative and the Event Horizon, this is the succession of

²⁹ *Notes from a Coma* is not the only text by Mike McCormack to show such religious overtones, and especially to expose the shift from religion to secularized consumption. In the last chapter of the thesis, we will look at the novel *Solar Bones*, which will prove a good example of this tendency.

Frank Lally's description of JJ as the altar boy from hell, by Gerard Fallon's recount of one of JJ's mindrot meditations about the role of religion in the Irish constitution. In the first, Frank Lally recounts how, when JJ was six years old, as he was debuting as an altar boy in the town's church, his garment was set alight by an altar candle. JJ was severely burnt on his hands and on the back of his head, earning the nickname "the altar boy from hell". The corresponding first section of the Event Horizon operates a sort of flash-forwarding on JJ's life, which portrays him on the Somnos ship with the other three convicts. In this respect, the flashback set in motion by Frank's recollection, is skewed by the projection towards the future of the Event Horizon. In this context it is revealed that JJ, in contrast with the other participants in the experiment, is not guilty of anything, instead "his very innocence, in fact, is one of the conditions of him being here as he is" (McCormack 2005: 36). In the second corresponding section, the idea of the project assumes religious, ritualistic, and sacred overtones. The nurses employed in the project, are indeed portrayed as disciples, worshippers, and devotees:

They drift in from the wings, rotating through six-hour shifts, the supporting cast of neuro-ICU nurses. Moving in the hyphenated time-lapse motion of the webcast there is something of the crisis apparition about them. Their white uniforms, fluorescing on our screens and monitors beyond accurate definition, lend them this aura of electedness. A hand-picked elite, lured here by professional curiosity and a time-and-a-half pay deal, they shepherd their charges one on one through the cloudless echoing topography of this three-month interregnum. (2005: 37)

The above passage is written in a pronounced sci-fi/ techno sublime style, which both estranges the reader and also makes her question the same truthfulness of what is being described. Is this really happening there? Just off the coast of Killary harbour? The shift in the narrative style is probably one of the strongest sources of uncanniness in the text, because it distances us from the depiction given in the main body narrative provoking an "intellectual uncertainty" (Jentsh 1906), about what we are reading.

Moreover, the section refers to the idea of "interregnum", which indicates the time in-between two reigns or regimes, a liminal time of neither/nor, of generative potential. The interregnum is based on the three months in which the prisoners/guinea pigs are on the ship. Meaning that what will come after will be created and decided during those three months. In the next chapter, narrated by Gerard Fallon, we learn about a mindrot that JJ had in class about the religious basis of the Irish constitution. His main point is that:

The constitution contradicts itself in the preamble, the opening paragraph. It recognises not itself but God as the Supreme Authority, the source of all laws including itself. (...) God is the foundation of civil law in this country. (...) Supposing someone was to stand up here in this classroom or somewhere else and claim that he was God and that he had evidence to prove that this was indeed the case. Then there would be a problem.” (McCormack 2005: 42).

What JJ is pointing out is a weakness at the core and foundation of the Irish constitution which makes it potentially prone and susceptible to mythologization and distortion in Roland Barthes’s terms. Fundamentally, the constitution, which is the foundation of what a democratic state can become, is depicted in the novel as an empty form: “When it becomes form, the meaning leaves its contingency behind; it empties itself, it becomes impoverished. History evaporates, only the letter remains” (Barthes 1972: 116). In this respect, and beyond JJ’s will in the correspondent section of the Event Horizon, we learn that:

Respondents to various newspaper and online polls have chosen JJ as the nation’s favourite son, the man most likely to take any marginal seat in any forthcoming election—by-, general, presidential, or European. He now occupies a place in the nation’s consciousness exceeding that of the project’s original mandate. He is now public property and any attempt to appropriate him as the exclusive property of any single party is likely to be rejected by the electoral-response reflex in crossvoting, abstention and outright hostility. (McCormack 2005: 43).

Consequently, it appears that JJ himself is undergoing a process of mythologization, in which by distancing the aesthetic representation of his persona from his personal story and individuality, he is becoming the symbol and sign for a nation eager to discover a new path forward. Moreover, the general linguistic register used in the Event Horizon when recounting the experiment, resonates with Braidotti’s description of the dangers posed by the symbiotic techno-human relationship:

A rather complex symbiotic relationship has emerged in our cyber universe between the flesh and the machine. This engenders some significant paradoxes, namely that the corporeal site of subjectivity is simultaneously denied in practices of human enhancement and in fantasies of escape via techno transcendence and it is also re-enforced as increased vulnerability. (2013: 113)

In this context, JJ transcends his flesh and bone body, and his personality is scattered and distributed through the means of information technology, of screens and internet networks. Contextually, JJ becomes a transcendental God-like figure at the core of the Irish constitution and images of worshipping and devotion are repeatedly referred to during the novel. The novel is permeated by references to religion, and the bible, the most

obvious one is the length of the coma, three months, followed by JJ's resurrection. Moreover, JJ found the Catholic religion so fascinating as a kid that he became obsessed with some of its foundational ideas. His obsessive interest towards the topic lead him to attempt suicide at the early age of seven, because after that age everyone's soul ceases to be pure. As Moylan stresses: "JJ's ordeal is cast in tropes from Ireland's Christian culture; and he is directly regarded as a Christ-like figure, 'dying' and rising again from his prison-tomb, suffering as an innocent" (2023: 351).

Moreover, like a sort of 21st century relic, JJ's brain, almost detached from his own persona becomes the site for the creation of a new collective conscience:

No less here than there but like the Divine equally present every-where, the subjects have now taken their place in the weak polytheism of contemporary celebrity. (McCormack 2005: 92)

Considered as a mystical state, one of those privileged moments when God steps forward out of His primordial loneliness to take a bow, coma may be one of those vortices through which God is freed into the universe. Having written Himself into the world not as an idea but as an emergent property of neuronal activity in the superior parietal lobe, a signature accessed through suppression of all stimulus which orients and delimits us in time and space, it may be that these selfless God-bearers have lain themselves open to His immanence ... through the vortices of these open minds God comes among us as pure potential, something prior to His Father, Son and Holy Ghost visitations, a phenomenon rarefied beyond the validating ecstasies of mystics, meditants and temporal-lobe epileptics. (2005: 124)

In this scenario, JJ's EEG is not only exploited as a resource to meet the presumed demands of pharmaceutical and IT markets but also elevated to the status of a savior-symbol, a deity-like figure, emblematic of Ireland's neoliberal economic transition, prominently displayed on screens across the nation. Consequently, JJ occupies a dual role as both a test subject and a revered figure, simultaneously positioned at the bottom and the apex of the social hierarchy. His brain becomes disassociated from his individual subjectivity and persona, undergoing a re-semanticization to serve the prevailing market imperatives. Consequently, JJ becomes what Baudrillard calls a fourth stage simulacrum, the proliferation of simulations and hyperreality, where representations endlessly reproduce themselves, creating a self-referential and self-sustaining system divorced from any anchoring in reality (1981). Moreover, JJ's comatose state blurs the boundary between life and death in the novel, echoing Braidotti's discourse on the incipient death feeling induced by reticular information technology:

The inhuman forces of technology have moved into the body, intensifying the spectral reminders of the corpse-to-come. Our social imaginary has taken a forensic turn. (...). The representation of embodied subjects has been replaced by simulation and has become schizoid, or internally disjointed. It is also spectral: the body doubles up as the potential corpse it has always been and is represented as a self-replicating system that is caught in a visual economy of endless circulation. (2013: 113-119)

After three months of being in a coma, JJ wakes up. The description of him leaving the Somnos ship is seen by Tom Moylan as the actual Utopian Horizon of the text:

Incredibly though and stiff and all as he is, JJ is one step ahead of them. Seeing her face in the crowd triggers the causal stream of skin-to-synapse linkage throughout his central nervous system, blooming less than a heartbeat later in his hippocampus—the breathless recovery of her in him. In spite of appearances, he has remained mindful of her, he has borne her in mind. His facial muscles broaden out beyond the blank stare of his media portraits. Then his voice sounds, dusty and faint from underuse but still up to the task of speaking for itself: “Yes,” he says, “I thought it was you.” All this in the nth year of what is still termed without irony the Age of Restored Salvation ... (Mc Cormac 2005: 199)

Moylan argues that Utopia lies in “in this anticipatory matrix of critical thought, human love, and communal well-being” (2023: 354). Although I agree with Moylan’s idea that community building and community living are a huge source of utopian hope, I also argue that the representation of utopia in *Notes from a Coma* lies especially in critical thought, which could help reveal and protect against the unthoughtful embrace of capitalogenic projects, and the subsequent finding of alternatives. I will elaborate and explore the aforementioned point in more detail in the next sub-section.

3.1.3.2 JJ as human and non-human, biological and mineral

JJ’s reasoning capacity, and especially his ability to draw the most diverse ideas and concepts together resonates with Morton’s description of “the ecological thought”:

The ecological thought is a virus that infects all other areas of thinking. (...) ecology isn’t just about global warming, recycling, and solar power—and also not just to do with everyday relationships between humans and nonhumans. It has to do with love, loss, despair, and compassion. It has to do with depression and psychosis. It has to do with capitalism and with what might exist after capitalism. It has to do with amazement, open-mindedness, and wonder. It has to do with doubt, confusion, and scepticism. It has to do with concepts of space and time. It has to do with delight, beauty, ugliness, disgust, irony, and pain. It has to do with consciousness and awareness. It has to do with ideology and critique. It has to do with reading and writing. It has to do with race, class, and gender. It has to do with sexuality. It has to do with ideas of self and the weird paradoxes of subjectivity. It has to do with society. It has to do with coexistence. (2010: 2)

JJ shows this capacity from a very early age to the extent that in the inside of a book cover that he had as a kid he wrote: “This book belongs to JJ O’Malley, Cahir, Louisburgh, Co Mayo, Ireland, Europe, The Earth, The Milky Way System, The Universe, The World” (McCormack 2005: 123)³⁰. It is from his childhood then, that JJ is haunted by that way of thinking which, still following Morton: “Like the shadow of an idea not yet fully thought, a shadow from the future (another wonderful phrase of Shelley’s), the ecological thought creeps over other ideas until nowhere is left untouched by its dark presence” (2010: 2). The ecological thought, then, not only resonates with Deleuze and Guattari’s “rhizomatic thinking” (1987), but it also assumes the haunting power of Derrida’s “arrivant”. It is an enmeshing (still borrowing from Morton’s terminology) thinking process in which the history of capital, planet earth, biological matter, hyperobjects, fear, anxiety, hope, the future, and the past merge together. It is a revelatory and generative thinking, where we can find hope. Although still agreeing with Moylan’s assumption that the utopian power of the novel lays in JJ’s return to his community, I find this outlook partial. In fact, the utopian power of the novel resides in its ability to expose the capitalogenic networks that govern our world, and to making them seem abstract, unnatural and uncanny. It helps with disengaging with what we think of as “normality”. This process of dismantling is extremely important, especially in a time where we must struggle against a new capitalist restructuring. And just after that, the community that JJ’s returns to, could represent a utopian one.

³⁰ This quote is also an implicit reference to Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. At the start of the novel we read:

“He opened the geography to study the lesson; but he could not learn the names of places in America. Still, they were all different places that had different names. They were all in different countries and the countries were in continents and the continents were in the world and the world was in the universe.

He turned to the flyleaf of the geography and read what he had written there: himself, his name and where he was.

Stephen Dedalus
Class of Elements
Clongowes Wood College
Sallins
County Kildare
Ireland
Europe
The World
The Universe” (2000 [1916]: 12).

Arguably, the outset of the novel underscores the intrinsic interconnection of various scales, as well as blurring the line reproductive labour and the reproduction of nature (Naidu 2023). Indeed, it's a non-human force that initiates the narrative, namely BSE (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy), driven by a protein known as 'prion'. However, the effectiveness and dissemination of this non-human agent are propelled by the widespread practice of cattle monoculture in Ireland, which should be looked at from the diachronic perspective of the history of the country: "BSE's emergence tracks these changes in agricultural life from the rise of the British colonial empire and the intensification of sheep farming for the global industrial wool trade, through to contemporary appetites for beef and milk" (De Loughry 2020: online). At the same time De Loughry also underlines the importance of registering and studying different kinds of pandemics in Ireland from a world-literary perspective to highlight its: "emphasis on economic modernisation, contiguity with other zoonotic pandemics, and world-systemic qualities. Given how dependent Irish food industries are on international consumption, all texts from or about Irish food or agriculture are necessarily global" (De Loughry 2020: online). The outbreak of BSE in Ireland causes Anthony's herd to be destroyed, and therefore:

(...) after the cattle had been taken away, I'd had a lot of thinking to do. Six months before I could stock up again, what was I to do in the meantime? Night after night in front of the fire thinking and mulling things over, looking at the telly and trying to make sense of things. I told him how I'd seen the coverage of all those revolutions and those orphanages and how I'd got the idea of going abroad and getting a child of my own (McCormack 2005: 18).

Consequently, it could be argued that Anthony exploited the reproduction-surplus caused by the strict anti-abortion and reproductive control carried out by Ceausescu's regime in Romania. Within the main body narrative neither Romania nor the communist regime is mentioned. We gather that information in the Event Horizon, in which the final trial to the dictator is described: "When the death sentence is read out and as he is being led from the room we will hear him humming 'The Internationale'" (McCormack 2005: 13). In 1969, Ceausescu adopted a pronatalist legislation which made abortion illegal for women under 45 with less than four children. The measures became even stricter in 1986. Ceausescu declared: "the foetus is the socialist property of the whole society. Giving birth is a patriotic duty. Those who refuse to have children are deserters, escaping the law of natural continuity" (Hord et al. 1991: 233). The main aim of the antiabortionist,

pronatalist trajectory was to maximise economic development through the growth in the workforce:

From an economic standpoint, the regime's population policy was centred on the expansion of the work-force. This was realised in the 1950s through the expansion of the female work-force. Once these reserves were exhausted, Ceausescu's plans became centred on the encouragement of population growth by means of pronatalist policies. (Soare 2013: 62)

Here, the reproductive work of women was seen as directly proportional to the economic growth of communist Romania, which would have especially needed an additional workforce for its impending industrialization. Because of Romania's pronatalist policies, thousands of children were abandoned due to their mother's lack of material resources to take care of them. Consequently, Romania's abortion ban treated children as surplus life and cheap nature, which could propel the development of the country. JJ is therefore part of a life-reproducing system which both negates abortion and the right to a dignifying maternity (Federici 2020), configuring the lives of kids born in those conditions as a stockpile of unused nature/life. Although no official report or statistics are available, it is believed that around 142,000 to 200,000 children were kept in 628 institutions around the country. After the fall of the communist regime in 1989, it is estimated that around 10,000 children were adopted internationally between the years 1990 and 1991 (Popescu et al. 2019). The fall of the communist regime also propelled a black market (Popescu et al. 2019), where children were sold to international families at various rates:

Some prospective parents come on their own, referred to a lawyer who for a substantial fee may simply deliver a baby to their hotel. Others work through registered agencies and freelance adoption brokers in Romania. Fees range from \$2,500 to \$15,000 and increasingly include a payment to the birth mother. And then there are Americans and Canadians of modest means, who come on group "tours," hoping to find and adopt a child for under \$5,000. (Hunt online)

JJ himself describes the orphanages:

How do you know? Have you ever wondered where some of those kids ended up? We were easy meat, Sarah, it was a free-for-all in those orphanages, like the new year sales. The US State Department estimates that ten thousand kids left that country in the immediate aftermath of the quote-unquote revolution. And they don't have a clue where they ended up. How many of them ended up in pornography or among paedophiles? No one knows, there were no checks or screening. As long as you had the spondulicks you were sorted. And of course if you came home and found that your little pink Caucasian baby was suffering from some illness you hadn't bargained for or that his chromosomes weren't stacked up the way God intended then you could turn him over to a state orphanage here, no questions asked. Twenty-three of us are now in orphanages here. AIDS, HIV, hepatitis, all the different shades of

autism—bond with that! Some of us were so sick you couldn't quarantine us, never mind love us. It wasn't right, Sarah. (McCormack 2005: 49)

Women's reproductive work in Romania parallels with the control over women's bodies and reproduction carried out in Ireland's Magdalene Laundries and Mother and Baby Homes. It is estimated that approximately 6,000 babies and children died in those institutions. Many of them were adopted by third parties without the consent of their mothers, while others were subjected to pharmaceutical trials in the years 1961, 1971 and 1973 (O'Rourke et al. 2018). Later in the novel, JJ and Sarah discuss the resurfacing of bones and skulls from the Killeen, an unconsecrated Irish burial ground for stillborn and unbaptized infants. This brings to mind the discovery of other mass graves found in Ireland, most notably in Tuam, Co. Galway, where the remains of 800 babies were found. JJ suggests that these babies are returning to their origin, the sea, where all life originates, and posits that they may discover a renewed existence by reuniting with the planet's biological, mineral, and geological elements:

Maybe those kids want to go back to the sea. That's where we all come from in the first place, isn't it? Maybe they want to start all over again. Washed out to sea and broken down by the sand and water, then rising up into the clouds and falling as rain all over this green and pleasant land. Rising up again as grass and trees and nettles and briars, maybe that's what they want. (McCormack 2005: 52)

JJ underlines how the voices of those children were never heard, similarly to how his agency was supplanted by the will of Anthony O'Malley purchasing him as his own child. This is also why JJ firmly goes against the narrative of him being the lucky one for being saved: "For the umpteenth time, Sarah, I was bought, I wasn't saved. A herd of cattle went to the sword—well, the humane killer—for me. In the beginning was bovine spongiform encephalopathy" (McCormack 2005: 49). It is pivotal in this context to underline what Preciado calls "the new somatopolitical regime" (2022) according to which in late capitalism the production and reproduction of life has become pivotal, and that in order to subvert this trend it is crucial to collocate the living and desiring body and its political agency at the core of the political ecology (Preciado 2022). In the novel a direct parallel between Ireland's livestock production and the orphanage where Anthony found JJ, can be traced from the very first pages. The orphanage at the start of the novel is described as halfway between a slatted house and a witch den. JJ in a recurrent mind rot meditation, describes the orphanage as a slatted house, a mart, and himself and the other kids as commodity objects/livestock to be bought. Consequently, Anthony's description of the

orphanage resembles a horrific panoply (Baudrillard 1998), a shop where kids could be chosen and bought:

Lying in a crib he was with six others, them all up on top of each other like a litter of bonamhs³¹, only half as clean. Like the rest of them he was scalded in his own water and looking out between the bars of the crib with the biggest pair of eyes you've ever seen on a child. (2005: 9)

They were grinding their teeth. The kids, every one of them, grinding their teeth down to the gums and making this buzzing noise that was filling the room. Sitting on their behinds, sprawled across each other, lying on their backs, every one of them working their jaws from side to side, chewing nothing but cold fresh air. (2005: 9)

So there I was pacing the room with my hands clasped behind my back, trying to look like I knew what I was doing, peering into the cribs like a cattle jobber looking at weanlings. (2005: 10)

In this respect, JJ considers himself as being a commodity from the very start, although the parallel between himself as a child and a calf reinforces the in-betweenness of his identity. Another telling sign of this is the description of JJ's eyes when he is in the orphanage: "I know now JJ's eyes are a kind of deep ruby red, the colour of strong tea without milk" (McCormack 2005: 10). JJ has red eyes, like the eyes of a guinea pig, the animal considered the most disposable, and least valuable. This links back to the description of JJ as both guinea pig and God. During the novel JJ's status as a commodity and cheap nature is reaffirmed when he decides to partake in the project Somnos. In this context, JJ's comatose status configures him as an undead entity, which, not only enhances the blurring of conceptual borders of human and non-human, god and guinea pig, but also addresses the incipient threats posited towards all living species:

Contemporary capitalism is indeed 'bio-political' in that it aims at controlling all that lives, as Foucault argues, but because Life is not the prerogative of humans only, it opens up a zoe-political or post-anthropocentric dimension. If anxiety about extinction was common in the nuclear era, the posthuman condition, of the anthropocene, extends the death horizon to most species. (Braidotti 2013: 111)

In the novel, the fjord serves as the testing ground for the Somnos project, which aims to induce a deep coma in the convicts, potentially leading to the establishment of franchised penal ships within the EU. In this context Ireland, despite its extremely low crime levels compared to other European countries, becomes the selected site for the Somnos penal experiment. Ireland's peripheral position compared to central Europe, and therefore its

³¹ 'Bonamhs' in Hiberno English means piglets.

dependency, and vulnerability in front of the shifting market needs, seem to be one of the causes for this decision. Against this backdrop, JJ answers to Sarah's doubts about the motifs behind the project by saying:

That's why Kevin's appealed to our vanity: an opportunity to show that we have the courage and expertise to guide this cutting edge experiment. What Kevin wants to show is that we've moved on from the days of the Celtic Tiger. We're not just a nation of mobile phone salesmen or telesales spooks or production-line ops. We've left that potty training behind us—we're out there now with a shiny piece of R&D all our own. We have the brains, we have the funding, all we need is a lab rat. (McCormack 2005: 161)

In this respect, the prison system is fundamental for the restructuring of the neoliberal state, in which it catalyses class and ethnic anxiety through the promise of a capillary security system (Wacquant 2010). But Somnos, seems to be more than a penal experiment. In fact, JJ and the other volunteers are reconfigured as the surplus life (Cooper 2008) of a new capitalist frontier expansion. This reconnects to the idea whereby the neoliberal shift in capitalism is marked by the dramatic exhaustion of the four cheaps: "labor-power, food, energy, and raw materials" (Moore 2015: 27), which according to Sharae Deckard pushed the restructuring of profit frontiers into non-material commodities, such as the information industry and finance (2016). In this context, according to Melinda Cooper, the progressive scarcity of fossil fuels, prompted the redistribution of profits onto the increasingly extensive biotech economy (2008: 48-49) According to Moore: "As capitalism evolves and restructures, so do the terms of the double internality. Every phase of capitalism has woven together new and old strands of the oikeios" (Moore 2015: 27). In this respect, Rosi Braidotti identifies one of the main characteristics of the current stage of global capitalism as one that delves deep into human conscience, also following new capitalist structures such as Platform Capitalism (Srnicsek 2016), or Surveillance Capitalism (Zuboff 2019):

What the neo-liberal market forces are after, and what they financially invest in, is the informational power of living matter itself. The capitalization of living matter produces a new political economy, which Melinda Cooper (2008) calls 'Life as surplus'. (...) Data banks of bio-genetic, neural and mediatic information about individuals are the true capital today, as the success of Facebook demonstrates at a more banal level. 'Data-mining' includes profiling practices that identify different types or characteristics and highlights them as special strategic targets for capital investments. (Braidotti 2013: 61)

In *Notes from a Coma*, the convergence of the pharmaceutical, penal and information industries is evident through the Somnos experiment, particularly considering Ireland's prominence in the global biopharmaceutical market, where even individuals' bodies and

emotions acquire economic and political significance (Deckard 2016: 170). This interplay underscores the interconnectedness between industries and their exploitation of human and natural resources. Relatedly, Ireland, as part of the World Trade Organization since 1995, signed the TRIPs agreement:

TRIPs is the most comprehensive intellectual property (IP) agreement of the twentieth century and will no doubt shape the terms of global movements and struggles around drugs, epidemics, and health for many decades to come. It concerns two of the most promising new technologies of the twenty-first century— digital and biotechnologies— and provides a precedent for the privatization of "knowledge" industries of the future. (Cooper 2008: 55)

In the Event Horizon we read: “Somewhere within the clints and grikes of this new world glittered the real prize: consciousness. (...) What at first glance appeared a heroic scientific enterprise had, in fact its origins in an economic imperative (McCormack 2005: 155)”. In a parallel to the oil and gas industry's utilization of fossil fuels, which evolved over millions of years, the neural experiment conducted aboard the ship is predicated on the commodification of the human brain, an organ whose features have developed over millennia (Smail 2007). Timothy Morton, in his exploration of the fifth property of hyperobjects—interobjectivity—illustrates how the human mind emerges as an outcome of the interobjective space where all entities intersect, termed "the mesh." He contends: “(...) that an account of hyperobjects was among other things an account of the fabric of the human mind. My thinking is thus a mental translation of the hyperobject —of climate, biosphere, evolution—not just figuratively, but literally” (Morton 2013: 85). In this respect, JJ’s brain is a source of extraction like an oilfield. Therefore, the brain is seen not from the point of view of the history of Capitalocene, or the history of human civilization, instead its history delves into the deep history of human development as a species:

Ocean cores, microscopic pollen, conodonts, basalt: all carry echoes of the past embedded in their isotopes, their colours, their patterns of mineralization. From these echoes histories can be built. Some traces, such as fossils, rocks, and manuscripts, inform us by virtue of being contemporary to the events whose histories they encode. But traces need not be old to carry historical information. A phoneme, uttered today, is a living fossil, though the lineage fades into oblivion after a few thousand years. So is DNA. Although population geneticists do occasionally extract DNA from ancient remains, they more commonly work with modern DNA borrowed from the inside of a cheek or from a drop of blood. Modern DNA is uncannily similar to an edited text. It consists of lines of code, written in an alphabet of four letters, that faithfully reproduce an original. (Smail 2007: 49)

This is also what makes the description of JJ’s brain so estranging, because it is both his brain and also the brain of the human species. Drawing from Chakrabarty's perspective,

the concept of 'human' extends beyond conventional historical narratives, particularly those entrenched in the global history of the Capitalocene, to encompass a narrative of species history. The act of extracting neurological data parallels the extraction of fossil fuels, prompting a collective recognition of vulnerability within a capitalist world-ecology that relentlessly depletes resources to sustain itself. Viewing the Somnos project and the awe-inspiring depiction of JJ's brain through a lens informed by capitalist world-ecology underscores their inherent alignment with the exploitation of natural reserves.

Consequently, while these elements may introduce a science fictional element to the narrative, they remain entirely explicable within the framework of capitalist-world-ecological dynamics, as elucidated by Eóin Flannery:

this move within historical understandings of humanity's relationship with planetary ecology is not solely designed to underscore the depth of humanity's dependence on the planet's wellbeing across many millennia. This vector of historical thought is also trained on exposing the scale of our responsibility for the escalation of climate change in the first instance (2012: 98).

In this respect, JJ's in-between position questions the nature-culture binary, exposing the destructive power of the capitalist world-ecology's main assumption. JJ embodies the idea of 'Nature' and everything that is abstractly put in that semantic cauldron. But at the same time, JJ is also seen as a commodity-object, a stockpile of unused material which is passed through the hands and wills of several economic needs. In this way, his life can be seen as the life cycle of any commodity: production, transportation, usage and disposal. Moreover, the same vision of JJ as a product of the deep past helps the envisioning of the idea of history proposed by Daniel Lord Smail, which is both unsettling and grandiose:

It is the grandeur that the deep time of human history shares with the walls of the Grand Canyon, where the sheer immensity of time is laid out for the wonder of all. We need not dig only in the dusty topsoil of the strata that form the history of humanity. The deep past is also our present and future. (2008: 202)

Therefore, this idea of history helps unscrewing the sedimented, teleological idea of past-present-future, propelling our understanding of time beyond teleological developmentalism (Flannery 2012). Consequently, the dangers of that line of thought are exposed, and human beings surface as both endangered species and perpetrators with common but differentiated responsibilities of environmental catastrophe. This aspect will be further explored in the next paragraph through the analysis of *The Fjord of Killary* (2012) by Kevin Barry.

3.2 It's "the-end-of-the-fucking-world stuff": localized apocalypses and border disruption in *The Fjord of Killary* by Kevin Barry

Kevin Barry's contribution to the realism-irrealism continuum could be traced starting from the publication of his novel *City of Bohane* in 2011. The novel belongs to that cohort of texts, which I mentioned in the second chapter, that popularized Irish speculative fiction. *City of Bohane* is a steam-punk novel, set somewhere in Ireland, probably Limerick City, after an unspecified catastrophe. The novel recalls the rivalry, struggles and relationships between the members of various groups and gangs which inhabit the city. The novel, has been analysed as a commentary on Ireland's energy dependency (Deckard 2022), as being an exemplary post-crash novel which catalyses the aesthetics of austerity (Galvin: 2018), and as embodying Derrida's idea of hauntology by displaying a constant dialogue between Ireland's pasts and futures (Hickey 2022). These and other concerns also lie at the core of the short story *The Fjord of Killary*, which first appeared in the *New Yorker* on 24th of January 2010 and was then published in the collection *Dark Lies the Island* in 2012. The two narratives are shaped in a remarkably different way, which also shows the multiple creative potentialities of non-mimetic and irreal literary texts to critically engage with our present. In fact, if *City of Bohane* is built around a conspicuous world-building device, which even includes the creation of a specific dialect that the characters speak, *The Fjord of Killary* appears as aesthetically far more rooted in our daily lives. Therefore, it also proves to be a well fit case study due to the feeling of mimesis and estrangement, border trespassing, scalar upheaval and un-worlding, that characterise the analytical framework of Uncanny Realism. This short story enacts a progressive defamiliarization process which involves both the characters and the reader. The text narrates the story of a bored and uninspired poet who decides to buy an old hotel on Killary Harbour to give his life a fresh start. But one night, while the hotel bar is crammed with drunken locals, a suspected storm turns into an apocalyptic wave that floods the hotel. The text reflects both the delirious excess of the Celtic Tiger and speculates about the catastrophic effects of global warming. In terms of narrative structure, the story is told from the perspective of the narrator, Caoimh. Similarly to many other texts that we will examine in this thesis, *The Fjord of Killary* appears to address an external listener, since it starts as the continuation of an ongoing discourse "So I bought an old hotel on the fjord of Killary" (Barry 2013: 27 my emphasis). As outlined by Armie in her book *The Irish Short Story at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (2023), the Irish

short story has always been a narrative form in which the past and the present meet, especially, when the enduring influences of the Irish oral tradition meet modern forms of narrating. Essentially, the short story itself is a site of “collision culture” which makes it particularly apt to entwine past and present histories, while also opening windows to possible futures. Armie points out how this aspect is particularly evident at the turn of the 21st century, as a consequence of the Celtic Tiger and the economic crash. In the case of *The Fjord of Killary*, the oral dimension of the text is made clear not only by its outset, but also by numerous vivacious dialogues and by the satiric character of the narrative. This discourse will also be reflected in the other short story analysed in this thesis, *The End of The World is a Cul de Sac*, which I will deal with in the fourth chapter.

The *Fjord of Killary* possesses evident gothic overtones especially in the ways in which contemporary gothic fiction has started to catalyse both economic and, especially, environmental concerns. In this context, the same location of the pub at the extreme edge of Europe parallels the general gothic predilection for far away, exotic places: “Traditionally, horror and the gothic take place in what have been called ‘outlandish’: obscure, out-of-the-way places, usually in the countryside and in villages, and that is exactly what the Water’s Edge Hotel represents” (Flynn 2023: 147). In this respect, Barry’s pubs generally function as modern contemporary version of haunted houses (the pub is a “public house”). This aspect is especially evident in another story called *The Pub with no Beer*, where the ghost of a local character comes to pay a visit to an uncharacteristically dry pub. Nonetheless, the characters in Barry’s stories are often spectral and phantasmatic: “Alcohol, medication and drugs are to be found everywhere in these ‘dystopic’ scenarios, used by people in order to fight reality. In this fictional world, bars appear as frequently as hills or landscapes, being sometimes the main setting for a story” (Armie 2023: 82). Moreover, *The Fjord of Killary* displays strongly apocalyptic tones. In this context, we can say that the story is about a ‘localized apocalypse’, and it therefore differs from most mainstream apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narratives. In this respect those narratives present some shortcomings especially when engaging with the idea of “the end of the world” understood as the end of our worldview, of the globe as produced by Western colonialism, modernity, and capitalism. In this context, post-apocalyptic narratives while trying to encompass the larger scale of the planetary, fall into the trap of spectacularizing the end of the world, with one single event wiping out human civilization. As we have seen, especially in

Morton's theories, conceptualizing the end of the world represents one the major aspects of the current theoretical debate. What seems to be at stake in that line of thought is not the apocalyptic imagery of the sudden destruction of human civilization in a not too far future. Instead, what theorists such as Morton, Latour and Van Aken, amongst others, focus on is the ending of the 'globe' in Chakrabartian terms. Moreover, the end of the world does not reside in the future, instead, we are already within it, we are in the time of hyperobjects (which signals the end of the "world"), and in "the time of the end", following Latour. Following this vein of thought, both Clark and Wenzel stress the reassuring, almost cathartic nature of apocalyptic narratives, which, by flash forwarding in either a near or faraway future fail to grasp the present moment and therefore undermine the possibility to envisage alternatives to our current mode of living (Clark 2020; Wenzel 2022). In fact, if we consider both global and planetary scale together, apocalyptic narratives present us with scenarios in which the globe, as we know it, has already been destroyed. In this way they skip the transitional phase entailing the transformation of our current mode of production, power structures and neoliberal ecology. In a certain sense they do not engage directly with the specific human history, namely Capitalocene, which has led to this current moment. Instead, they operate an extreme simplification of that history, easily solving it by wiping it out in the first place. Similar concerns are raised by Marco Malvestio about what he terms "eco-dystopia" which:

merges the catastrophic imagery of the post-apocalyptic tradition and the consequential mode of dystopia (...) in the context of an ecological dystopia, every dystopian novel is also, at least partly, but inevitably, apocalyptic. (...) Eco-dystopia merges the narration of the catastrophe of the post-apocalyptic novel and the predictive speculations of dystopia. (2022:26-28)

In the next section we will look at how *The Fjord of Killary* engages with the idea of the end of the world by putting in place a strongly irreverent critique of the world as we know it, and by depicting a localized apocalypse which does not spectacularise the end of the world. Instead, it addresses the real, much less spectacular, spotting effects of anthropogenic climate change. For this reason, the analytical framework of Uncanny Realism will help unbox and unscramble the coordinates, limitations and threats posited by the modern capitalist world view.

3.2.1 The end of what world?

The Fjord of Killary tells the story of what could be termed as a localized apocalypse, or the depiction of an apocalyptic event which is experienced in a specific locale. It not only aptly represents the uncanny and improbable spotting climate events inherent to climate change (Chakrabarty 2016), but it also helps visualise the networks which constitute our modern capitalist world. Going back to the theory that we explored in the first chapter, the first thing to identify is: what sort of world is depicted in this short story? At its core, the narrative unfolds within a pub, The Water's Edge, situated in the West of Ireland, owned by an urbanized publican from Dublin. He serves drinks to local clientele, supported by a group of young Belarusian workers whom he compensates with the minimum wage. In essence, Barry's pub by the fjord of Killary serves as a microcosm reflecting the broader capitalist world-ecology, which is particularly evident in its dialectical interplay between the centre, semi-periphery, and periphery. It also represents the specific position Ireland found itself after the fall of the Celtic Tiger, during which despite the ongoing semi-peripheralization of the country and its internal inequalities, its status as a high-income economy and attractor of foreign capital was re-affirmed. Moreover, the pub by the fjord functions as a further metaphor for how the capitalist world-ecology is built on its foundational abstract separation from Nature. In this context, the protagonist epitomizes the attitude of the colonizer/capitalist while also representing the typical post-modern identity which "experiences a sense of fragmentation, a loss of a sense of identity and discontinuity within the past" (Keohane & Kuhling 2004: 123). Consequently, he embodies the general romanticised attitude of non - Irish and urbanized Irish people towards the West. In this respect, he sees the West of Ireland as a primordial place where he can gain back his poetic inspiration: "But I was thinking, the West of Ireland... the murmurous ocean...the rocky hills hard-founded in a greenish light... the cleansing air... the stoats peeping shyly from little gaps in the drystone walls..." (Barry 2013: 30). Therefore, the protagonist bought into the post-card picture of the West of Ireland as a place untouched by modernity and progress. Furthermore, the protagonist bought the hotel at a greatly inflated prize, which addresses the culture of real-estate speculation which characterised the last years of the Celtic Tiger (Flynn 2023: 146). Nonetheless, the recent economic crash can be felt in the crepuscular tone which is permeant from the outset of the story: "I was at this point eight months in the place and about convinced that it would be the death of me" (Barry 2013: 27). For what concerns

the West of Ireland, as we've outlined in the first chapter, the normalised idea of modernity which is tied to teleological progress hides away systemic inequality, poverty, and economic dependency. Deckard highlights how the story shows "the uneven distribution of power, resources, and infrastructure between Dublin's core and 'the country's' internal peripheries which is a legacy of the colonial export-based grazier economy and that was only intensified during neoliberalization" (2015: 13). Consequently, the West of Ireland far from being a pre-modern *locus amoenus* heavily shows the signs of uneven capitalist development. Therefore, the protagonist's romanticizing gaze appears as complicit towards the commodification of the Irish landscape carried out by the tourist industry participating in: "the deliberate commodification of landscapes, heritage centres and other tourist sites, but also in the cultivation of 'stage authenticity' and the 'commodification of craic' in Irish pubs" (Keohane & Kuhling 2004: 124). According to Flynn: "This nostalgic touristic simulacrum of the West is an uncanny doppelganger that cannot materialize, as the hotel stands on the precipice of an oceanic grave" (2023: 147). Quite satirically in the short-story we read: "The estate agent had gussied up the history of the place in the brochure – a traditional coaching inn, original beams, visited by Thackeray, heritage bleeding out the wazoo, etc. – and I leapt at it" (Barry 2013: 28). The English writer Thackeray is often mentioned in the short-story, and the protagonist seems to find inspiration in the fact that such a famous writer spent time in the same hotel that he is running now. This aspect highlights the obsolescent relationship that the protagonist and the characters in general have with their national history. As previously stressed, the will to forget Ireland's colonial past was one of the mantras and mottos of the Celtic Tiger. This obsolescent relationship conditions the way the characters deal with their land and with the memories it bears: "Ireland's status as a land that is both alien and familiar in all of these texts underscores the uncanny way that the Celtic Tiger transformed Irish national consciousness while often murdering, disfiguring or erasing its national past" (Scheible 2023: 239). What the short story does not specify is that Thackeray went to Ireland on two occasions, in 1840 and 1842, in order to write what would be later published as *The Irish Sketch Book*, commissioned by Chapman and Hall:

Thackeray was writing about Ireland against the background of a weakening Repeal movement, at a time when Irish reliance on English charity was at its greatest, when newspaper coverage of Ireland's difficulties was at its peak, and when the poverty of the countryside indicated the imminence of a catastrophic famine. (McAuliffe 2001)

According to MacCarthy, Thackeray's text exemplifies "the attitude which made it possible for English tourists to preserve an untroubled conscience in the face of Irish sufferings" (1952: 55). He also underlines how Thackeray deeply failed to recognise the systemic root-cause of the poverty that he saw displayed all over Ireland. Moreover, Thackeray's attitude towards the locals was one of both amusement and repulse. "One of the distinguishing features of his work is the attention he pays to the life and pursuits of the common people; a people that by turns delighted him with their language and wit, and that exasperated him with their seemingly feckless attitudes" (Ó Muirthe 2015). This quote, reflects the protagonist's attitude towards the locals:

My first weeks out at the Water's Edge I had kept a surreptitious notebook under the bar. The likes of "thrun down" would get a delighted entry. I would guess at the likely etymology – from 'thrown down' as in 'laid low'? But I had quickly had my fill of these maudlin bastards. (Barry 2013: 33)

Another reference that helps individuating the protagonist's coloniser/capitalist attitude is when he compares himself to *Heart of Darkness*'s Colonel Kurtz: "A notion came: if I sold the place for even three quarters of what I paid for it, I could buy myself half of Cambodia and do a Colonel fucking Kurtz on it altogether" (Barry 2013: 33). Moreover, similarly to how Thackeray travelled from the centre of the empire, London, to the Irish periphery, the protagonist goes from Dublin, the financial and economic centre of the Irish Republic to the peripheral West. His attitude is one of superiority towards the locals who he continuously exoticizes:

The people of this part of north Galway are oversexed. That is my belief. I found levels of ribaldry that bordered on the paganistic. It goes back, of course. They lick it up off the crooked rocks. Thackeray, indeed, remarked on the corsetless dress of rural Irish women, and the fact that they kissed perfect strangers in greeting, their vast bosoms swinging. (Barry 2013: 36)

Not only does he sexualise and exoticize the locals, but also the Belarusian workers. The employment of young Belarusian workers at minimum wage underscores the globalized nature of labour markets and the exploitation of cheap workforce from the semi-periphery. Their presence highlights the interconnectedness of different regions within the capitalist world-system, where the flow of capital and labour transcends national borders. Their presence especially underscores the shifting fortunes of capital and traces a connection between Ireland's present and past, condemning the attitude that both the protagonist and

the locals have towards the pub's staff. The workers are constantly marginalized and systematically othered by both the protagonist and the locals. The latter especially show a complete lack of understanding towards the systemic unequal structure which sustains the world they live in, which becomes clear in their extremely populist comments:

When you think (...) of what this country went through for the sake of Europe, when we went on our hands and knees before Brussels, to be given the lick of a fuckin' butter voucher, and soon as we have ourselves even halfway right, these bastards from the middle of nowhere decide they can move in whenever they like and take our fuckin' jobs? (Barry 2013: 38)

In this respect, the seasonal staff from Belarus represents the other side of the promises made by the Irish tourist industry. The workers, who represent cheap imported labour (Moore 2018), are both invisibilised and sexualized, especially the female workers. Furthermore, what the speaker is pointing at are the consequences of the IMF troika. The Celtic Tiger, and the economic crash loom in the background of the novel and are often referred to as the memory of a past golden age. As I will further develop later, the repressed historical dimension in the novel links various moments of Irish history together, which shed light onto the present state of affairs. For what concerns the treatment of the pub's staff while Caoimh does not resolve to the local's populist discourses, he minimizes the cost of his staff by paying them minimum wage, therefore showing a complicit exploitative attitude. He mostly dehumanizes his summer staff, and although he considers them to be a nuisance, he also seems to deeply envy them. The protagonist appears to be particularly envious towards what he considers the Belarusian's extremely promiscuous sexual life, and towards their youthful energy: "Yes. It would all do to make a new man of me. Of course, I hadn't counted on having to listen to my summer staff, a pack of energetic Belarusians fucking each other at all angles of the clock" (2013: 30). This aspect echoes the general feeling of exhaustion that the protagonist feels, and which he constantly seems to confront against the energy of youth:

I had made – despite it all – a mild success of myself in life. But on turning forty, the previous year, I had sensed exhaustion rising up in me like rot. I found that to be alone with the work all day was increasingly difficult. And the city had become a jag on my nerves – there was too much young flesh around. (2013: 29)

Deckard links this aspect, to the broader motif of exhaustion and energy depletion in the short story, which can also be linked to the current global quest for new extractive frontiers. But as we will see later, the constant reminder of 'the good old days of youth'

also shows a nostalgic attitude towards a past where the effects of anthropogenic climate change were not so permeant as they are now.

Another aspect of the scene which takes place in the pub, and that configures it as a microcosmic representation of the capitalist world-ecology is the role of women. Wright (2020) shows how the pub could be understood as a Foucauldian heterotopia, in which certain behaviours and norms are accepted and normalized. Wright points out how the pub is a place where masculinity is created through rites of passage, and where the presence of women was oftentimes seen as functional for the reinstatement of manly power and hegemony. This appears as particularly true in the short story, where the female characters are often sexualised and receive offensive, invasive comments on their bodies: “Vivien slapped and roared at him as he stroked her massive haunches. She reddened and chortled as he twisted her around and pulled her vast rear side into his crotch area” (Barry 2013: 30). Especially Nadia, one of the young workers from Belarus is constantly sexualised by the male locals at the bar. In the pub, women’s function seems to be that of reinforcing masculinity: “When women become gradually more included in pubs, their presence provides men with an additional opportunity to prove their adherence to heterosexual aspects of hegemonic masculinity” (Wright 2020). Moreover, the sexualization of women and the control over their bodies through constant commentary is rationalized and never spoken against. This underscores the permeant presence of rape culture and gender inequality as one of the foundational bases of capitalism (Segato 2016). Rape culture is a societal environment where gender-based violence and abuse are pervasive, downplayed, and accepted as commonplace. Additionally, it entails the normalization and promotion of attitudes and behaviours that rationalize and endorse such violence, while also asserting dominance over women's sexuality. The microcosm portrayed in *The Fjord of Killay* is adjacent to what Paul Preciado terms “petro-sexo-racial” regime (2022).

The microcosm depicted in the short story, aside from presenting a society based on colonialist, racist and patriarchal attitudes is also permeated by an obsession towards petrol and petrol culture, epitomised by the characters’ constant references to road directions. Most of the dialogues among the characters are focused on how long it would take to go from one place to another in the country. This not only points to the small, localized scale at which the characters think but also to their complete reliance on fossil fuels, which is highly vulnerable given Ireland’s energy dependence. At the same time

patriarchy and fossil fuel dependency become tightly linked in Daggett's definition of petro-masculinity:

While misogyny and climate denial are often treated as separate dimensions of new authoritarian movements, a focus on petro-masculinity shows them to be mutually constituted, with gender anxiety slithering alongside climate anxiety, and misogynist violence sometimes exploding as fossil violence. (2018: 28)

Moreover, the short story winks at the progressive scarcity of fossil fuels, at a national and at a global level, as Jason Moore has shown. Specifically, we read: "Fuckers aren't washin' diesel up there again," John Murphy said. "The Horigans? Of course, they'd a father a diesel-washer before 'em, didn't they? Cunts to a man" (Barry 2013: 31). Moreover, as also stressed by Deckard (2015), the story points out various regimes of extraction and exhaustion. She notices the vampiric attitudes of the characters, and the way that the staff "wears love bites on their necks", look as pale as ghosts, and how at the end of the novel Vivien Harty bites her husband Mick Harty: "then she bit him on the neck. Blood came in great, angry spurts" (Barry 2013: 43). This and the progressive ghostliness of the characters indicates the increasing scarcity of the four cheaps, as stressed by Jason Moore. Therefore, the pervasive feeling of resource-exhaustion creates what I call 'clusters of uncanny', which is particularly evident in the increase of uncanny, ghostly presences within the story. The un-dead quality of some of the characters engenders a double movement of identification and de-identification. As McNally underlines:

For capital's great powers of illusion lie in the way it invisibilises its own monstrous formation. In endeavouring to pull off the magic-cap of modernity, Marx sought a confrontation with monstrosity. He set out to reveal the legions of vampires and werewolves that inhere in capital so that they might be banished. (2011: 114)

What is interesting about the idea of the vampire, the *drachfholla*, is that every victim of a vampire becomes one, and that a vampire was also once a victim of vampirization. The vampire challenges the victim-perpetrator binary, a concept that is also central to theoretical discussions in the current era of the Anthropocene. The vampire bites that we see in the short story, not only address capitalist regimes of extraction and exhaustion, but they can also indicate a site for the blurring of inside/outside borders during Anthropocentric times: "Skin houses the body and it is figured in Gothic as the ultimate boundary, the material that divides the inside from the outside. The vampire will puncture and mark the skin with his fangs the outside becomes the inside and the hide no longer

conceals or contains” (Halberstam 2007). Consequently, the bitemarks address the newly rediscovered permeability of the body during the Anthropocene, and tears apart “the periphery of the skin”, using Federici’s words (2019). In this context, the permeability of the body parallels the sudden intrusion of the storm inside the hotel. Therefore, outside/inside, background/foreground, nature/culture borders are blurred on various metaphorical levels. These are narrative sites where various levels of uncanny recognitions and shocks happen, and in which the familiar closed-in world of the pub reveals itself as porous, enmeshed, undefined and malleable.

Against this background, a storm of unprecedented violence is raging, and it progressively starts to enter the pub. The world represented by the pub (as we’ve delineated in the first chapter) conceives of nature as an inert background onto which human actions can be projected. A background which functions both as sink and tap (Moore 2017), controlled by the foundational laws of over-pollution and ecosystemic depletion. Consequently, as we go on, the “planetary dimension” comes to the forefront. “Outside, the rain continued to hammer away at our dismal little world, and the sky had shucked the last of its evening grey to take on an intense, purplish tone that was ominous, close-in, biblical” (Barry 2012: 31). This progression engenders in the reader an increasing defamiliarization with what is happening inside the pub. And at this point then, when humans interfere with planetary dynamics that they encounter not the globe, nor the Earth in Heideggerian terms, they encounter planet, whose internal processes do not respond to anthropocentric logics: “what you encounter when you spoil the Earth is the Planet. The Planet, in contrast to the Earth, is indifferent to us” (Chakrabarty 2023: 38).

3.2.2 The background is actually moving! The end of the world

From the outset of the short story, the landscape outside the hotel is described as both a background for what is happening inside, but is also imbued with a deeply eery, haunting character: “It was set hard by the harbour wall, with Mweelrea mountain across the water, and disgracefully grey skies above. (...) The night in question, the rain was particularly violent – it came down like handfuls of nails flung hard and fast by a seriously riled sky god” (Barry 2013: 27). During the story, the rain becomes increasingly stronger, although the characters mostly seem to ignore it. The protagonist tries to attract the attention of the other people at the bar, by asking questions that at first appear causal, like: “That’s some

evening?” (2013: 34), and then increasingly more preoccupied as in: “I said will it flood, Bill? Will it flood? Are you even listening to me?” (2013: 36). In this context the characters don’t show any particular concern for what is happening, also because, as Bill Knott answers to the protagonist: “Hasn’t in sixteen years (...) won’t now” (2013: 37). Contextually it could be useful to look at what Amitav Ghosh calls “uncanny and improbable events” (2016), or events that were deemed as very unlikely to happen, but which now occur with increasing frequency. Nonetheless, the characters’ attitude towards the storm resembles climate denialism, which is an attitude functional to the reinforcement of petro-masculine identities:

Climate denial obviously serves fossil-fuelled capitalist interests. However, coal and oil do more than ensure profit and fuel consumption-heavy lifestyles. If people cling so tenaciously to fossil fuels, even to the point of embarking upon authoritarianism, it is because fossil fuels also secure cultural meaning and political subjectivities. (Dagget 2018: 27)

In this respect, according to Gosh, the growing frequency of improbable events penetrating the fabric of mimetic narrative settings serves to challenge and ultimately dismantle the paradoxical constraints of realism. In the context of Barry’s short story, the storm, which is constantly knocking at the doors of the pub also echoes Vermeulen’s description of the shopping mall. It is the storm, together with elements such as the vampiristic attitude of some of the characters, and the recurrent reference to the Great Irish Famine, which progressively de-familiarizes the narrative and evokes a double feeling of recognition and estrangement in the reader. The characters’ smallminded, anthropocentric resolutions for how to face the violence of the storm, are represented by alternatively the suggestion that insurance will cover all damage, and that some sandbags will keep the storm at bay. Nonetheless, while the storm is raging, they continue drinking and chatting about road directions. The protagonist, although he appears to be the most aware of the dangers represented by the storm, still shows a limited understanding of what it actually represents, namely the local manifestation of Capitalogenic climate change. Instead, he appears, to look even at the storm from an individualistic perspective: “There was no getting away from the fact that we were being sucked into the deep of an emergency. I was getting happy notions. I was thinking, the place gets wiped out, I claim the insurance, and it’s Cambodia here I come” (Barry 2013: 40).

Nonetheless, it appears that other lifeforms and animals outside the hotel do notice the incumbent treat and react accordingly. The first reaction that we see displayed is the barking of the dogs: “Just then a cacophony erupted: from the hillsides, everywhere, came the aggravated howls of dogs. These were amped to an unnatural degree. The talk in the lounge bar stalled a moment in response but, as abruptly, it resumed” (Barry 2013: 32). Moreover, we are presented with: “minks creep over the harbour wall. They crossed the road in perfect tandem and headed for the rising fields beyond the hotel” (2013: 34), or with an otter that enters the hotel, but that, once shooed outside the door: “he aimed not for the tide-line rocks, where the otters lived, but for the higher ground, south” (2013: 36). Consequently, we can say that nature as a modern, cauldron/container for all entities which do not enter in the realm of culture, is knocking heavily at the door of the pub. What was thought of as an outside space is flooding inside and destroying modern conceptual borders. Consequently, the inside-outside, nature-culture binarism is being destroyed in the eyes of the reader despite the characters’ enduring reliance on it:

Yet now our gaze seems to be turning again; the uncanny and improbable events that are beating at our doors seem to have stirred a sense of recognition, an awareness that humans were never alone, that we have always been surrounded by beings of all sorts who share elements of that which we had thought to be most distinctively our own: the capacities of will, thought, and consciousness. (Ghosh 2016: 30)

Moreover, another disconcerting feeling conveyed by the story is the constant scalar quake and displacement which is narratively conveyed by the dialectic relationship between the description of the pub’s interior and the outside. Especially by how the outside progressively breaches inside the hotel: “The Belarusians carted boxloads of old curtains from the attic to use as sops against the doorways but the moment the last boxload reached the bottom of the stairs the doors popped and the waters of Killary entered” (Barry 2013: 41). The effect created by the persistent stalking presence of non-human forces against what is considered as ‘culture’ is a recurrent feature of eco-gothic narratives (Flannery 2023: 115). This feeling can also be explained by the concept of Anthropocene disorder, described by Timothy Clark, as “a break-down in the senses of proportion and of propriety when making judgements” (2015: 145). It can also be explained, by the image of “falling” which Chakrabarty describes as: “a certain shock of recognition of the otherness of the planet and its very large-scale spatial and temporal processes” (2021: 15). As I will explore later, the material threat posited by the storm is the possibility for the hotel and its inhabitants to fall and sink down into the waters of the fjord, and therefore

both metaphorically and materially becoming part of the deep mineral and biological history of the area. Nonetheless, according to Clark, one of the reactions engendered by the Anthropocene disorder can be one of denial, which in the short story is both expressed verbally, but also through the inertia of the character's behaviours: "objects and routines of normal, daily life are forms of denial (...), a subtle mix of knowledge, inertia, self-deception, evasion and material entrapment" (2016: 160). I argue that in the story, one element that embodies both a constant sense of physical displacement, threat, and anxiety is the protagonist's persisting feeling of nausea. First of all, the physical reaction of nausea is strongly linked to a sense of seasickness, which points to a movement of constant oscillation and imbalance, which is in a certain sense a position of liminality between stability and instability. This aspect is further confirmed by the earlier description of the hotel as "listed west-ward. Set on a can of peas on the floor of just about any bedroom and it would roll slowly in the direction of the gibbering Atlantic" (Barry 2013: 28). Following our description of the pub as embodying the structure of the capitalist world-ecology, its own foundational construction appears to be already as unstable and unsustainable. Moreover, the nausea felt by the protagonist is a symptom of one of the properties of the hyperobjects, namely, viscosity. Morton defines the property of viscosity:

In a sense, all objects are caught in the sticky goo of viscosity, because they never ontologically exhaust one another even when they smack headlong into one another. A good example of viscosity would be radioactive materials. The more you try to get rid of them, the more you realize you can't get rid of them. They seriously undermine the notion of "away." Out of sight is no longer out of mind, because if you bury them in Yucca Mountain, you know that they will leach into the water table. And where will that mountain be 24.1 thousand years from now? (2018: 36)

This concept further dismantles the binary of inside/outside, by displaying the inherent nearness and intimacy of beings: "it also becomes clearer with every passing day that 'distance' is only a psychic and ideological construct designed to protect me from the nearness of things" (Morton 2018: 21). It therefore destroys the idea whereby Nature is something we should go back to: "Is there nothing to 'get back to,' since the problem is not that things are truly distant, but that they are in our face they are our face?" (2018: 22). Therefore, the feeling evoked by hyperobjective intimacy and viscosity is one of strangeness and uncanniness: "While hyperobjects are near, they are also very uncanny. (...) Immediate, intimate symptoms of hyperobjects are vivid and often painful, yet they carry with them a trace of unreality. I am not sure where I am anymore. I am at home in

feeling not at home” (2018: 28). Moreover, hyperobjects’ viscosity puts into question the same idea of time understood as teleological presentism: “Viscosity is a feature of the way in which time emanates from objects, rather than being a continuum in which they float” (2018: 33).

In this respect, despite the resistance that Caoimh shows towards what is happening, his encounter with the local manifestation of the hyperobject of global warming in the form of a storm, creates the object “nausea” which makes it physically impossible to deny the treat he is facing. Therefore, during the short story we often read sentences such as: “I had an odd nausea developing” (2013: 34), “A seep of vomit in my gullet” (2013: 35). The storm, with its increasing apocalyptic violence, appears as adjacent to another characteristic of the hyperobjects, namely non-locality. In fact, the storm which is raging outside the fjord of Killary appears to be localised:

The worst of the news was that the emergency appeared to be localised. The fjord of Killary was flooding when no other place was flooding. The rest of the country was going about its humdrum Monday-night business – watching football matches, or Dan Brown adaptations, putting out the bins, or putting up with their marriages – while the people of our vicinity prepared for watery graves. (2013: 41)

In the realm of hyperobjects, non-locality is a property that questions all anthropocentric ideas of time and space. In fact, no manifestation of the hyperobject is actually the hyperobject, but just a local manifestation of it: “What does this mean? It means that my experience of the weather in the *hic et nunc* is a false immediacy. It’s never the case that those raindrops only fall on my head! They are always a manifestation of global warming!” (Morton 2018: 48). Therefore, through scalar quakes, and the permeant presence of hyperobjects, the world constituted inside the pub is conceptually disrupted despite the understanding the characters might have of the process. In this context, the coordinates, and the borders of that world dissolve: “When the inside of a thing coincides perfectly with its outside, that is called *dissolution* or *death*” (2018: 31), and moreover “The nonlocality of hyperobjects scoops out the foreground–background manifolds that constitute human worlds. The undulating temporality that hyperobjects emit bathes us in a spatiotemporal vortex that is radically different from human-scale time” (2018: 197). Against this background, the narrative which at the start resembled and mirrored a familiar world becomes uncannily realistic: by the progressive defamiliarization of the narrative, we progressively realize the ‘irreality’ of the capitalist discourse. In this context, the same concept of reality changes: “reality envelops us like a film of oil. The mirror

becomes a substance, an object. Hyperobjects push the reset button on sincerity, just as Neo discovers that the mirror no longer distances his image from him in a nice, aesthetically manageable way, but sticks to him” (Morton 2018: 35). Against this background, we feel displaced, in a liminal condition which is both disconcerting and generative towards alternative futures.

Moreover, *The Fjord of Killary* addresses the real threat of rising sea levels in Ireland. It is in fact quite likely that one of the most severe outcomes of climate change on the island of Ireland, will be the rise of sea levels and the subsequent erosion of coastal areas and estuarine floods, together with an increase in flood in fluvial areas (Hickey 2012). From this perspective, the short story can be included in that larger trend that DeLoughrey (2019) has defined as “the oceanic turn”. In fact, the increase probability of an “oceanic future” due to climate change has favoured an ontological re-assessment of oceanic spaces within the humanities. Indeed, the ocean, together with the different temporalities associated with it can open up new planetary and interspecific conceptualizations: “The Anthropocene has catalysed a new oceanic imaginary in which, due to the visibility of sea level rise, the largest space on earth is suddenly not so external and alien to human experience” (DeLoughrey 2019: 34). From a planetary point of view, the sea is the origin of all life on earth. At the same time, considering the interconnection of planetary and global scales, the ocean has also come to represent one of the privileged sites for capital accumulation, both from a mercantilist and extractive point of view. Contextually, as outlined by Malcolm Sen, “Sea level rise may indeed be a contemporary concern, but it calls for a closer scrutiny of our historical and cultural relationships with the oceanic” (Sen 2019: 7). As also specified by DeLoughrey, in the Caribbean context, the ocean (in this case the Atlantic) has functioned as an immense unmarked grave for those violently displaced by the shifting fortunes of world capitalism. This aspect surfaces in the *Fjord of Killary* through the recurrent references to the Irish Great Famine and to the subsequent emigration of millions to the other side of the Atlantic:

The juxtaposition of an Irish history of destitution and exile, the origins of which are biopolitical, serves as a sombre backdrop to a contemporary narrative about the possibility of seeking refuge on a boat to Clare Island. The story therefore conjoins the disaster of the famine with an ecological one in the making, and it does so through a decidedly oceanic turn. (Sen 2019: 20)

In this context, the role of the Famine in the story should not be understood from a victim-like attitude, but as a constant dialectic critique of the present phase of the Capitalocene, which still produces inequalities, famine, and mass migration. In the story the Great Famine functions as an uncanny return of the repressed which surfaces in sentences like: “Bill Knot reckoned the distance to Clare Island oversea if it should come to it. ‘Of course, it would not be the first time’, he said ‘that the likes of us would be sent hoppin’ for the small boats” (Barry 2013: 42). The role of the Great Famine can be understood at the crossroads between global history and non-human planetary history: “While Irish dependence upon the potato and the specific agricultural practices attendant to its cultivation both assumed cultural significance in terms of the Irish-British colonial relationship, the ecogothic goes beyond such anthropocentrism” (Flannery 2023: 116). As I delineated in the first chapter, the potato blight, the *phytophthora infestans*, originated in bird guano used for fertilizer before the green revolution. The same spread of the blight underscored the interconnectedness of the capitalist world-ecology at the time, while also exposing the extreme danger of its exploitative management of nature. The potato blight, as well as the BSE epidemic, as analysed in *Notes from a Coma*, or the 2020 Covid pandemic, not only make visible the risks posited by the capitalist world-ecology, but also show how our bodies and lives are both permeable to and dependent upon non-human nature for their sustenance and dwelling. The Great Famine resulted in a refugee crisis which involved around 2.1 million people (Gerard 2018: 1). The urgency of the Famine changed emigration patterns in Ireland, a country generally characterised by mass migration even since the start of the eighteenth century (Gerard 2018). During the famine, many departures were generally unplanned, because of the urgent need to flee from death and hunger, and therefore, people tended to travel during unfavourable sailing seasons, and under less safe conditions (Gerard 2018). This, along with poor hygienic conditions in the ports of arrival and departure, and of the ships caused high causality rates:

The high death rates of 1846 and 1847 were the result of several factors: weak, starving people, time spent in unhealthy quarters while waiting to arrange a passage, and confinement in poorly ventilated, crowded quarters on board ship for months at a time. (Mulrooney 1966: 6)

The lingering ghost of the Great Famine, therefore, not only acts as a commentary on the incumbent climate emergency, but also addresses the contemporary immigration policies that Ireland adopted during the Tiger, as exemplified by the young Belarusian workers.

Moreover, the image of death by water, epitomised by the sentence “the people in our vicinity prepared for watery graves” (Barry 2013: 41), positions the story as an even bigger critique towards European management of the refugee crises: “To put this story in a geopolitical context we have to recognize that if history intrudes in it, the future does so as well. There are uncanny, prescient reverberations between this 2010 short story and the refugee crisis of 2015” (Sen 2019: 20-21).

3.2.3 What do we make of it? A failed epiphany

Surely it cannot be stated that there’s a lack of signs which are alerting the characters, and which should lift their veil of denialism: the water is coming in, the animals are fleeing towards higher ground, the characters experience symptoms of nausea, death, exhaustion, as well as recounting memories of the Great Famine. All these signs should warn them against this present disaster, but nonetheless they appear to be moved by a constant denialist inertia. Even though before the epilogue we read some more concerned comments by the characters:

‘Water’s up to the second step,’ Vivien Harty noted. (...)
‘And rising,’ Mick Harty said.
‘I haven’t seen rain the likes of that,’ John Murphy said, ‘since Castlebar, the March of ’seventy-three.’ (Barry 2013: 38)

They are suddenly pulled back into their own petro-masculine inertia by Bill Knott’s comment, who says “What’s we be talkin’ about for Castlebar? (...) Forty-five minutes on a light road?” (Barry 2013: 38). Therefore, during the second section of the novel, when the characters, scared by what is happening gather as a group, they become almost choreographed. Caoimh decides to take advantage of the situation to improve the opinion that the locals have of him, and therefore starts to offer them drinks: “I felt suddenly that I was growing into the mine-host role. There was a conviviality in the bar now, the type that is said to come always with threatened disasters” (2013: 39). From this point on, the amount of alcohol intake starts to progressively increase. The obsolescence and mindlessness brought about by alcohol and drunkenness acts as a barrier against the character’s understanding of the situation, and it instead appears to root them even more in their small, anthropocentric lives. This does not mean that they don’t feel threatened, in fact their spontaneous actions indicate the urgency of the danger: “We moved back

from the windows. Our movements had become curiously choreographed” (2013: 39). And even Caoimh’s decision to move everyone upstairs parallels the otters’ and minks’ decision to flee uphill. Nonetheless, denialism acts as a mental, abstract barrier, and therefore, when they move upstairs the situation turns into a disco party despite the fact that, when Caoimh looked outside “It had the look of death’s dateless night out there” (2013: 42). The characters at the bar start to talk about their personal relationships, marriage adultery and love affairs, all of which seems extremely superficial and unnecessary in front of the threat posed by the storm. In this context, Meschiari highlights how relationship focused discourses within literary realism act as a distractor against the multiple crises of the present (2020). Accordingly, the characters try to find distraction and entertainment, so they won’t have to deal with their current situation. Moreover, as previously mentioned, the short story is permeated by a constant reference to youth and the good old days. This aspect appears to be double sided. On one hand, as stated above, the protagonist’s envy towards youth is symptomatic of exhaustion, which could be read as both energy depletion, and being at the brink of a catastrophic end. On the other, as noticed also by Flynn (2023), the constant reference to the old times and old days denotes a deep nostalgia which appears to be complicit with the climate denialism that pervades the story. In fact, looking back at the good old days, especially epitomized by the 80s music party at the end, brings the characters back to a time when the threats of climate crises did not appear as incumbent: “Oh, and we danced the night away out on the fjord of Killary. We danced to ‘Chiquitita’, slowly and sensuously; we danced in great, wet-eyed nostalgia to ‘Brass in Pocket’, and we had all the old steps still, as if 1979 was only yesterday; we punched the air madly to ‘Summer of ‘69’” (2013: 44). Moreover, the flood can also be seen as the indifference shown by the public towards the evident flaws and unreality of the Tiger boom, which led to an economic crash. The excitement at the bar echoes the final lines of a pre-crash poem by the spoken-word artist Colm Keegan which goes: “dying, and dying and dying, but it’s all so fucking electrifying ‘cause we are fumbling blind, we are no idea what we are doing, we have no idea where we are going, and we are almost there, we are almost there” (Keegan 2018).

Furthermore, while the locals are drinking away and confessing unspeakable secrets to each other, Caoimh gets caught in an epiphanic spin of thoughts: “And the view was suddenly clear to me. The world opened out to its grim beyond and I realised that, at forty, one must learn the rigours of acceptance. Capitalise it: Acceptance” (Barry 2013: 44). The sentence underscores his persistent, individualistic, utilitarian attitude: he decides to

capitalise, to gain from the disaster at hand, either in the modality of a renewed poetic inspiration, or the insurance money, or of an improved relationship with the pub's clientele. What Caoimh is willing to do, despite everything is suggesting the opposite, is to continue with a teleological, capitalistic way of living. And once he sees that there's much to gain from the disaster at hand, he even ignores Alexei when he points out the lowering level of the water. In particular, the last paragraph of the story underlines a strong business as usual, denialistic attitude: "1648 was a year shy of Cromwell's landing in Ireland, and already the inn at Killary fjord was in business – it would see out this disaster, too" (Barry 2013: 45). This excerpt clearly refers to Oliver Cromwell's arrival and subsequent conquest of Ireland. Cromwell forced the relocation of Irish Catholics to the West of the country where the scarcity of fertile land tied the peasantry to a potato-based diet, which was one of the historical causes of the Great Famine. Notwithstanding the evident disaster they are finding themselves in – the flood – and its inherit link to the history of Capitalocene, the characters show a sort of quiet acceptance of their situations, and a lasting reliance on the logic of progress and modernity. In fact, instead of following what Latour calls facing the planet or, Gaia, and situating themselves in the present (2017: 219), the protagonist projects himself into the future, "I know that they would come in sequence soon enough, their predestined rhythms would assert" (Barry 2013: 45), by leaving the past behind "the gloom of youth had at last lifted" (Barry 2013: 45). Similarly to how the inn at Killary kept being in business despite the many disasters it witnessed, he finds solace in the solipsistic hope of a renewed literary career. Contextually, he completely ignores the planetary forces which are colliding and dismantling the logics and dynamics of modernity and progress. Still following Latour, both Caoimh and the locals appear as modernized subjectivities that now benefit from the capitalist world-ecology. As a result, they see no reason to change their habits and way of living.

Telling Westerners – or those who have recently become Westernized, more or less violently – that the time has come, that their world has ended, that they have to change their way of life, can only produce a feeling of total incomprehension, because, for them, the Apocalypse has already taken place. They have already gone over to the other side. The world of the beyond has been achieved – in any case for those who have become wealthy. They have already crossed the threshold that puts an end to historicity. (Latour 2017: 206)

On the other hand, the young Belarusian workers appear as the generation which is paying the higher price, and which will pay the most from the disastrous outcomes of the climate crisis. They are vampires because life has already taken a toll from them, they bear the

environmental and monetary debts of the previous generation and go towards an increasingly unstable future. They are also ghosts from the future, *arrivants*, and they represent the unequal distribution of both responsibilities and effects of the climate crises. The owner of the pub, which represents the centre, the most privileged character in the story, concludes the story by saying: “The gloom of youth had at last lifted” (Barry 2013: 45). It is almost as if by denying a future life to the younger generation he shows how he himself was a vampire all along. He does not envy youth anymore, since he himself denies the right of a future to the next generation.

The next paragraph will analyze Tomás Mac Síomóin’s novel *Is Stacey Pregnant? Notes from the Irish Dystopia*, positioning the themes discussed so far within the gothic landscape of the Irish bog.

3.3 Bohereens, autobahns and the milky way: *Is Stacey Pregnant? Notes from the Irish Dystopia* by Tomás Mac Síomóin

Tomás Mac Síomóin (1938-2022) was a biologist, novelist, and essayist whose work was mostly published in Irish first and then self-translated into English. In his work, he weaves together reflections on Ireland's 21st-century challenges—neoliberal economy, technology, and ecological disruption—infusing biological theories into his works. Ultimately, Mac Síomóin's literary and essayistic production navigates Ireland's historical, sociopolitical, and ecological landscapes, urging a comprehensive understanding of interconnected scales in literature and societal analysis.

Is Stacey Pregnant? Notes from the Irish Dystopia (2014), originally published in Irish by the publishing house Coiscéim in 2011 with the title *An bhfuil Stacey ag iompar*, merges these interconnected yet multifaceted concerns. The novel tells the story of the fictional Clooneen bog traffic jam, in which thousands of cars got stuck in the middle of the empty countryside on their way from the West of Ireland to Dublin. The characters don't have names, instead they are called by their vehicles' names: Citroën, Ford, Opel, Cortina. The characters try to speculate about what has caused the jam, while despairing for both their lack of solutions and the gradual shrinking of primary resources like water and food; and although "human" time – hours, minutes – seems to have stopped, "planetary" time – night, day, and changing seasons – is still in place. The text is narrated from the point of view of the character known as Citroën. As far as we know, he is heading towards Dublin along a road that bisects a giant bog. He decides to take that road instead of a brand-new motorway just inaugurated by the government to avoid being breathalysed at a Garda checkpoint. In Dublin, his lover is waiting for him to board a low-cost flight to Spain and spend the weekend together, unbeknownst to his wife.

Along the way he realises that contrary to what he had imagined, a disproportionate number of people have gotten behind the wheel to drive from the West of Ireland to Dublin. Moreover, one thing that all the drivers seem to have in common is that they obsessively listen to a radio programme called *Josie Thornton's Show*. In addition, everyone is looking forward to the next episode of the *Cougars* series in which it will be revealed whether one of the protagonists, Stacey, after whom the novel is named, is pregnant or not.

At a formal level, the novel presents a highly hybrid structure, imbued with inter-textual references. The novel merges both gothic tropoi such as the found manuscript, as well as

sci-fi echoes particularly reminiscent of Ballard's *Crash*. Moreover, the most salient breach into the realist surface of the novel is the constant rupture of what at first could be identified as a recognizable chronotope: especially, the teleological trajectory of the novel is reshaped and relativised in the light of non-human time scales. Contextually, although we locate the characters in Ireland, the bog as the major setting of the novel disrupts space coordinates of here and there, inside and outside, and further complicates time constituting it as a bundle of scales and historical recurrences. Therefore, the identities of the characters progressively become more porous, magmatic and difficult to categorize.

3.3.1 Time coordinates: clashes of teleology and deep time

Similar to the other novels analysed in this thesis, *Is Stacey Pregnant?* starts off with a seemingly recognizable, mimetic narrative set up. The first scene locates us somewhere in Ireland, around springtime:

Gliding smoothly along the twisting country lane between Killnad and Dunveaty, grassy townlands West of the Shannon waking up now from the long winter sleep, goeth the Citroën. hawthorn is in heavy flower, the blossoms lying like snow on the branches of hedgerows that come down to meet the road. (2014: 5 kindle)

The scene appears as a satirical idyll, with place names shaped based on the morphology of Irish toponyms—where the suffix “kill” denotes a parish and “dun” signifies an ancient fort—yet these names are ultimately invented. The River Shannon is the only real place name. Moreover, something that locates us in time is the car's name Citroën, which, despite the satirical use of the archaic third person “goeth”, tells us that the scene is set in contemporary Ireland.

The level of realism in the novel is especially conveyed by a teleological spatial temporality, which, as we will look at in more detail in the second part of the paragraph, is constantly put into question by the conjunction with non-human time scales. It is not a case then that the characters in the novel move from the West of the country towards Dublin, or from what is perceived as the most traditional areas of the island to the capital city where the new financial centre and the headquarters of foreign multinationals reside. In this sense, their 'world' hinged on a teleological temporality, coincides with the world described by Pheng Cheah, as: “a normative spatial temporality” (2016:16).

Consequently, the character's journey resembles the promethean, teleological trajectory which Ireland undertook during the Celtic Tiger, and which would have pushed it from being a rural, under-industrialized country to being a modern tech and pharmaceutical hub. Concurrently, the characters' attitude is an overtly Faustian one: "Although modernization is foisted upon us from outside by the experience of imperialism and colonialism, and in a post-colonial era through exogenous forces of globalisation, we should not delude ourselves, as we often do, that we are innocent victims of history" (Keohane & Kuhling 2004: 168). In this context, the West of Ireland is still highly stereotyped, as exemplified by a tourist billboard on the road that says: "The Tourist Board (or was it Aer Lingus?) slogan that the Irish are 'the friendliest people on earth' flit incongruously across The Citroën's mind" (2014: 14 kindle). Contextually, the novel often reinstates a strong dichotomy between the West and the East, between backwardness and progress, which is strongly underlined by the treatment and management of the land, and chauvinistic attitudes towards women. Nonetheless, despite the journey that the characters are undertaking, we learn by their complaints that the economic crash has already occurred. In fact, many of the people in line complain about the austerity measures adopted by the government after the economic crash. As I outlined in the historical chapter, Irish policies after the crash were not necessarily put into question. On the other hand, despite the evident incongruities and unsustainability of the Tiger model, "Ireland's response to its crises represents little more than an anxious toeing-the-line in economic policy, kowtowing to the demands of the IMF, and nostalgically dreaming of those halcyon days of perpetual growth" (Kitchin & all 2012: 1303). Consequently, the characters appear to be on the 'road to progress' even though that road has already been destroyed. The trajectory of the cars towards Dublin appears already as a spectral metaphor of Ireland's (and the world's) contemporary trajectory. Therefore, similarly to the characters in *The Fjord of Killary*, the ones in *Is Stacey Pregnant?* reinstate their hope in a dying system. On top of that, the future – or a promised land of progress – seems to be both spectral and unreachable. In fact, not only does the characters' inertia feed into a moribund system, but also, the logics of debt have already prescribed and drained the characters' future possibilities. As Flannery reminds us, the debt-based system of Celtic-Tiger and post-Crash Ireland should be examined within the broader framework of a credit based economy which systemically underpins neoliberal economic regimes (2022). In this type of regime, debt shapes our future, imbuing precarity in all aspects of life, from home security to health care, as well as deeply conditioning our future choices (Flannery

2022). Contextually, McClanahan says: “(...) the uncanny temporality of debt is both the reappearance of the past and the anticipation of the future” (2018: 105). Nonetheless, it is worth noting that most consumer practices during the Tiger, car-buying included, were credit based. As underlined by McClanahan, there subsists an inherent uncanniness in the same process of credit-based ownership. In fact, what one perceives as ownership through credit transactions does not necessarily equate to tangible possession. Rather, there exists a perceivable gap between the portion of value one ostensibly owns and the entirety of the object's value. McClanahan notices how US debt culture is deeply rooted in individual consumption, a trend which characterized the Celtic Tiger period in Ireland as well. Debt situates the debtor in an in-between position, between the past and the future and between life and death: “revealing the hidden violence of the credit economy, credit-crisis culture reminds us that debt is a matter of life and death: not just for individual borrowers but also for the economy as a whole” (McClanahan 2018: 1). Therefore, considering the high individual credit-based expenditure on automobiles during the Tiger, in *Is Stacey Pregnant?* the juxtaposition of the characters' identity with their cars, configures them as indebted, in-between, spectral subjects. If uncanniness plays at various levels in the text, the characters' ghostliness configures as a central bundle around which debt's vampiristic attitude shows the inextricable nature of credit at a personal, national, and global level (McClanahan 2018). In this context, at the end of book one we read:

When the costs of these family difficulties are added to the huge mortgage they have to pay for that new house they bought in D4, the ability of the Citroën to make ends meet is sorely tried. Mortgage rates are set to rise shortly; the increased property tax will clip the family's wings; rises in the price of petrol and water are forecast by pundits whose infallibility regarding these affairs is a matter of record. Along with the many other blows to the family's economy that are in the pipeline as citizens struggle to pay their banks' crippling debts! He, The Citroën, would not be surprised if direct and indirect taxes will have to be further increased in the near future. If only to pay for the losses incurred by that clatter of international steeplechase gamblers who placed their bets on Ireland before that ill-fated horse broke its back at that dangerous mid-course jump. Try to forget that such payments mortgage the futures of Neil, Sarah and Seán! (2014: 74 kindle)

Contextually, similarly to how in *The Fjord of Killary* and in *Notes from a Coma*, the youngest generations seem to be the ones which will pay the most, in *Is Stacey Pregnant?* this attitude is further reinstated. Therefore, the life paths of young generations in Ireland (and the world) appear prescribed by the necessities of monetary debt, and, as we will see later, environmental debt. The future, which should be an open field of possibilities is instead configured as close-ended and spectral, and its uncanniness projects into the present as the ghost of the future to come, as Derrida's *arrivant*, or Morton's idea of

future-future. Consequently, and fittingly for our discourse: “all roads to the future lead to an immense pile of debt” (Dients as quoted in Flannery 2022: 8). Nonetheless, and congruently with the characters in Barry’s short story, it appears that here as well “the inertia is on the side of the modern” (2013: 112) as Morton would suggest, and that therefore, the characters which have been recently modernised, throughout the Celtic Tiger, simply ignore the signs that surround them. As we will shortly explore, the characters are not only in denial about the catastrophic global consequences of the economic crash, but also persistently ignore the signs of an all-pervasive climate crisis. The people in the novel reinstate their faithfulness towards the Tiger economy especially through commercial identitarian markers. Above all, their cars not only represent an extension of their identity, but they also appear as truly inextricable from their personas. In this context Baudrillard’s idea of the identification of the consumer with the commodity they consume not only helps us understanding this aspect, but is also crucial to consider how during the Celtic Tiger the affluence of new consumer goods became a sign of detachment and progress from the previous rural Irish way of living: “cars are rapidly becoming symbols of power and mobility, in Irish society, (...) all cars appeal to such metaphors of power and control, however. (...) the car is now the wish-fulfilling ‘dream machine’ par excellence of the subject of collision culture” (Keohane & Kuhling 2004: 47). Baudrillard further notices how the car-driver relationship is not only created through a pseudo-cyborg iron-flesh-and-bone-body, but it’s especially propelled by the speed of the driving. And therefore, the driver: “merges with his double, with the car, and so no longer has an identity of his own” (2008 online). It is through speed that the two are reconciled, and the spectral image of the car and the driver merge in an accelerated flash of light particles: “the two are reconciled by speed – the phantasm, the spectre, the ecstasy of speed – which has become an unstoppable, undeniable collective passion” (2008: online). At the start of the novel, Citroën, by exceeding speed limits, almost runs over a woman cycling in the opposite direction. The scene brings back to mind Keohane and Kuhling’s idea of “collision culture” in which different driving styles and habits in Ireland collided during the Celtic Tiger. The scene reinstates Citroën’s self-declared position as a modern man driving towards the future. In fact, when he gets off the car, the woman is described: “She descends slowly from her bicycle and turns to The Citroën, her broad peasant face drained of colour with the start her near brush with death had given her” (2014: 11 kindle). Then, when she is joined by her partner, Citroën describes the man as: “‘More gorilla than human being’, (...) A surviving Neanderthal in this arsehole of

nowhere!” (2014: 12 kindle). The comments on the people’s bodies and identities echo Caoimh’s stereotyped representation of the locals in *The Fjord of Killary*. The second comment appears especially consistent with the Celtic Tiger’s attitude of rejecting and denying the past. Citroën’s identity appears adjacent not only to the Tiger’s teleological progress, but also to the notion of “petro-masculinity” as analysed in the previous paragraph. Just like in *The Fjord of Killary* the characters’ attachment to petrol culture parallels the objectifying attitude shown towards women as exemplified in the sentence: “This one glides along like a dream. And it isn't too heavy on petrol. When looking for a car, one should be just as discriminating as when seeking a wife. That's right! Buying a car is just as serious a business as contracting matrimony...” (2014: 19 kindle). In addition, the tacky radio show that everyone seems to be listening to gives the illusion of creating another community, in which everyone listens to the speakers’ problems and cares about them. Consequently, women’s problems are especially portrayed in a highly voyeuristic manner, permeated by the male gaze. From the very beginning, women are objectified, depersonalised, and their bodies are metaphorically (and then not as metaphorically) seized part by part in order to fulfil the requirements of their male counterparts. It is also worth noting how *Cougars*, the program they watch, and the radio programs reinstitute the patriarchal logics of domination of the female body as the site of reproductive labour, and pleasure for the male gaze. The same title of the program, *Cougars*, reflects chauvinistic and patriarchal attitudes towards women. The term ‘cougar’ is generally used to define women over forty who determinedly seek relationships with younger men. Despite some recent efforts to reclaim the term, ‘cougar’ is still widely perceived as derogatory inasmuch as it refers to older women's sexuality casting them as predators or overly assertive (Montemurro & Siefken 2014). In this context Debbie Ging states:

In Ireland, as in Britain and the United States, the shift towards neoliberal government and its concurrent commercialisation of the media-scape have been key drivers in facilitating the discursive and representational repolarisation of gender. The trajectory from a public-service broadcasting model to one whose core objective is to sell audiences to advertisers sets up an entirely new dynamic between the broadcast media and their audiences. As well as marginalising those demographic groups that are of little interest to advertisers, this model addresses consumers in increasingly gender-reductive ways. (2009: 55)

In this sense, the teleological perspective carried out by the characters is not untethered from the patriarchal logic that is instead an integral part of what Paul Preciado calls the

petrosexoracial regime, and which theorists such as Silvia Federici, and Jason Moore point out to be one of the pillars of the capitalism.

Moreover, we see in Mac Síomóin's novel how celebrities and especially the character of Stacey and all the cast of the series *Cougars*, have gained a central role as symbols of society. In this context, Keohane and Kuhling argue that while in traditional societies the hero was generally worshipped for having fought for the community, in modern society "The celebrity is worshipped because they 'fight' for themselves, and in modern society the cult of the individual is manifest in the social form of the celebrity as ego ideal wherein we vicariously satiate our desires of individual success" (Keohane & Kuhling 2004: 47). Given the predominant use of the radio as a medium within the novel, the two scholars point out that:

The popularity of Irish talk radio is in part due to its dual function of celebrating modern individualism and simultaneously reconstituting traditional community, in articulating a unified sense of the "common good" despite the fragmenting, individualising effects of modernity and the plurality of world-views recent social transformations have engendered (...) Thus Irish talk radio is a strong representation of the localisation of the global: it is a forum which both articulates and reflects on the recent changes in Irish society, and which reinscribes a notion of the collective onto the increasingly differentiated and globalised "voice(s) of the people". (Keohane & Kuhling 2004: 80)

In the novel the shared knowledge of the TV show *Cougars* is what humoristically and paradoxically keeps the community together. Even in the darkest moments some characters hold on to the hope that someone, somewhere in the country would probably know what has happened to Stacey. One of the functions of the celebrity-talk in the novel, is the representation of a shallow community whose values have been replaced by insufficient globalized and transnational cultural social references, especially reminiscent of what Keohane and Kuhling call the "localization of the global", or the adaptation of global formats for an Irish audience (2004).

Nevertheless, during the journey and in the middle of the Clooneen peat bog, the cars are forced to stop due to a very long, endless traffic jam. This interruption marks the initial rupture in the novel's previously established realistic narrative. The abrupt occurrence of the traffic jam not only appears improbable but also profoundly unforeseen, prompting both the characters and readers to ponder its cause:

Since that surly lout, with his Liverpool United jersey, filled his tank in a garage at the commencement of the motorway, at the edge of Clooneen Bog, the speed of the line of traffic in which he is now irremediably stuck is growing progressively slower. The long procession of cars in front of him stretches as far as his eye can see. A little later, and you would say that it is hardly moving at all. The Citroën has never seen traffic so dense on this stretch of road. (Mac Síomóin 2014: 14-15)

The same notion of probable/improbable is put into question by Amitav Gosh. What we could deem probable or improbable appears to be an abstraction based on our notion of reality, which is being exposed as truly partial. The Citroën describes the line of cars towards the east in this way: “All heading eastwards; Westward traffic in the right-hand lane is non-existent. Without a house or any other sign of civilization in sight!” (2014: 15). From this moment on, the teleological temporality that characterized the narrative's initial mimetic layer, in line with the economic and social dynamics of the capitalist world-ecology, begins to intertwine with the temporal framework of the bog and the broader planetary context, stretching endlessly into the horizon. The individuals stranded within their vehicles measure time by the succession of the radio broadcasts or the movements of the protagonist's Rolex wristwatch, which also appears as another rooting identitarian marker. This continual monitoring of time, encapsulated by Rolexes and radio programs, signifies the characters' fluctuating identity amidst the identitarian markers crafted within the confines of the neoliberal phase of capitalism, orchestrated through the regulation of temporal and spatial domains. At a certain point, however, we see how this anthropic control of time, along with its identity markers, begin to jam. The radio begins to repeat the same talk show and news programme incessantly. Then at some point the protagonist's Rolex stops and so do those of the other drivers. The repetition of the radio broadcast creates a profound sense of uncanniness. Indeed, we see how the protagonist first begins to ask questions about how this is possible, whether he has gone mad or died:

Didn't I hear that pure-as-the-driven-snow bullshit earlier today? Or didn't I? Ah, they must be doing a rebroadcast of that useless rubbish. Or has time itself stopped? Could it be that I am dead? Take it easy, man! That sort of speculation will land you in cloud-cuckoo land. Damn! (...) Will there ever be an end to all of this stopping and starting? Will I ever make it to the airport before boarding time? That doubt, once entertained, burgeons... (Mac Síomóin 2014: 33)

The recurrence of the radio program represents a striking instance of the uncanny, aligning with Freud's concept of involuntary repetition, wherein a seemingly past event recurs over and over again. However, the protagonist's apprehensions are substantiated

when he learns that the hands of his watch have remained motionless for an extended period, confirming his suspicions:

The Citroën is the first to note that the hands of his watch are no longer moving. When he suddenly recalls his appointment with Anna at the airport, he glances at his watch. To observe that—although this bunch has been blabbing for the last half-hour, at least—the Each and every person in the group hurriedly scrutinizes his, or her, own watch. With the same disquietingly sinister result: the hands of every watch in the Parish are frozen at 2.00 pm. The changing position of the sun in the sky above, which has slid perceptibly from the zenith. (2014: 48 kindle)

It is at this moment that the characters, having lost their temporal co-ordinates, revert to those of the planet, which has continued to flow in time. Indeed, over the course of the novel, day makes way for night and summer for winter. This confrontation denotes a clash between the confinement of human time, which, echoing Jason Moore, represents merely one among several conceivable ways through which humans could have conceived their relationship with time and nature. However, this constriction of human time is markedly relativized by the incomparability of planetary time. Drawing on the insights of Timothy Morton, planetary time embodies a category of objects characterized by spatial, temporal, and other attributes fundamentally distinct from human ones. This juxtaposition underscores the profound disjunction between anthropocentric temporal frameworks and the expansive, heterogeneous temporality inherent to the planetary context. It is at this point that the feeling of uncanniness generated by the global/planetary collision peaks:

Bad enough that the traffic hasn't budged an inch over the past hour, at least! But this observation pales into insignificance beside the big question—that as yet unanswered question he poses to himself again—why has time itself, or time as it is defined and measured by man, at least, ground to a full stop here on the Bog of Clooneen? While the earth's movement relative to the sun is the reason why the latter is sinking now towards the Western horizon! As it always has! (2014: 50 kindle)

Therefore, as the novel continues, and the jam does not proceed, the movement of the sun starts to substitute the radio, and the characters start to attune to the uncanny situation they find themselves in: “The sun sank beneath the horizon. Ragged red clouds hovered above the point of its disappearance in bright pale blue sky whose colour will soon drain away to be replaced by the darkness of night” (2014: 62 kindle). As we can see from this excerpt, the style of the narration begins to alternate at a slower pace with the syncopated style that has characterized the narration so far:

The hours are melting into one another, symbolized by this perpetual 2.00, which seems to him to have become a metaphor for some primal time that can never be manipulated by human thought. But, whose human co-relative is this perpetual boredom which so wearies

his spirit. To facilitate his re-insertion in a more human dimension, he gives the radio another try. (2014: 71 kindle)

3.3.2 The bog as a temporal-spatial device, where past, present and future histories merge

Subsequently, the narrative's spatial scope becomes markedly static, confining the characters within the limits of the Clooneen peat bog. In this respect, the bog surfaces as an interesting space in which to analyse the feeling of uncanniness in connection to the idea of planetary-global scalar collision. In a book called *Contentious Terrains: Boglands, Ireland and Postcolonial Gothic* (2016:2), Derek Gladwin describes boglands from both a biological and conceptual point of view by saying:

Boglands/bogland, or “bogs” as a shorthand name for a type of wetland (mires, morasses, swamps, lagoons, fens, and sloughs), are squishy, moss-covered topographies that function as a “halfway world”, neither exclusively water nor land and yet part of both. Part liquid, part gas, and part solid material composed of decomposed plant and animal remains thousands of years old, bogs challenge our notions of reality by creating imaginary worlds through common material spaces. As unformed landmasses bogs stretch across many parts of Ireland and are often associated with culture, politics, and history as much as they are with geography and geology. (...) Bogs are simultaneously limited and limitless, yielding and unyielding, canny and uncanny sable and unstable, ordered and disordered, known and unknown political and apolitical, spatial and indeterminate, and temporal and atemporal. (2016: 2)

This is why the bog represents a liminal geographical space where the boundaries between what is human and what is not become blurry. The bog reshapes time as well as space, becoming the puppeteer of an uncanny chronotope which merges space and time scales as well as historical recurrences. It is a place where the nature-culture pair fails, in which one finds oneself dispersed and out of scale. The bog in fact, is a place of connection not only with the extremely long and non-human temporalities of peat formation, but also a link with the history of humanity, and even somehow with our evolutionary history. Still echoing Chakrabarty's idea of the Anthropocene as a time when “modern”, “modernized” or “globalized” humans meet the history of their species, the bog-land is a site where this encounter is possible. The bog directly recalls the image of the bog-man or the bog-butter, which are examples of how the preservative properties of peat allowed the prehistoric past of Ireland to resurface. Contextually, the bog is a space where both death and life coexist and merge into an inextricable unit. The in-between, neither-or and continuously shifting properties of the bog, make it an extremely fitting setting for Uncanny Realism.

The bog is a space where the dichotomies at the basis of the capitalist world-ecology and of the petrosexoracial regime (Preciado 2022), are exposed and possibly subverted. Echoing the concept of anamorphism in *Notes from a Coma*, bogs are anamorphic spaces and underworlds that subvert prescribed laws and beliefs. Beneath their surfaces, bogs preserve an immense wealth of Irish history through their non-human anaerobic functions. As a result, it not only gives us access to an amount of historical knowledge which would otherwise be difficultly accessed, but it does so by blurring the line between human and non-human agency. The bog's timescale and anaerobic activities merge with the otherwise perishability of human artifacts and keeps them up to date. Moreover, the bog's constant microbiological activity opens up a door into the future. It attunes us with scale temporalities which are so extremely vast, that the commonly anthropocentric understanding of the short interval between present, past and future, is completely outscaled. In the novel, therefore, the bog functions as an interworld, similarly to how JJ's three-month coma was named an *interregnum*. Contextually, and especially considering the rootedness of the framework of Uncanny Realism in our present time of crises, the Clooneen bog, by exposing the intermingling of various scales which compose our time of singular yet multiple crisis, acts as a revelatory narrative space.

If boglands make up 20% of the Irish territory, today only 1% of the original bogs are preserved intact: "These drained and cut peatlands are concentrated in the rural midlands of Ireland where, since the 1950s, large-scale industrial peat extraction for energy generation has been directed by the semi-state company Bord na Móna (BnM)" (Bresnihan and Brodie 2023: 363). In this context, the management of Irish bogs sheds light onto the progressive teleological attitude which diachronically shaped these territories, starting from the British colonial regime to today's neoliberal one. Consequently, from the point of view of the return of the historical repressed in post-crash novels, the bog delves deep into the long history of colonization of the island of Ireland by the British empire, during which:

Ireland's history as a British colonial conquest wielded enormous influence on land tenure and ownership, and the social fabric of Ireland revealed immense inequalities between landed gentry and their tenants. Bogs were frequently the only land that tenants and poorer classes had access to, and were used for habitation, growing crops, and fuel. (Flood 2016: 74)

The colonial relationship of the British with Irish land profoundly disrupted and modified the various landscapes of Ireland, and the pre-colonial relationship that its people had with them. During the Celtic Tiger, Ireland tried to forget its colonial past in order to step forward towards modernization. In this respect, the bog as the setting of the novel, and particularly the abrupt stop while the characters are driving to modernity, is connected to the depiction of the bog as a site where the past cannot be forgotten and where the presumed utopia of the present is put into question:

These disruptions were articulated in part through English attempts to manage the bog in order to make it a more 'efficient' space for agricultural production, which made the bog a site of colonial tension and colonial memory. Thus, the colonial history of the bog makes it a site of melancholic memory that allows the violence of the past to remain alive and to rupture the capitalist euphoria presented by the Celtic Tiger era. (Ryan: 2020)

Our specific case deals with the moment of the crash, when Ireland was stopped on its way to modernity, and therefore a moment of crisis which could generate alternatives to the political projects which the nation had so far embarked in. Particularly, if we align our thinking with neo-Marxist thinkers such as Jason Moore or Aníbal Quijano, we see how the current neoliberal moment has deep roots in the long history of capitalist modernity, which began with colonialism. In this regard, many events that trace the history of colonization in Ireland resurface in Celtic Tiger texts in an uncanny way, bringing back what should have been forgotten but cannot be. In fact, the traumas and disruption of colonialism in Ireland, can, amongst other things, function as a warning towards the unthoughtful embrace of what has been analysed as neo-colonialism through financial, immaterial capital during the Celtic Tiger (Flood 2018). Especially, as time passes in the bog, the characters experience a dramatic lack of food, which pushes them to resort to the most extreme solutions. This occurrence is reminiscent of Ireland's most tragic event, The Great Famine (1845/1852). About a third of the way into the novel, as the jam stretches on, hunger begins to set in. Although Citroën has some lunch that his wife's family gave him before the journey, he decides to accept a sandwich from one of the other drivers:

Even if he had his own "larder" as a back-up supply in case the going gets rough. Wrapped up neatly in a copy of *The Sunday Star*! Presented to him a seeming infinity ago by Maura's people, just in case he became afflicted by "the hungry grass", as rural folk describe insatiable hunger, on his long journey from Letterfree to Dublin. (2014: 68 kindle)

The reference to the 'hungry grass' goes back to Irish folklore and especially to the idea whereby a certain kind of grass which grows on a burial site can give you an insatiable hunger. The 'hungry grass' could also be translated as 'famine grass' because most of the folklore around it emerged as a way of coping with the horrors of the great famine:

The mental and material landscape of the Famine was (and remains) a prominent part of Irish consciousness. Folk narratives provide a way for people to come to some understanding of such grievous circumstances. Similarly, narratives about the experience of fear gortach may have served to address the concerns of the famine-stricken. (Davis 1996: 42)

Also, thirst starts to plague the people blocked in the jam as food and drink start to be more and more scarce:

This is how this excruciating thirst, and this accursed traffic jam that looks like as if it is never going to end, are both affecting my perception of reality, he mutters to himself. When they descend from the car to stretch their legs, they quickly find out that they are not alone in their plight. The contents of water, milk, lemonade, Kong Kola, Pepsi, Fanta, Sprite etc. between cans and bottles, have all been drained to the last drop, even the occasional can of beer. The Cortina's brat is the first to start howling with the thirst. His piercing screeches freeze the very marrow of The Citroën's bones. His father and The Skoda Bishop go in search of water... (2014: 69 kindle)

Images of hunger become central to the narrative, "The Citroën feels the hunger more keenly than ever. He imagines it now as a gigantic hungry worm wriggling around in the hollow of his stomach" (2014: 88 kindle). Nonetheless, although hunger, scarce hygiene conditions and thirst are the most urgent problems that the characters should face, the person who becomes elected as a representative for the people stuck in the vicinity sees petrol exhaustion as the most impelling concern:

Ignoring imperiously the scabrous contributions of the numerous hecklers, The Beamer now explains that, with all this toing and froing, many parishioners must already be worried because they are low on petrol. But that he, The Beamer, is putting the finishing touches to a plan that will take care of such a shortfall and ensure that no parishioner will be left stranded in this bog for lack of petrol. (2014: 101 kindle)

This is indicative from several points of view. First, we see how the peat bog connects us to other stories related to what Jason Moore terms capitalist world-ecology, particularly energy regimes and the decline of "cheap oil," as Sharea Deckard also notes. More specifically, Ireland comes from a long tradition of dependence on peat, an energy source that is less efficient than coal and oil and particularly polluting. For this reason, the Irish

government decided in October 2022 to place severe restrictions on the usage and sale of peat. On the official Irish government website, gov.ie, we read:

People with turbary rights and all other customary practices in respect of turf will be unaffected by these regulations. They will continue to be able to cut turf for their own use and will retain the ability to gift or sell turf. However, no sale of turf may take place by way of the internet or other media (that is, advertising in local press), or from retail premises. (Gov.ie 2022)

In this respect, Sharea Deckard notices how the bog:

(...) is imagined as the ruins of national energy sovereignty capturing the peculiarities of Ireland's peat dependence, the ecological exhaustion of industrial peat mining, and the failure of the state to enforce environmental remediation of the strip-mined bogs, which continue to release vast amounts of carbon into the atmosphere. (2022: 385)

Moreover, the concern over petrol signals a fear of energy dependency, as well as the rising costs of living crisis due to fuel and petrol. Despite this, the decision, driven by the candidate's political realism, proposes a new energy dependency that not only denies possible alternatives to the problem, but at the same time ignores the overall impact of fossil fuels. In fact, one of the issues that returns in the novel is that of global warming, which permeates the text in a disturbing way. As a result, the novel could also be seen as petro-realism, by which Brent Ryan Bellamy means:

Petro- is meant to posit that all texts produced within petroculture are functionally marked by the ontology of oil, even as they anticipate a world after oil. Realism emphasizes the forms of mediation of the various scales simultaneously implicated in specific instances within a larger whole. Petro-realism aims to offer a better grasp on the ecology-energy impasse. (259: 2017)

Moreover, the management of boglands is crucial to Ireland's energy futures, especially from the perspective of the Celtic Tiger and post-Celtic Tiger tech sector and its increasing energy demands. This aspect connects the boglands of Ireland with the most recent restructuring of global capitalism, and exposes the nexus between local geographies, and semi-peripheralization processes within the capitalist world-ecology, while also showing the recurrence of past energy regimes. By that logic, the bogland has always been identified as a wasteland, which should have been made profitable:

the specific waste landscape of peatlands is becoming important to digital infrastructures in historical continuity with older forms of extraction and development. The large-scale, transformative projects of 'smart' and 'green' eco-modernity represented by data centres, wind farms and carbon sequestration evoke discourses from the 18th and 19th centuries,

when efforts to drain and reclaim these semi-aqueous territories were driven by moral as well as economic imperatives. These colonial logics and their spatially transformative enactment have endured in how politicians, climate scientists, industrialists and spatial developers alike see bogs as somewhere that must be made valuable for capitalist accumulation at the expense of existing ways of life. (Bresnihan and Brodie 2023: 363)

Moreover, the management of the land coincides with the depiction of women within the novel. In this context, the treatment of the bog as a colonised space parallels the feminization of the land and of the nation within nationalist and contemporary discourse. In a paper titled *Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family* (1993), McClintock highlights how revolutionary nationalisms typically revolve around a male figure as the revolutionary subject, mirroring colonial endeavours that portrayed themselves as masculine invasions into untouched territory. Consequently, the contestation over nationalism becomes a battle over feminized spaces, limiting opportunities for women's agency or involvement. McClintock contends that women are symbolically absorbed into the national identity as its figurative border and symbolic boundary. While they are often depicted as symbolic representatives of the nation, they are excluded from any direct participation in national agency (1993). Within the Irish context, women, represented either by Mother Eire or the Virgin Mary, have always been seen as the symbolic site where the values of the nation dwelled. In this context Sorcha Gunne writes:

(...) gender relations in Ireland are haunted by the spectre of the historical trope of woman as nation personified by Yeats's Caitlín (or Cathleen) Ní Houlihan. Following this, Ronit Lentin's statement that she will be a post-feminist in a post-patriarchy is equally apposite as an epigraph to this paper because it is the position of women in contemporary Irish society that is the primary concern here." (2012:1)

In this respect, the characters' trajectory from "the old mother Ireland" to the "new, neoliberal, modern one" is also conveyed by the way in which the Citroën is travelling away from his traditional wife and towards her lover Anna. Anna seems to be emblematic of neoliberal post-feminism, although at the same time Anna always appears in a zone between dream and reality, a dreamlike ideal that is unattainable. She represents a new female figure who incorporates the new Mother Eire:

She would be setting out for the airport by now, very likely. If she isn't already there. There is no way that a person as prissy and as punctilious as Anna is ever going to forgive a let down like this. Even if his excuse is based on true and verifiable facts! For Anna, being a Gorgon to the manner born, facts that fail to conform to her beliefs and desires belong to some alien universe that she prefers never to know. (2014: 49-50 kindle)

Contextually, the depiction of women in the novel is highly stereotyped and serves as a further metaphor for the teleological trajectory of the characters' journey. Nonetheless, this same depiction exposes what Bracken names women's "closed futurity" during the Celtic Tiger. This criticism is further enabled by the bog as a spatial setting, in fact, as stated by Gladwin:

(...) modernised economic policy and prosperity do not necessarily translate into progressive social change especially for women and minority groups. (...) This is largely why Irish feminists have been sceptical of modernizing narratives in the last few decades. On another level, what illuminates the concerns for women and their relationship with Ireland also relates to the space in which the plays are set – the bog – which serves as a challenge to both the future of progress and the invention of the past. (2016: 179)

In the context of gothic writing, Ellen Scheible says: "One of the strongest defining features of the Irish Gothic is its intertwined relationship with the national tale and its use of the female body as a template for cultural tension, change, and anxiety, similar to Freud's use of the body as a home for the recognition of trauma" (2023: 235).

Within the narrative, the characters appear ensnared within the confines of their temporal and spatial realities. Yet, amidst this apparent stasis, the text subtly interweaves elements of colonial history with the emergent economic boom of the Celtic Tiger era and the pervasive influence of global petrol culture. The in-betweenness of the characters proves to be the perfect place to observe and see this conjunction, while heightening the uncanniness and un-homeliness of the narrative as well. Drawing on Lazzarato's work on the neoliberal subject of the "indebted man", Eoin Flannery stresses how:

(...) there are Gothic overtones to the ways in which the Irish landscape and economy are haunted by our individual and combined indebtedness. As our ensuing argument outline, such recourse to the spectral and the uncanny is readily apparent in the literature that deals with the zenith and the decline of the Irish Celtic Tiger. (Flannery 2022: 132)

Going back to the characters' identification with their automobiles, it can be seen how their bodies also become a site where past and present histories merge and unfold, and their human or trans-human identities are also put into question. Contextually, their bodies become progressively porous, and the confines between what is human and what is not have started to collapse. Over the course of the novel, the body, identified with the machine, appears to return to a vulnerable abject corporality. In this respect, the extreme

functionality of the machine which was displayed in the first part of the novel is subverted. In fact, the shell of the car becomes inanimate as fuel supplies run out, and simultaneously the identity of the characters becomes increasingly reliant on primarily bodily functions. This process progressively blurs the boundaries between human and non-human, while the vulnerability of the body exposes our inherent co-dependence with the non-human other. The progressive disengagement with their cars and the appearance of the “human species” other is made evident in the outset of Book Two, where we first read: “The unceasing twisting and turning of his body in his frenzied quest for a comfort that is unobtainable in the back seat of his car lasts right through the night. (...) For a fleeting interval, he isn’t quite sure where he is. (...) You are in your own Citroën, you eejit!” (2014: 77 kindle). Citroën doesn’t feel at ease in his car anymore, and for the first time in the novel we bear witness to the metaphorical separation of the character’s capitalist identity from his human one, intended as a living organism within a planetary mesh. In fact, subsequently we read:

His attention is deflected from the star to the shadowy figures scurrying about the cars in the thin pre-dawn light. They seem to be making for clumps of low bushes in the bog, just a short distance from the edge of the motorway. The insistent signal sent to his brain by his own lower innards reminds him of the reason for this unexpected flurry of activity. (...) Nothing lies to the north of him but the formless dark of this vast bog, weakly illuminated now by the silent starry sky above. (...) The Citroën cannot help wondering if the exercise of this bodily function was a matter for such shame on the part of our distant ancestors, some of whose remains lie, undoubtedly, far beneath this blanket of peat. Most unlikely he concludes! Probably just another part of that Jansenist heritage that has so scarred our people! (2014 77-78: kindle)

Nonetheless, further on in the narrative we read how Citroën continues to place his hope into the car’s radio, in case some message or news will come through the radio and give them a solution:

Hoping against hope, that some semblance of normality has returned to air waves had that seemed up to now to be parasitized by Josie Thornton and his gormless guests. Maybe a news flash will throw some light on the predicament of all us who are trapped here by this fucking appalling inconvenience, to put it as politely as the facts warrant. (2014: 80 kindle)

Contextually, the radio programmes not only represent the self-reproductive nature of the capitalist world-ecology, but also its symbolic hope-inducing system. In fact, something else that emerges from the passage is the idea of hope. The characters, despite the evident calamity they find themselves in, maintain a persistent hope in the system. Their hope is not a positive, generative one, since it is not channelled towards finding possible

alternatives, but instead it represents a capitalist-realist, modern inertia, which keeps the logics of the capitalist world-ecology alive (Morton 2018). It aligns with the pre-crash shared idea that the system, and the banks which enabled it, were too big to fail and that the system will always find a way out. This attitude is contingent with Darko Suvin's description of capitalism as a system which subsumes utopia's political and revolutionary power (2010). Contextually, the characters' hope is easily fuelled by minor movements along the traffic jam, or by completely implausible explanations which circulate amongst the people:

Not that they really believe the optimistic forecasts of the vendors of false hopes who visit the parish in quest of food and drink. Yet, one never knows! Hope springs eternal in the human breast, as that old hoary cliché has it. And what parishioner would want to be caught unawares on this abnormally oppressive sultry day by a sudden movement of the traffic while socializing at some distant remove from his, or her, vehicle? (2014: 81-82 kindle).

The characters' unrealistic hopes resemble what Mauss calls "magical thinking" (2001), which various contemporary theorists have adapted to the neoliberal context (Moeran 2017; Skovgaard-Smith 2023). This form of thinking surfaces in the context of necessity, when a highly complicated problem needs to be solved. The problem solvers/ magicians of our era are figures conspicuously endowed with symbolic power/capital like political leaders, economists, entrepreneurs which are infused with: "vague and indeterminate powers to transform societies, politics, markets, organisations, and selves" (Skovgaard-Smith 2023: 7). Therefore, the people stuck in the jam decide to face the enormous problem they are stuck in by reinstating that magical thought into both the system and its symbolic representative. First of all, they organize into different groups, which they term 'parishes', governed by different Taoiseachs. The representative of the Citroën's parish is a character known as the Beamer. From the moment of "the presidential elections", the Beamer's attitude appears as a mixture of gish gallop and sexism, aimed at undermining his adversary. But it's also imbued with that vague, and generic attitude which is one of the main characteristics of magical thinking. During his electoral discourse he states:

Except that the strategy she advocates ignores completely the grim reality of the problems that face us. Which I'll come to in a moment! In the meantime, let me stress the two words that are inscribed on my banner: one is "Realism"; the other is "Practicality". I hope you don't think, my friends, that all of this is windy rhetoric! I don't mind telling you out straight: I am not a person without importance and considerable influence in the business life of this country. I am centrally involved in the affairs of a transnational hi-tech corporation whose business was estimated at €70bn last year. We have upwards of 30,000 employees, both in Ireland and around the globe which I manage personally. I even own some luxury apartments

in Lower Manhattan. As I said before, this isn't all just hot air. It is just that I take seriously my democratic duty to demonstrate my mettle to you, fairly and honestly. For, after all, it is necessary that you know the quality of the candidates in front of you before you cast your vote. For, when the time comes to make a choice, who wants to buy a pig in a poke? Who wants to cast a vote for a good-hearted lady, yes, I freely admit that, whom I imagine to be a fine housewife, as every good woman should be. I am sure she can put a fine tasty meal on the table, but what experience has she, I ask, in the fields of commerce and administration? (2014: 98 kindle)

The characters exhibit a disposition characterized by an exaggerated political realism, whereby they seemingly acquiesce to circumstances with a sense of absurd resignation. This attitude exacerbates their situation rather than ameliorating it. In the novel we read: “Although he is personally disinclined to recognize The Beamer’s de iure leadership role in the Parish, The Citroën is forced to swallow the de facto reality of it”. (2014: 116). The election of The Beamer as Taoiseach is a turning point in the narration. In fact, up until now, the crises caused by the jam has opened up a generative cognitive fracture into the predicaments of the capitalist world-ecology. Nonetheless, the generative potentialities of this process are undermined by the character’s acceptance of the Beamer’s leadership. In fact, as we read in the above excerpt his governmental methods are based on “realism” and “practicality”. These two predicaments are put to work especially in the management of food and petrol supplies. The trajectory that the Beamer’s policies will take are reminiscent of various political disasters in Ireland, and especially Britain’s management of the Great Famine, but also the Irish government's acceptance of post-crash austerity measures. This section of the novel is characterised by a deep historicization process, in which the juxtaposition of images of starving bodies and the description of neoliberal economic policies sheds light onto diachronic, yet interconnected, phases of Irish history and the history of the Capitalocene at large. Especially, the section’s title *Because of Usury* and the opening epigraph “‘Stuff happens!’ Donald Rumsfeld, referring to the torture of war prisoners in Abu Ghraib Prison, Iraq” (2014: 76 kindle) highlight the two political lines of thought that characterised both the Famine and the Irish bailout: the liberal/neoliberal ideology of economic dependence, and a strong foundational political realism which justifies atrocities under a “de facto” attitude. The joint representation of recent and past historical traumas engenders a constant cognitive process of recognition and estrangement in the reader. In fact, the skewed depiction of Irish history creates a generative gap within which the reader can question past, present and future political trajectories. Furthermore, the spatial setting of the bog enables the merging of various histories by erasing the temporal boundary between past, present and future. Similarly,

the characters progressively start to occupy a threshold position between life and death, which allows their bodies to become another physical/biological space in which various historical layers merge and unfold.

Firstly, let's look again at how famine-related history plays out within the narrative. The Beamer first decides to sign an unfavourable agreement according to which the starving characters would be able to acquire packets of crisps and coke for an extremely inflated price from a truck stuck somewhere along the jam. The crisps and coke diet doesn't improve the characters' health and nutritional state. Instead, it deteriorates it to the extent that most of them become skeletal, extremely weak, and many also die from starvation. The non-charitable attitude towards the starving resembles England's actions when managing what became to be known as the Indian wheat food relief. This food relief scheme saw the possibility of distributing Indian wheat to face the fast spread of the potato blight in the year 1847, but its efficacy was extensively undermined by British non-interventionist policies to avoid interfering with free market mechanisms and private interests (Harzallah 2020: 313). Consequently, the ineffectiveness of this food relief scheme: "seemed to weaken the paupers' resistance to contagious disease, which spread rapidly. Starvation, typhus, fever, and dysentery killed thousands of people in 1847" (Harzallah 2020: 321). Similarly, in the novel the people who are only fed crisps and coke see their immune system weakening and many of them fall ill. The reminiscence of the Great Famine starts at this point to become more and more permeant, and is also directly addressed in the narrative: "They remind him of images of the Great Famine in the schoolbooks of his early schooldays. Skeletal women! Bearded spectral faces!" (2014: 178 kindle). These images evoke what Davis calls the thin-legged revenant: "The striking image of wasted legs that attends these narratives could well have been derived from the widespread starvation that prevailed during the Potato Famine" (Davis 1996: 42). In this context, the people of the jam, almost at the point of starvation, are led to accept the Beamer's proposal to sign an agreement with another food company called The Smilin' Porkys whose trucks are supposedly stuck in the jam too. This company only sells pork meat at the price of both petrol and undefined services performed by the jam's people. Contextually, they are also accumulating a considerable amount of petrol which they sell through vouchers. The trade of food to the starving people of the jam is carried out through extremely ideologically mediated policies, as the Beamer explains:

Consumer goods, services, even personal services: all have their price. You hardly have to be a Milton Friedman to understand that price and profit are of the essence of the free market, that very foundation stone of real democracy. You could hardly expect businessmen to the manner born, like the Smilin' Porkys, to manage their meat market in any other way. (2014: 151 kindle)

The reference to Milton Friedman, the founder of the Chicago School of economics, and a defender of the supremacy of the free market especially in books such as *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962) and *Free to Choose* (1980), addresses both the Irish economic policies during and after the Celtic Tiger and to Britain's economical ideology during the famine. For what concerns the first, as extensively explored during chapter two, Ireland's embrace of neoliberalism (although not overtly declared) is recognised as the basis of the country's trajectory since the late 1950s. Nonetheless, when examining the Great Irish Famine, economic liberalism and laissez-faire policies, where "the intervention of the government in the market was to be regulated according to the action of private traders" (Harzallah 2020: 313), emerged as the primary ideological solutions to the crisis. In the novel, we read:

The Citroën thinks. Apart from the courteous gloss put on the proceedings by Porky, the present scenario is basically a throwback to the days of the Great Hunger, as the starving peasantry lined up in the Poorhouse for thin gruel to be ladled into their empty bowls. (2014: 180 kindle)

Moreover, the services paid by the people to the Porkys are also reminiscent of the poor conditions under which the starving Irish were obliged to work in the famine workhouses. Such institutions founded under the 1838 Irish Poor Law and started to be built in 1845. During the years of the Famine the workhouses became overcrowded, which alongside the poor hygienic conditions and diet, caused the death of around 200.000 people. According to Lynch's description:

Therefore poverty— particularly in respect of the 'undeserving poor', such as an unemployed able-bodied individual—was to be punished, and this was embedded in every aspect of the workhouse. The structure itself was imposing: a huge, multi-storey stone edifice compared with the previously mentioned one-roomed windowless cabins of the poor. Families were divided, and every action from dawn to dusk was run to the sound of a bell. The control was all-encompassing. (Lynch 2014: 126)

Similarly, The Smilin' Porkys start to dictate their conditions for the distribution of food, which appear as highly gendered and unequal:

The Smilin' Porkys themselves are the ones who will decide, in a given context, what service is needed. A man or two might be needed to shovel snow from the motorway, for example. Or to remove trees blown down by the storms or burnt-out cars that impede the traffic.

Women are needed to take care of the sick, children or babies. And, especially, the growing numbers of orphans that are left after their parents die from the hunger or commit suicide. (2014: 158 kindle)

Contextually, much like how a large number of destitutes who sought relief in the famine workhouses died within their very walls, along the jam, more and more people begin to mysteriously disappear. Women and non-nationals are the first ones to go missing, which indicates the disposability of a high share of the population within a neoliberal economy.

Moreover, as previously stated, Famine-related history merges with and sheds critical light onto the recent events of the Celtic Tiger and subsequent bailout. As we've extensively pointed out in the first part of the paragraph, the novel is permeated by the crepuscular presence of the Tiger's wealth, which has come to an end. At the same time, the jam appears to represent the sudden stop along the road to progress which the world, and the Irish nation, experienced during the 2008 global economic crises. Furthermore, the agreements that the parish's Taoiseach signs with both the crisps and coke dealers and with the Similin' Porkys company are an evident reminder of the various stages of Ireland's economic downturn. First of all, the government guarantee deals and then the resort to the EU/ECB/IMF troika. The first refers to the deals which the Irish Taoiseach Brian Cowen and the Minister for Finance Brian Lenihan agreed to on the 29th of September 2008:

The decision provided a comprehensive government guarantee in respect of the financial obligations of the six domestic institutions — Allied Irish Banks (AIB), Anglo Irish Bank (Anglo), Bank of Ireland, Educational Building Society, Irish Life & Permanent, and Irish Nationwide Building Society (INBS) — falling due over the following two years. (Donovan & Murphy 2013: 200)

Following the agreement there were slight improvements in the banking system. However, between 2009 and 2010, market pressures escalated, eventually causing a partial collapse in confidence by late summer and early autumn of 2010. This was followed by the decision on the 18th of November 2010, to resort to an EU/ECB/IMF bailout, giving the costs and unaffectedness of the previous measure. As Colin Coulter and Francisco Arqueros-Fernández state:

The terms of the deal struck between the troika and the Irish government would see the three bodies advance €67.5 billion in emergency loans over the next three years. It would become commonplace to refer to this arrangement as a 'bailout', a term whose genial connotations suggest that the financial assistance involved represented an act of selfless benevolence. The

reality was rather different. The funds loaned to the Irish state came at punitive interest rates, disappeared mainly (€35 billion) into the voracious European banking system and afforded the creditor institutions the power to dictate government policy for years to come. (2019: 91)

Moreover, the two scholars highlight how harsh budgets introduced during this time included a range of measures that cut or eliminated social welfare programs previously deemed essential, resulting in a significant rise in social deprivation. From 2008 to 2014, the percentage of Irish citizens facing material deprivation, meaning they lacked essential items like proper clothing and shelter, nearly doubled. Most notably, in the novel, the uncanniness of debt is conveyed through death-like images of starving bodies, whose lack of basic necessities reflects the condition many Irish people, particularly those from lower social classes, found themselves in after the crash. Therefore, the parallel treatment of the Porkys' policies and the images of the starving people of the jam, echoes Flannery's reading of Dienst's idea of indebtedness: "While the debt economy is too often read as a fraction of the broader conjectural sphere of finance capitalism, Dienst is alert to the fact that indebtedness is a very much a lived and materially impactful condition" (Flannery 2022: 9). This becomes even more clear if we take into account the uneven distribution of public debt, which extensively affected the lower classes, women and that share of the population which did not really benefit from the Celtic Tiger. Mary McGlynn highlights the unevenness of the Irish recovery by stressing how while big developers had their debts taken over by the government, small mortgage holders weren't given any help. Even after Ireland exited the bailout program, one out of every ten citizens struggled to afford food every day. Furthermore, despite the fact that most Irish citizens earned less than €38,000 per year at the peak of the economic boom, they are still responsible for funding domestic bailouts and repaying loans from the troika (2022: 3-4). Contextually, a vast share of the jam's population starts to be literally sacrificed by the Smilin' Porkys. In fact, many people who left their cars to reach the Porkys' quarters and work for them never return. Thus, the lingering suspicion that the meat the Porkys are serving isn't pork is confirmed at the end of Book Two, when Citroën finds a piece of skin in his bowl of soup, sporting the Ford Escort's arm tattoo:

What The Citroën sees in that mug, that Celtic design, a la The Book of Kells, sets the faces of Ms. Toyota Starlet, The Fiat 1100 Dub, The Renault 4 Ponytail, The Cherokee 1.4 Italian, The Skoda Bishop and his companion, The Cortina and many others swirling around in a hellish bloody whirlpool constructed for their own benefit by the Smilin' Porkys. (2014: 198 kindle)

In this respect, Scheible points out the frequent juxtaposition of famine related histories, with the starved, dead of abused female body. She states:

For contemporary Gothic writers, the same famine metaphor is aligned with the trope of the female body as a landscape of unsustainable and threatened Irish cultural history. The moments of resolution (if there are any) in such writing tellingly provide a critique of, but not a solution for, Celtic Tiger capitalism, compulsory heteronormativity and tenuous notions of Irish history and trauma. (2023: 242)

The above passage further addresses the redistribution of the state and the banks responsibilities onto the public, which Ireland's finance minister justified by saying "we all partied" (O'Callaghan et al. 2015: 41). In this context, austerity measures are conceived of, as explored in chapter two, as inherently part of the neoliberal system, "as one facet of slow violence and structural violence as constitutive of a global economy grounded in inequality" (McGlynn 2022: 35). And therefore, "the structuring of the 2009 bailout imposed a retroactive narrative on the boom and bust, one that underscores a worldview driven by nonstate economic actors and suggests an absence of alternatives" (McGlynn 2022: 34). Moreover, austerity measures in Ireland were followed suit by a continuation in the neoliberal trajectory which did not engender a true critical outlook on the system at large, but which saw the economic crash as a tangential mismanagement of real estate and financial markets. This mindset did not undermine the trustworthiness of Ireland's neoliberal trajectory, which was instead infused with hope for a prosperous future recovery:

The discourse first emphasizes the size of the public debt which created the need for a bailout and justified the policy solution of austerity. Then, in a more optimistic-vein, the solution to breaking free of the crisis is presented almost as a mantra where the objective is for Ireland "to exit the bailout" and "get back to borrowing from the markets". This gives legitimacy to austerity and to the financial markets. (O'Callaghan et al. 2015: 41)

On the other hand, *Is Stacy Pregnant?* subverts this narrative by exposing the profound violence, inequality, and lack of future prospects that this logic lead to. Nonetheless, as we will see in the next paragraph, *Is Stacy Pregnant?* constantly addressed the necessity of finding alternatives, by constantly and deeply distrusting the diachronic and synchronic dynamics of the capitalist world-ecology.

3.3.3 How can we subvert this world? Beyond T.I.N.A.

The final trace of the uncanny feeling created by the collision of scales is conveyed through the literary device of the rediscovered manuscript. In fact, a quarter of the way through the novel, what initially seemed like a straightforwardly narrated story is revealed to be a rediscovered manuscript. We realise this when the narration stops to make room for a small-italicised chapter that says:

By the time the following extracts were recorded, it seems that the motorists and their passengers had adopted the custom of calling the informal assemblies that were wont to gather beside a blue Peugeot (a make of automobile) every time the lines of cars, stretching eastwards as far as the eye could see, ground to a halt: the Dáil. And, once again, it is obvious that the term “The Parish” refers to a group of cars in the immediate vicinity of The Citroën, whose drivers and passengers got to know each other and organize during those interminable halts in order to allay whatever hardship might arise from the protracted Clooneen Jam, and to defend themselves. Levi and Levi (2447) draw attention to the similarity of the structure of this, seemingly, spontaneous organization and that of the faux-democratic structures that organized society administratively until The Great Collapse ended the hegemony of all such primitive modes of social organization. It is clear that the word “parishioner” pertains to denizens of “The Parish” as so defined, whether drivers or passengers. (2014: 46 kindle)

The literary device of the manuscript has a long tradition in Gothic fiction, some examples are the classic gothic novels of *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, or *The Castel of Otranto*. In general, the found manuscript addresses the question of the novel’s reliability, mediating unreal plotlines through the means of a written witness by constructing the basis for fabricated authenticity. The manuscript device infuses an uncanny feeling on the reader, especially for its lack of introductory explanation. The emergence of the rediscovered manuscript not only fosters profound uncertainty regarding the factual reality of events but also transports us to an alternative temporal dimension. This shift prompts inquiries into the identity of the narrator, the origin, and temporality of the discourse. At the end of the novel, we gather more information about the manuscript which sheds light on the Clooneen Jam event:

Recent surveys show that few of our fellow citizens are aware of the notorious traffic snarl “The Clooneen Jam”, now known to have occurred half a millennium ago in the then Republic of Ireland, and which is described by The Citroën Notebook from within. Our own research indicates that this event happened shortly before the so-called Peak Oil Crisis irremediably altered the history of mankind. That is to say, slightly before chronic flooding due to rising sea levels and increasing rainfall levels, together with dangerous radioactivity levels due to the Great Windscale Disaster, led to the mass abandonment of Dublin, together with low-lying sections of the country’s Atlantic coast, and the re-location of the country’s capital in Müllingar (now about 75m over sea level), near the island’s geographical centre. (2014: 205 kindle)

As a result, we discover that what we've just read is just a section of a longer manuscript, and that the version we are reading now is correlated by a series of academic commentaries which read the manuscript in light of what has come after it. In this context, the few hints the academic apparatus to the manuscript gives us about the status of reality a few centuries from now, show that despite ecological and social destruction, capitalism survives, and has spread on a planetary level. Additionally, while the scholarly annotations enhance the purported authenticity and scientific verisimilitude of the presented information, they also prompt us to question our beliefs as readers and our position within the story. They relativize our agreed-upon reality and its teleological trajectory. It seems that the characters, however, do not deviate from their realist, teleologically driven progress. Nonetheless, the novel is filled with insights, warnings and relativization signs. Therefore, the manuscript, by evoking a sense of meta-uncanniness in the reader, highlights how it is within our power to recognize the signs that multiply unnervingly around us and alter our path. While we can't change what has happened in the Clooneen bog, it is still within our power to alter the future depicted in the manuscript. Ultimately the finale appears similar to the failed epiphany of *The Fjord of Killary*, but the manuscript evokes a feeling of disengagement in the reader, because the future there depicted is rejected. In fact, the found manuscript opens space for finding alternatives, which can be read through Morson's idea of sideshadowing (1994). Sideshadowing is especially enabled within the novel by the constant rupture of a linear, monolithic temporality. In fact, if a one-levelled temporality could engender what Morson calls foreshadowing, and therefore the presence of an inevitable prescribed future, then a multi-layered one opens the investigation into an open field of possibility and into what might have happened. In *Is Stacey Pregnant?* we've extensively explored how the linear realistic narrative chronotope of the start is questioned through multiple scalar temporalities as well as historical layers, enabled by the spatial setting of the bog. Moreover, the novel ends with four possible interpretations/ epilogues to the Clooneen bog jam. The first one describes the Clooneen bog jam as the inaugural event to the creation of the World and Interplanetary Order. The second instead reads the events as a metaphorical account of the Celtic Tiger and its collapse. The third one, interprets it as the doppelganger of the history of humanity, and the narrated events especially signal the start of what has been called "The Great Disaster", which involves extreme climate change, flooding, and loss of ecosystems all over the planet. Moreover, in this third epilogue, we learn that the people around the year 2490 have little to no knowledge of

their history, which has enabled the reproduction of the capitalist world-ecology on an interplanetary scale through the conquest of other planets. The last interpretation focuses on the role of automobiles in bringing forward the extreme consequences of climate change. I believe that these four epilogues, evoke a feeling of deep disappointment in the reader. In fact, both convey obvious interpretations that emerge during the reading of the text and echo well-worn apocalyptic narrative tropes, the fallacy of which I already explored in the previous paragraph about *The Fjord of Killary*. In this context, the epilogues just seem to reinstate the ideology of Margaret Tacher's "T.I.N.A.", 'there is no alternative', and to continue with a disruptive capitalist realist attitude. Nonetheless, as we've seen, the novel deeply conveyed capitalist dynamics not only as extremely dangerous, but also as profoundly unreal. Therefore, the epilogues do not give voice to all the possible alternatives which could have surfaced in the management of the jam. Therefore, the partial take of the four epilogues creates a void which should be filled with new narrations and possibilities. In this context the idea of sideshadowing becomes pivotal:

sideshadowing conveys the sense that actual events might just as well not have happened. In an open universe, the illusion is inevitability itself. Alternatives always abound, and, more often than not, what exists need not have existed. Something else was possible, and sideshadowing is used to create a sense of that "something else." Instead of casting a foreshadow from the future, it casts a shadow "from the side," that is, from the other possibilities. Along with an event, we see its alternatives; with each present, another possible present. *Sideshadows conjure the ghostly presence of might-have-beens or might-bes. While we see what did happen, we also see the image of what else could have happened. In this way, the hypothetical shows through the actual and so achieves its own shadowy kind of existence in the text.* (Morson 1994: 118, my emphasis)

In this context, following Allison Gibson:

The anticipation of retrospection therefore instead resembles sideshadowing because, rather than the future being predestined and channeling back to the present, the anticipated future is imagined and provisional as is the retrospective impression of the present that it creates. (2020: 140)

Therefore, the incorporation of the rediscovered manuscript and the possible endings introduces ambiguity regarding the veracity of the narrated events and allows for the reader's active participation in shaping the conclusion. This interpretive flexibility is further enhanced by the deployment of complex spatio-temporal and historical stratifications that critically interrogate the linear temporality characteristic of neoliberal narratives.

In conclusion, the two novels and the short story analysed in this chapter challenge conventional perceptions of the West of Ireland and the bog as traditional or backward regions. Instead, they reveal the semi-peripheral trajectory imposed on these spaces by both the Irish nation and the broader historical forces of the Capitalocene. More generally, the narrative techniques employed by the three authors provoke a critical disengagement from the normalized and accepted reality principle, rendering the familiar capitalist worldview deeply alienating. In this context, the framework of Uncanny Realism serves as a valuable tool for unpacking the thematic and narrative features of these texts.

This chapter demonstrates how all three works exhibit a high degree of textual hybridity, blending realist narratives with gothic, science-fictional, and apocalyptic elements, thereby creating a sense of simultaneity between mimesis and estrangement. Furthermore, the texts feature uncanny objects that disrupt binary oppositions such as human vs. non-human, interior vs. exterior, and nature vs. culture, while also intertwining local, global, and planetary scales to provoke deep historical reflection. These objects include JJ's brain in *Notes from a Coma*, the Water's Edge pub in *The Fjord of Killary*, and the bog in *Is Stacey Pregnant?*

Additionally, these works challenge linear, reliable, and teleological concepts of time and space by employing fragmented and disorienting narrative structures. This is particularly evident in *Notes from a Coma* through the use of the Event Horizon and multiple narrative voices, and in *Is Stacey Pregnant?* through the concept of the uncanny chronotope, which merges human and non-human temporal scales to create an eerily familiar time setting, as well as the use of the found manuscript. Recurring historical events, especially the Great Irish Famine, underscore the uncanny quality of these narratives, serving as reminders of the ongoing catastrophes of the Capitalocene.

The next chapter, explores the layered nature of domestic spaces. The two novels under analysis, namely *Nothing on Earth* (2016) and *The End of the World is a Cul de Sac* (2022), depict domestic environments as microcosms where local, global, and planetary histories intersect. Moreover, through their portrayal of scalar collisions and the inclusion of non-secular elements, these works reveal how alternative and subversive possibilities can arise within these spaces.

4. Haunted houses, monster houses, show houses and ghost estates: *Nothing on Earth* by Conor O’Callaghan, and *The End of the World is a Cul de Sac* by Louise Kennedy

This chapter delves into the multifaceted nature of domestic spaces, which serve as both sanctuaries of comfort and breeding grounds for societal constructs. The home, a bastion of familial warmth and anticipation for the future, also embodies the epitome of bourgeois values, wherein family units propagate to sustain the state and economic systems. Such duality renders the home a fertile ground for the manifestation of the uncanny, particularly potent within domestic confines. In his book *The Architectural Uncanny* (1992) Anthony Vidler states:

The house provided and especially favoured site for uncanny disturbances: its apparent domesticity, its residue of family history and nostalgia, its role as the last and most intimate shelter of private comfort sharpened by contrast and terror of invasion by alien spirits. (1992: 18)

Examples such as Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839), or Julio Cortazar’s *Casa Tomada* (1946) serve as literary archetypes wherein the intrusion of the uncanny unveils the hidden machinations and repressed truths underlying bourgeois domesticity. In essence, the haunting of these homes symbolizes the intrusion of the unreal into the mundane, laying bare the concealed complexities and anxieties inherent within. The Freudian concept of the *unheimlich*, rooted in the German term *Heimlich* denoting the domestic sphere, encapsulates this phenomenon of the home morphing into an unfamiliar, unsettling realm. Here, the once-familiar dwelling transmutes into a disconcerting unfamiliar place, blurring the boundaries between the known and the unknown. Haunted houses, often emblematic of bourgeois affluence, epitomize this breach of domestic tranquillity. Gianluca Didino in his essay *Being Homeless, about the Condition of Living in Strange Times* (2020, my translation)³², sheds light into the entangled meaning of ‘home’ in our present times. He links the postmodern idea of transcendental homelessness with the more tangible and widespread material homelessness, which has increasingly become a characteristic of urban landscapes.

³² Original title in Italian: *Essere senza casa, sulla condizione di vivere in tempi strani* (2020).

Moreover, Didino shows how the house is a place where the dichotomy between inside and outside fails in the face of climate change:

In both cases, the meaning is that of a deliberate act performed by humans to draw a distinction between the outside (the world) and the inside (the place of dwelling). Between these two dimensions, which are spatial and ontological at the same time, are two types of barrier: on the one hand, the boundaries of the house, typically consisting of walls, and on the other hand, the thresholds consisting of doors and windows, porous barriers that can be crossed. Thresholds are where the outside world comes into contact with the intimacy of the home. (2020: 42, my translation)³³

Central to this transformation are the walls of the house, symbolic barriers demarcating the realms of culture and nature. As these walls falter, their solidity compromised, they become permeable membranes through which uncanny forces infiltrate, challenging the perceived sanctity of the domestic space. As Timothy Morton says:

Home, oikos, is unstable. Who knows where it stops and starts? (...) "Home" is purely "sensual": it has to do with how an object finds itself inevitably on the inside of some other object. The instability of oikos, and thus of ecology itself, has to do with this feature of objects. A "house" is the way an object experiences the entity in whose interior it finds itself. (2013: 117)

Moreover, according to Van Aken (2020), the bourgeois house demarks the border between what is outside (nature), and what is inside (culture). Everything that is catalogued as nature enters the bourgeois house in a purified fashion: water, electricity, food, and all the networks that sustain the capitalist world-ecology at large. Therefore, the bourgeois house conceals and hides all those networks, which when resurfaced bring back "the collective repressed which emerges as something alien which disrupts and renders domesticity impossible"³⁴ (Van Aken 2020, my translation). Furthermore, the uncanny sheds light on the inherent insecurity which lays at the basis of ownership and especially home ownership. This aspect is heightened by the debt-culture which sustains contemporary home ownership: "the uncanny disturbs the very idea of property itself. Freud implies that the uncanny is not simply the experience of feeling alienated from our property but a realization that alienation is reflected in our property" (McClanahan 2017:

³³ The original text says: In entrambi i casi il significato è quello di un atto deliberato compiuto dall'uomo per tracciare una distinzione tra l'esterno (il mondo) e l'interno (il luogo dell'abitare). Tra queste due dimensioni, che sono spaziali e ontologiche allo stesso tempo, si trovano due tipi di barriera: da un lato i confini della casa, costituiti tipicamente dai muri, e dall'altro le soglie costituite da porte e finestre, barriere porose che possono essere attraversate. Le soglie sono il punto in cui l'esterno del mondo viene in contatto con l'intimità della casa.

³⁴ The original text says: (...) quel rimosso collettivo come estraneo che corrompe e rende impossibile lo stesso senso domestico e di stabilità.

125). And moreover: “The dead pledge of the mortgage defamiliarizes domestic space, which instead of being a place of comfort and security becomes a space of unease and alienation” (McClanahan 2017: 127).

Therefore, the gothic space of the house functions as a catalyser of the layered critical dynamics inherent in our current times, becoming the space selected for investigating the process of uncanny un-worlding that I have outlined in the first chapter. In this context Didino states: “we see how today the world is always on the verge of ending even in a more metaphorical sense, closely related to the crisis of the home, for in these places more than anywhere else the world becomes a nonworld or, rather, demondifies” (2020: 66, my translation)³⁵.

In the context of Ireland, the evolution of the house over the past three decades serves as a barometer for the nation's socio-economic fluctuations. This metamorphosis reflects broader societal shifts, wherein changes in housing trends and conditions reflect underlying turns in the country's fortunes and collective psyche. After the 2001 dot.com crash, the Celtic Tiger economic boom became inextricably entwined with the real estate market and construction industry. The state “allowed the property sector to be driven by developers, speculators and banks, rewarding them with tax incentives, lighter tax obligations and market-led regulation; it enabled buyers to over-extend their indebtedness; and it provided too few barriers to development” (Kitchin et al. 2014: 1070). As highlighted by Mary McGlynn, the Irish construction boom did not only reflect the speculative opportunity of the American model of sub-prime mortgages and wholesale funds borrowing but also localized histories:

supposed beliefs about home ownership as the apotheosis of neoliberal individualism operate alongside and in tension with ingrained ideas about public and private places that arise from such historical conditions as the Big House, the role of the Land League, and the persistence of ruins dotted across the landscape. (McGlynn 2022: 25)

In this respect, as outlined by Keohane and Kuhling the Celtic Tiger, the real-estate speculation boom was especially directed by the class of what they term “gombeen men”, namely “members of a new Irish class of strong farmers shop keepers and publicans: land-

³⁵ The original text says: dall’altro vediamo come oggi il mondo sia sempre sul punto di finire anche in un senso più metaforico, strettamente legato alla crisi della casa, poiché in questi luoghi più che in ogni altro il mondo diventa un non-mondo o, meglio, si demondifica.

grabbers and opportunists who fattened on evictions and emigration, paying tenants” (2014: 9) which represent “the insatiable greed of the post-colonial, post-catholic, post-nationalist, post-democratic, republican Irish who have ruled for the 20th century, a swarming horde of vampires” (2014: 9). According to Jason Buchanan “The explosion in Irish landlordism is an anti-communal form of building in which the emphasis is on space as a commodity” (2017: 52). Moreover, as Laurence Murphy and Pauline M. McGuirk say:

The story of the rise and fall of the Celtic Tiger property developers offers insights into the role of the super-rich in material and symbolic place making. Irish developers were not only involved in the physical construction of place(s); they were very public actors in the construction of discourses of Ireland as a place of opportunity, entrepreneurialism and success. In contrast to the relative anonymity of high-rolling financial traders, property developers were celebrated media stars. Indeed, as the property boom gathered pace, stories of past property successes arguably became an essential prerequisite for mobilising new rounds of property investment. (2013: 153)

Therefore, houses lose their meaning of ‘home’, and ‘living space’, and become an empty shell aimed at generating capital. The house then becomes a simulacrum, a site where both immaterial financial speculation and real desire for “an enduring final object of enjoyment providing spatial and temporal boundaries to life a mooring for meaningful life-projects” (Kehoane and Kuhling 2016: 38), become indistinguishable. Plans of homemaking were built firstly on the opportunities offered by new financial products such as a wide array of high-risk mortgages, and they were afterwards undermined by the failure of those same products. This is particularly truthful when it comes to describing the sub-prime mortgage speculation frenzy which spread around Ireland at the time:

The sub-prime mortgage crisis arose because economic restructuring and flexibilization under conditions of globalization have amplified the desire for security amongst the economically least secure borrowers whose jobs are being outsourced and flexibilized. ‘Sub-prime’ precarious borrowers are precisely Simmel’s subjects of modern culture whose life chances are unstable and incoherent, for whom self-realization through meaningful autonomous life projects is foreclosed. (Kehoane and Khuling 2016: 43)

As a result, the country experienced an out-spread resignification of housing through gentrification:

The speculative nature of global gentrification reshaped the way the Irish articulated narratives of property, land, community, ethnicity, and home. As the second period of the Tiger spun out of control, an ethos of gentrification came to dominate ideas of space and community. This ethos of gentrification is an ideology that was produced by a speculative

form of globalization that reconstituted space as a fluctuating commodity. (Buchanan 2017: 54)

According to Keohane and Kuhling the boom of the housing estate in Ireland is a symptom of what they defined as “the possessor principle”.

The possessor principle, Lee shows, is historically and experientially grounded in economic insecurity. Desire for the “big house”, typically (and not insignificantly) simulacra of the nineteenth century landlords’ mansions, now for “ourselves alone”, express our newfound security, but, equally, they are symptomatic of our persistent anxiety about security. (2004: 112)

In Ireland individuals were mostly blamed for the burst of the economic bubble. Their supposed greed was reinvented as a scapegoat, according to the trend of risk society to put the blame on individual consumer choices rather than on the inherent fallacies of the system. Both Eóin Flannery (2022) and McGlynn highlight the trend of the Irish government to put the blame on individual citizens, especially, she claims:

This transfer to blame citizens embeds risk and responsibility at a personal level quite at odds with the factual conditions of the crash, which arose primarily due to structural problems, including a regulatory climate that favoured large investors and multinational corporations, a property market overheated by speculative lending and general financialization of the economy. (2022: 161)

The economic crash was accompanied by the emergence of the so-called 'Ghost Estates', where over 600 private sector housing developments were abandoned or left only partially occupied. “Post-Celtic Tiger Ireland is a haunted landscape of ghost estates and zombie banks cannibalizing the state” (Keohane and Kuhling 2016: 9). Ghost estates are probably the most iconic footprint left by the Celtic Tiger real estate industry:

While these came in many forms, ranging from largely vacant shopping centres situated incongruously in rural towns to the iconic skeletons of would-be ‘landmark’ buildings in Dublin's city centre, it was the images and stories of ‘ghost estates’ that became the material and symbolic apotheosis of Ireland's economic crisis. (O’Callaghan et al. 2014: 124)

The term Ghost Estate was first used in 2006 by David McWilliams and by October 2011 there were around 2,846 of such estates scattered around the country (Kitchin et al. 2014: 1069). The public discourse around ghost-estates was extremely widespread:

Similarly, the purported “good health” of the Irish banks was undermined by the visibility of unfinished estates. They signified a crisis of epic proportions – there were unfinished developments in every part of the country. Moreover, they were eminently “photogenic” and reproducible, thus circulating pictorial evidence of the Celtic Tiger’s crash internationally.

Unfinished estates became a focal point for discussions about the causes of the crisis (providing a material representation of the more abstract banking crisis) and were used as a proxy measure (by quantifying the number of unfinished estates and vacant dwellings) of the extent of the crisis. Through disentangling the economic, political and social relationships that were bound up in them, unfinished developments became the symbolic site through which the crisis was narrated and made comprehensible to the general public. (O'Callaghan et al. 2015: 39)

O'Callaghan et al. analyse ghost estates as empty signifiers which, although they could be directed towards valuable political discourse, have more often been directed towards post-political discourse which viewed such estates as a singular example of overproduction rather than giving a systemic analysis of the phenomenon. Thus, by shadowing the systemic dynamics of neoliberal capitalism, such discourses are a misleading justification of the broader system in which the ghost estates, and the Tiger at large, were inscribed. On the other hand, Kitchin et al. (2014), look at ghost estates as examples of “new ruins”, which differ from the common understanding of ruin insofar as, the latter would normally be sites which have either been abandoned to fall into disrepair after the departure of the people who lived there. “New ruins”, instead, are places which have never been inhabited and which stand as an empty shelter of fictitious capital:

Thus, they constitute a form of ruination different from traditional ruins; whereas in the latter capital has extracted value and moved on to a new spatial fix, in unfinished estates investment capital has melted into air before value can be extracted. Here ‘ruin’ is used to describe buildings that are being left to fall to pieces not because they themselves have lapsed into disuse, but because the speculative future that they as financial investments promised has lapsed into disuse. Thus, unfinished estates offer both an example of the ‘new ruins’ created by the accelerated creative destruction of financialized capitalism, and a physical manifestation of the ‘ruined’ future promised by the Celtic Tiger project. (2014: 171)

This contrast between old ruins and new ruins strikingly appears when we confront two pictures: the first one taken from the collection *Ghost of the Faithful Departed* (2012) by David Creedon which analyses homes left abandoned because of mass-migration in the countryside, and a picture of a ghost estate by the photographer Anthony Haughey. The feeling of abandonment and estrangement which pervades both pictures creates a historical link which emphasises the destruction caused by profit driven dynamics through historical time and material geographies. The first picture along with the rest of the collection, which is titled *Heart of the Home* (2005), was widely analysed and commented by Kieran Kuhling as:

Creedon's photographs of religious icons, furniture and décor, family memorabilia, and household *bric a brac*, elements from real and imagined scenes, appear as images from dreams – the dreams which these houses' former residents had assembled around themselves, as well the dream images and memories of home that we ourselves project into these scenes. (2014: 20)



Instead, Anthony Haughey's collection *Settlement* (2011), pictures a landscape where houses act as immaterial sites of un-lived lives and unfulfilled futures:

These abandoned building sites could be described as places of collective mourning, where memory is inextricably bound with these violated landscapes. They are a constant and painful reminder of economic failure, indebtedness, and the environmental cost of rezoning and building in inappropriate areas, such as flood plains and remote rural regions with little or no access to transport, schools, and services. (Haughey 2018: 302)



Houses and ghost estates recur in the novels I set out to analyse. They catalyse both past, present and future histories, acting as a lens through which we can look at Irish history within the history of Capitalocene as a historical trajectory of constant shocks, crises and destruction (The Great Famine, mass migration, gender-based power relations, recession, boom and collapse). In this context, Flannery highlights how cultural representations of the Celtic Tiger era frequently highlight the phenomenon of ghost housing estates, which serve as prominent symbols of both personal and environmental repercussions (Flannery 2023: 130). Collectively, they create an uncanny landscape, showcasing the ambivalence inherent in mortgage ownership within the context of the global debt economy (Flannery 2023: 130). These estates, with their abandoned structures, embody specific historical contexts intricately intertwined with the past and present narratives of global financial capitalism. In her essay '*no difference between the different kinds of yesterday:*' *The Neoliberal Present in The Green Road, The Devil I Know, and The Lives of Women*', Mary McGlynn analyses fictional ghost estate sites in which the gothic and the uncanny create a link between several layers of history, time, economic shocks, and gender roles. Specifically, she says:

The iteration of the gothic in post-boom novels features crumbling structures, laden with hidden secrets and stocked with repressed, maimed bodies, the half-finished buildings of the boom embodying gothic deterioration. The term 'ghost estate' directly evokes the spectral haunting of the gothic, originally present in classical economics via Adam Smith's evocation of an eerie 'invisible hand'. (2017: 36)

Moreover, McGlynn identifies ghost estates with globalized non-places as "a space which cannot be defined as relational, historical, or concerned with identity" (Augé as quoted in McGlynn 2017: 37). This point is quite apt when it comes to merging national and global histories together, especially in the way that the historical past emerging in the stories points out at the inherent interconnectedness of local histories with the global history of the Capitalocene. Moreover, the representation of ghost estates within the novels is akin to what Frantzen and Bjering call hyperobject. Briefly, the concept of the "hyperobject" was coined by Mikkel Krause Frantzen and Jens Bjering (2020) in opposition to Morton's idea of the hyperobject. In fact, while hyperobjects are an insightful way to understand planetary dynamics and the affects they generate, the hyperobject by bringing forward Kristeva's idea of the abject as the primeval form of repression, shows how capitalism-

driven human actions have been repressed, hidden, and made abject. They describe the hyperabject as:

intimately linked to the logistics of contemporary capitalism to which it is enjoined as a kind of parasitic traveller. The hyperabject is like a blind passenger who died long ago in his hideaway, but still travels the world endlessly, frozen in the cargo hold of a plane, hidden in a forgotten recess of a container ship, grown into the belly of a trans-continental train. (2020: 99)

The hyperabject is linked to the “circulation of plastic, people and animals, capital, oil.” (2020:99), and it therefore stands for that cohort of human actions that once repressed are coming back through that series of combined and uncanny events which we resume by the phrase “climate change” or “global warming”. The hyperabject, is thus “hyper” because it pushes the abject onto a collective level without underestimating the consequences of unequal and shared responsibilities. In this way, the Real(s) consequences of such historical worldview emerge, haunting the material site of the ghost estate in the novels. Moreover, the representation of ghost estates in the novel is often juxtaposed with the landed gentry’s Irish Big House. Contextually, Kehoane and Khuling define the extravagant Celtic Tiger houses as “monster houses” which: “is an especially revealing symptom of the persistence of the past in the present, the fusion of traditional and modern cultural forms in contemporary Ireland” (2004: 112). As highlighted by both Mary M. McGlynn and Eóin Flannery, Celtic Tiger houses carry the memory of what in Ireland was known as “the big house”. The big houses were the sites where the landed gentry, or Anglo-Irish aristocracy resided:

The most obvious manifestation of their landed power and wealth was the construction of hundreds of Big Houses of varying architectural sizes, shapes and styles that for generations to come would dominate the physical landscape, and which were to be found in numbers in every county of Ireland. The grander houses of the aristocracy were generally located amidst hundreds of acres of demesne parkland, woodland and gardens, and most were surrounded by high demesne walls. (...) These symbolised not just the aristocracy’s wealth but also their confidence in the future stability and economic prosperity of the country, now that the Catholic threat had been disabled, and they were also a deliberately powerful and symbolic signifier of their specific social and political ambitions and agendas of future colonial control and power. (Dooley 2022: 5-6)

Big houses can be found scattered all over the country, and their burning and destruction constituted a crucial step towards Ireland’s freedom from the British empire. The burning of the big-house in Ireland came to represent the end of the power of British lords and their way of living. Consequently, the big house resonates in Irish Celtic Tiger houses in

a two-fold way. On the one hand, the construction of Irish monster houses echoed the grandiosity of Anglo-Irish properties by showing the new wave of prosperity through an old colonial symbol: “Desire for the ‘big house’, typically (and not insignificantly) simulacra of the nineteenth century landlords’ mansions, now for ‘ourselves alone’, express our new found security, but, equally, they are symptomatic of our persistent anxiety about security” (Keohane & Kuhling 2004: 112). On the other hand, after the crash, the Big House resonates in the depiction of ghost estates, as the reminder of a declined way of life, or the the “ ‘unhousing’ of the Anglo-Irish during the early part of the twentieth-century in Ireland” (Flannery 2023: 126). In a similar vein, the emptied shell of an unfinished house represents the present and future unsustainability of the Tiger and of the economic model it relies on. Flannery echoes:

(...)we disinter some provocative thematic complexes: power and vulnerability; belonging and displacement; loyalty and betrayal; and trust and paranoia. Indeed, the real and imagined threats to this class are most often figured in terms of a minatory ‘natural’ hinterland. Decay and cultural decline are, then, slow processes of return to the ‘natural’, and such processes appear in both figurative and literal terms across the texts under consideration here. (Flannery 2023: 125)

Therefore, the portrayal of the house in literature during the Celtic Tiger era and its subsequent collapse reflects the establishment of a new societal norm in 1994 and its subsequent disintegration. For this reason, the house becomes a central site for the exploration of the idea of the end of the world, as established in the first chapter. In fact, many of these houses are depicted as liminal inter-world places, where the dismantling of the world-view inherent to the capitalist world-ecology has not yet been fully supplanted but is nevertheless disintegrating. This ongoing dismantling opens up space for reflection and for the possible creation of alternative futures:

If we are to exorcise the haunted houses of Ireland’s landscape it is more than a matter of helping spirits to pass over, mourning the past, laying certain things to rest, making atonement with those who suffered under the old order and coming to terms with our collective memories, both beautiful and shameful, in the wake of the death of the collective motherland. Waking the dead is also a vigil. It means being awake and watchful to the new dangers that present themselves in liminal periods of historical metempsychosis: it means protecting the present and taking responsibility for the future: it means preventing evil spirits from breaking through and taking possession of our souls, and insofar as these Mercurial spirits are already amongst us, it means grappling with them and governing them. (Keohane and Khuling 2016: 24)

In fact, Celtic Tiger and post-crash houses act as a catalyser for the dismantling of not only of the Tiger model, but also of the global capitalist world-ecology it belongs to.

Therefore, the house channels the literary representation of the contemporary crises, bridging the Irish experience with global phenomena such as the financial crisis and the climate emergency. As a result, the home becomes porous, susceptible to invasion, and traversed by multiple layers of significance. Firstly, ghost estates possess a deeply spectral quality primarily because their initial purpose was to serve as conduits and repositories for fictitious capital. Consequently, their function as living spaces was relegated to a secondary role. Moreover, they exude a "ghostly" and spectral aura due to their vampiric nature, wherein fictitious capital acted as a parasite, draining the potential life that could have been lived within them. Therefore, ghost estates epitomize what McClanahan called the uncanniness of debt which resonates with Flannery's words when he says: "the narrative foregrounds conditionality as uncertainty of the self in living in front of the unseen audience of the dead and the absent. This uncertainty and ambivalence are the terrain of debt" (Flannery 2022: 82). Secondly, the house becomes the site where the traditional dyad of nature-culture fails, echoing Morton's idea of the-end-of-the world as the collapse of foregrounds and backgrounds. This permeability is notably reflected in the deterioration of the walls, floors, and doors of houses, blurring the distinction between interior and exterior realms, of Nature-Culture dyad and of subsequent capitalist-world-ecological dichotomies. In this respect, the house itself, can represent a microcosm, a place where the dynamics of the capitalist world-ecology are displayed and subsequently subverted. Therefore, the house as an uncanny place also echoes Morton's assumption that:

When one object [...] transitions from a certain set of objects to another set, it briefly undergoes the uncanny realization that not-at-homeness is always the case, that sensual relations are never the real thing. What we call causality [...] is an uncanny moment that happens in front of the encrypted objects, when a strange object perturbs a domain that has achieved a necessarily, structurally false ontic familiarity. (2013: 33)

As Ayesha Ejaz Khan highlights in connection to Shirley Jackson's novel *The Haunting of Hill House*, gothic sites such as haunted houses allow the past to surface in the present, and repressed truths to come back to light again. This is particularly true also for our case studies, where multiple histories merge and conjoin different temporal and spatial planes. Especially, the novel and the short story analysed expose the particularly gendered dimension of the Irish Celtic Tiger. During the boom, as I outlined in the historical chapter, women found themselves in between two equally closed-ended futurities, either the mother-carer or the post-feminist (Bracken 2022). In this respect, the literary depiction of the female body and sexuality which "underlies and haunts both the Gothic and the

uncanny is often a marker of gender disparity and sexual bias in contemporary writing” (Scheible 2023: 233). Women in Ireland have been the source of free, cheap, and disposable labour in terms of care-work and social reproduction. Jason Moore considers cheap care one of the pillars for the reproduction of the capitalist world-ecology. He visually defines it as: “While recovering, workers will depend on their families and support networks, a factor outside the circuits of production but central to their continued participation in the workforce” (2015: 7). Moreover, cheap care work is one of Fisher’s Real(s), inasmuch as it has been systematically silenced and hidden in public discourse (Moore 2015). This aspect connects the female characters in the novels with the broader, global, systemic exploitation of cheap care, while underlining the specificities of the Irish case. As Silvia Federici states:

But in the case of domestic work the situation is qualitatively different. The difference lies in the fact that not only was domestic work imposed on women, but it was transformed into a natural attribute of our female body and personality, an inner need, an aspiration, supposedly coming from the depths of our character. Domestic work had to be turned into a natural attribute rather than being recognized as a social contract, because from the beginning of capital's project for women this work was destined to be unpaid. Capital had to convince us that it is a natural, inevitable and even fulfilling activity to make us accept our unpaid work³⁶. (1976: 6, my translation)

The role of women in contemporary Ireland needs to be understood as the outcome of three diachronic yet joint phases: firstly, in the pre-national folk beliefs, secondly in the patriarchy-based Irish Nationalism, and finally through the feminization of the workforce during the Celtic Tiger. Cara Delay in her essay “*Deposited Elsewhere*”: *The Sexualized Female Body and the Modern Irish Landscape*, sheds light on how:

The feminization of the Irish landscape in the early twentieth century helped consolidate gender norms, affirming that women were “the passive and voiceless embodiment of nature” who must be dominated by men. The regulation of women and the landscape thus helped bolster the new patriarchal state that would deny most Irish women a significant active or public role. (2012: 5)

³⁶ The original text says: Ma nel caso del lavoro domestico la situazione è qualitativamente diversa. La differenza sta nel fatto che non solo i lavori domestici sono stati imposti alle donne, ma sono stati trasformati in un attributo naturale del nostro corpo e della nostra personalità femminile, un bisogno interiore, un’aspirazione, che si suppone provenga dalla profondità del nostro carattere. Il lavoro domestico doveva essere trasformato in un attributo naturale piuttosto che essere riconosciuto come un contratto sociale, perché fin dall’inizio del progetto del capitale per le donne questo lavoro era destinato ad essere non retribuito. Il capitale ha dovuto convincerci che è un’attività naturale, inevitabile e persino appagante, per farci accettare il nostro lavoro non retribuito.

In this respect, fairy beliefs served as a constant warning and way of controlling women's potentially deviant behaviours and to constrain them into the domestic sphere. It's no coincidence that most of the fairy beliefs concerning fairy abduction were related to stories of women which had ventured outside the material, or metaphorical, landscape which societal and religious rules assigned them. Moreover, despite the fact women's role in society was chiefly tied to childbearing and housekeeping (although peasant and working-class women also worked in fields and factories), the pregnant or post-partum body was seen as impure, and in need of "churching" (Delay 2012). Until the new mother was churching by the priest, her body was considered impure. Although the process of churching is a complex one, it indicates within its meanings the tendency to isolate women both physically and politically from society.

The newly founded Irish nation inherited the array of patriarchal beliefs from pre-national Ireland and mixed them with nationalist ideals and precepts. Firstly, women's role in society was solely tied to childbearing and housekeeping, and they were systematically excluded from the political realm. Moreover, Irish women became the symbol of the Irish Nation subjugated under British rule and therefore waiting to be salvaged. In this respect, women were mostly portrayed either as passive and defenceless, or as the male poet's muse. In this respect, within the Catholic Irish State, women had as their main aspiration the image of the Vergin Mary, pious, chaste, devoted to childbearing and house-keeping and fearful of God:

This symbolic rendering of the feminine as icon of worship functions to strip women of their actuality, of their "realness". She is always object, never subject in the various literary discourses of Irish nationalism, where she functions primarily as the maternal ground that gives birth to the future. (Bracken 2016:7)

Moreover, the role of women in society was enforced through the joint effort of the Irish State and the Church especially through what James M. Smith called "the architecture of containment" (2007), which also according to Delay, was reminiscent of the spatial control on women's bodies in pre-national Ireland. The architecture of containment continued the configuration of women as "others", severed from society, and as deviant beings in need of re-education. Gerardine Meaney identifies this process with the constitution of an "abject other" (2011), which is also physically and discursively "outside history" (Boland 1997:188). The usage of women as a source of free, care labour is also clearly represented by what was called "the marriage bar" which prevented married

women from working and was lifted in 1976. Moreover, Ireland in 2018 was the last European country to repeal the antiabortionist 8th amendment which gave the same rights to the pregnant woman and the foetus. Therefore, when analysing Celtic Tiger and Post-Boom novels, it is crucial to keep in mind that, while women could have access to jobs and careers, they were still under strict social constraints which had power and control over their bodies and decision making. Therefore, in literary texts, women are often portrayed in an in-between status, where, although they have access to opportunities once foreclosed to them, they are still subject to societal judgements and rules, which consequently perpetually keeps them in a vulnerable position. Accordingly, in the context of Irish women's gothic writing during the Celtic Tiger, Scheible says:

The Irish woman's body becomes the canvas for cultural change in a national literature haunted by the economic rise and fall of Ireland's Celtic Tiger, suggesting a loss inherent to present-day life that is no longer associated with colonial violence or the trenches of war but, instead, with financial decline and disaster. (2023: 233)

And moreover:

Women writers employ the contemporary Irish Gothic to represent the global threat of domestic erasure to both nation and family as a revelation of the ironic expectations placed on the female body to reproduce the nation while simultaneously repressing an innately dangerous sexuality. (2023: 237)

Therefore, the novels and the short story I analyse merge layers of literary realism with gothic and unrealistic tropes in order to make invisibilised dynamics surface. Consequently, the narratives prove to be both familiar and unfamiliar, identifiable and estranged. The landscape as well as the timescape are managed in order to provoke continuous reference shifts in the plot, through which space and time scale merge together. Moreover, the house represents the ultimate place of failed domesticity, the narrative image through which the dismantling of the capitalist world-ecology can be more faithfully depicted.

4.1 The haunted show-house of the disappeared, *Nothing on Earth* by Conor O'Callaghan

Nothing on Earth by Conor O'Callaghan was published in 2016 by Transworld Ireland. It tells the story of four people: Helen, Martina (Helen's sister), Paul (Helen's partner) and whom we know as "the girl", the daughter of Helen and Paul. The four of them moved back to Ireland after ten years spent on the continent, in Germany. When they arrive to Ireland, they move in the show house of a derelict ghost estate in a small Irish town. Martina and Paul work in a software plant while Helen stays at home with the girl. Slowly in the novel, each of the characters disappear (Helen is the first and the last one is Paul) until the girl is left alone. She tries to find help by banging at the door of the town's priest. After one day at the priest's house the girl disappears too. *Nothing on Earth* is divided into eight chapters and it starts in *medias res*: a young girl, half naked and with her body scribbled on all over with almost unreadable words, bangs at the door of a priest's house in a small Irish town. We are almost straight away told that all her family has strangely disappeared. From that time on the plot is mainly recounted by the priest, who is retelling what the girl told him about the disappearance of her family. Something that we also know from the very start is that the priest was presumably accused of having done harm to the little girl after she sought help at his house.

In terms of narrative genre, the novel shows a mixture of both realistic/ mimetic aspects (which can be found especially in the description of the town life) and an abundance of gothic, uncanny tropes. What is, in fact, the most striking characteristic of the novel is the feeling of mystery and uncertainty that permeates throughout it. Moreover, the setting is what makes the novel so uncanny, and what also directly links it to the Celtic Tiger period and the crash. In fact, the plot is set in one of the few finished houses (namely the show house) of an abandoned ghost estate in the proximity of a small Irish town. Nobody lives on the site apart from the family. The estate was abandoned during its construction and what is left are piles of rubble, tools, bricks, diggers, and cement now completely covered in weeds and disintegrating in the wind. The feeling of emptiness given by the ghost estate is what haunts the novel the most, and the characters are frightened by this feeling to the extent that, every time they hear an unfamiliar noise, the feeling of fear is suddenly replaced by the hope to find someone in the estate to fill the void they are surrounded by. Something else that contributes to create this uncanny

feeling is the description of extremely hot weather and a lack of rain which is completely uncharacteristic of Irish weather. In terms of structure, the plot offers a notably unreliable narration which is particularly evident since it is the priest who recounts the tale. We sense an air of concealment, suggesting his potential culpability. Additionally, the story told by the priest originates from the young girl, whose grasp of events was incomplete. Moreover, while the story is being told, the point of view often shifts from one character to the other. Sometimes it could be Helen's, sometimes it could be Paul's and other times it is Martina's. The constant shifting of perspectives leaves the reader in a perpetual state of uncertainty, questioning the truth and where their allegiance should lie. Additionally, it's essential to consider the viewpoint of the town itself, with its collective judgments and scrutiny placed upon the protagonists.

In accordance with the methodological framework of Uncanny Realism, I will base my analysis of the novel on two interconnected scales of disappearance. Following Chakrabarty, the first one will take into account the global dynamics according to which the lives and bodies of a high share of the world population are conceived as disposable, exploitable, and are exposed to vulnerability and precarity. The second, will look at how, at a planetary level, the disappearance of the body reflects the collapse of inside-outside borders, that Morton speaks of. Consequently, the permeant heat in the novel, and the porousness of the characters' bodies to the dust and the debris surrounding them, is akin to Morton's description of viscosity, phasing and non-locality as properties of hyperobjects. Both levels, while focusing on different details, are nonetheless interconnected and inseparable. They are also connected in the way in which, systemic economic marginalization is profoundly linked to a heightened vulnerability in the face of climate change.

4.1.1 Showing, layering, working: the first scale of disappearance

Nothing on Earth is set in a ghost estate in an unidentified part of Ireland. As I explored in the introduction to this chapter, and in connection with both the theoretical and historical ones, we can see how ghost estates are a suitable spatial setting wherein to analyse the copresence of historical layers, and various space and time scales through the means of the uncanny. As Mary McGlynn says:

Buildings are an ideal site to examine the way that economic forces interact with narrative, each with attention to structure. Both commercial and domestic property markets exist as simultaneously concrete and abstract. The term “housing”, a fusion of home and property, gets at the paradoxical position of domestic space as both shelter and capital in a neoliberal economy, while real estate as a term carries within it the assertion of substantiality and the sense of profession. (McGlynn 2022: 163)

This appears as particularly true in the case of O’Callaghan’s novel in which the constant blurring of the reality/irreality border makes the reader constantly oscillate between several temporal and spatial layers. In this paragraph I will mostly focus on the global, in Chakrabartian terms, implications of the novel, and especially the role that national policies and global capitalism play in the shaping of a specific locale, specifically in relation to class, gender and societal structure. Contextually, I argue that the disappearance that the characters could be read on the two interlinked scales of the global and the planetary. The former accounts for the disappearance of cheap lives and workers amongst the continuous shifts within neoliberal capitalism. In this context, what is pivotal to underline is the central role that work culture plays within the novel. Recent scholarship by Michael Niblett (2020) has underlined the crucial importance of a world-literary analysis of work culture within texts. In fact, by channelling the specificities of work culture during the various stages of capitalism, and especially in its neoliberal phase, literary texts give voice to the often invisibilised cheap work performed by those who are marginalized by economic systems. Often, the literary depiction of these aspects of the text are conveyed through the means of the phantasmatic and the uncanny, which echoes the liminality and precarity of such workers whose existence is always on the edge between life and death. In the specific case of *Nothing on Earth*, we learn that the family decided to move back to Ireland after some ten years spent in Germany. Their decision was led by Martina’s and Paul’s opportunity to work in a software plant in Ireland. This underlines the connection between the Tiger economy and the global restructuring of the tech industry, which sees Ireland at the forefront of the relocation of multinational tech companies. In particular, Ireland became the preferred location for the European headquarters of tech multinationals, as well as the appointed construction site of numerous data centers throughout the country, as we explored in *Is Stacey Pregnant?*. Both initiatives were facilitated by low corporation taxes within the Republic. However, the depiction of the software plant in the novel underscores the non-local nature of such industries, which are constantly seeking the most favorable tax and salary rates.

Simultaneously, it also highlights the increased mobility required of workers to meet the demands of global capitalism (Federici 2018). Ultimately, the description of the software plant does not differ from the overall uncanniness of the text:

The chrome logo of the software plant where Paul and Martina worked was blinding with the reflection. In there, somewhere, whichever way you looked at it, were both her other halves. One vehicle beeped. At her, or at the couple in her slipstream? They were getting louder behind her, their steps and chatter. The big gates, when she reached them, had a handmade sign tied to them saying the black gloss was still wet. The first headstones were grey and worn; those farther in were newer, more polished; farther still was all plastic grass and bouquets, unconsecrated scrub and thistle. Who were they beckoning? Her footfalls were being overtaken by their echoes. If not her, then who were they calling? (O'Callaghan 2016: 38)

The operations conducted within the software plant remain a mystery; the reader is neither informed nor shown what occurs behind its gates. In this regard, the novel bears resemblance to McCormack's *Notes from a Coma*, where the events on the ship are revealed solely through the medium of the Event Horizon, leaving everything else to the reader's imagination. Moreover, the software plant is a non-place, in Augé's terms: "meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places (...) they do not integrate the earlier places: instead, these are listed, classified, promoted to the status of 'places of memory', and assigned to a circumscribed and specific position" (1992: 72). Further, the nonlocality of those places signals their potential relocation at any time, which impedes the creation of any communal/realational value in their temporarily selected locale. Indeed, the depiction of the software plant as uncanny and spectral serves to underscore its vampiric essence, symbolizing its capacity to siphon not only the vitality of local laborers but also essential natural resources such as water and energy. Consequently, as the narrative unfolds, the relocation of the software plant to an unspecified locale in Eastern Europe emerges as a pivotal juncture, emblematic of the family's descent into abject poverty. Furthermore, the coalescence of the power plant with the oppressive summer heat, a motif permeating the text, and the exacerbating scarcity of water resources, as I intend to elucidate later, signifies the intricate entwinement of extractive capitalism and climate crisis.

Furthermore, social reproductive labor assumes a foundational and pivotal position within the narrative, illuminating the frequently overlooked and marginalized contribution of social reproduction within the capitalist world-ecology, as argued by

Deckard and Houlden (2024). This role persists unabated even amidst the backdrop of neoliberal globalization, underscoring its enduring significance and relevance.

During the first section of the novel, before Helen's disappearance, we see how the reproductive, unpaid work that she performs at home enables Paul and Martina to go to work at the software plant. By looking after her daughter, preparing meals and "unpacking and breaking up boxes for the green bin and keeping the house presentable in case any viewers came" (2016: 39), she is conceived as externalised labour. In this respect, following Mies:

But I would like to point out that housewifization means the externalization, or ex-territorialization of costs which otherwise would have to be covered by the capitalists. This means women's labour is considered a natural resource, freely available like air and water. Housewifization means at the same time the total atomization and disorganization of these hidden workers. (Mies 2014: 110)

Moreover, Helen's reproductive work does not only account for the process of "housewifization" as described by Mies, but also for how, in the current neoliberal present, reproductive work is often performed at a low cost by marginalized, racialised and working-class women: "resultingly recent thinking about social reproduction is less grounded in family and the figure of the housewife, instead focusing on the interconnected global nature of race, gender, sexuality and class across strata of care" (Deckard & Houlden 2024: 136). Consequently, we learn how, when Helen was in Germany, she used to work as a nanny for a family of three, known as Ute, Benedikt and Sophie. Therefore, she starts to look for a similar job in the town close to the estate. Contextually, Helen's portrayal in the novel assumes a liminal dimension, as she occupies intersecting identities as an Irish national and a former migrant worker. Moreover, within the broader category of labor labeled as "unskilled" (Kofman & Raghuram 2015), she finds herself marginalized, emblematic of the complex dynamics shaping social hierarchies within the narrative. In fact, if neoliberal capitalism have progressively necessitated workers which also respond to the figure of "the migrant, the itinerant, the refugee" (Federici 2018: 42 epub), we should not understand this process as entrenched only in software plans or factories. Instead, as argued by Kofman and Raghuram:

One of the primary reasons for female migration has been to provide socially reproductive work in the countries to which the women migrate – both as waged workers and as family members. (...) Social reproduction is, therefore, a crucial aspect of gendered global migration, influencing who migrates as well as migration outcomes and experience. (2015: 40)

Therefore, the depiction of Helen also echoes the immigration policies that Ireland adopted during the Celtic Tiger, and that, as we've explored in the historical chapter, sees migrant people performing jobs which prove to be reproductive for others who have a more prestigious social capital within neoliberal capitalism (Da Col Richert 2012). Consequently, just before Helen's disappearance we have access to a flash-back on her life with Paul before and after getting married:

They'd met their first year at university. Helen was pregnant by Christmas and dropped out. (...) For twelve years Helen had looked on from the fringes of Paul's life, his college peers and his work colleagues. However much he tried to include her, from the moment the girl was born she experienced the parties in basement flats and wine-bar Christmas bashes with all the sadness of a revenant. She was always there and not there. She could see and hear everything, but her own words never seemed to land on the far shore and she drifted through those rooms with invisibility's weightlessness. (O'Callaghan 2016: 47)

In the passage we see how the decision of dropping out from college just fell on Helen's shoulders, as well as the childcare work which followed in the next twelve years. Consequently, Paul progressed with his life and career whereas Helen progressively lost her place within social relations. The excerpt describes Helen as deeply marginalized, almost to the point of being invisible. She's depicted as a revenant, a 'rediviva,' always present yet unnoticed, observing everything without anyone acknowledging her. Hence, Helen's eventual vanishing within the ghost-estate appears to be the culmination of years of gradual disappearance, where social exclusion leads to a wearying dissolution of her physical presence. This element is also strikingly put forward from the very first mention we have of the character of Helen. In fact, the priest, upon starting his recollection of the events, appears uncertain as whether "the girl's mother" was actually Helen:

The girl's mother was not 'Helen', but Helen will have to do for now. She did have a real name. It was, once, a matter of public record. What was it, her real name? Nobody seems sure any more. There were even moments, towards the end, when Helen wasn't entirely certain herself. (O'Callaghan 2016: 21)

The uncertainty over Helen's name highlights her invisible status within social-historical relations; especially, if her name can be easily forgotten and substituted by another, her identity and persona could consequently be disposed of quickly. In this respect, her societal role is considered disposable from a capitalist-patriarchal logic. On the same page we also read: "This was one of those moments when she scarcely recognized her name

and sat as motionless as the others. (...) They always shared, she knew, a running joke about her being as vague as fog. Now here she was, so miles away that everyone was gazing at her” (O’Callaghan 2016: 21). The passage highlights the contradictory yet ever present trend that constitutes women as both invisible and subject to constant societal control, which also leaves them in an in-between status of both strict control and high vulnerability. I will further develop on the topic when introducing the character of Martina. The extent of Helen’s invisibility is also conveyed in another passage, in which after Helen’s disappearance, Martina attempts to contact her former German employees. The German couple answers by saying that, contrary to what Helen claimed, they saw the woman just a couple of times, after which they fired her under suspicion of thievery: “Hi, Martina! Thank you for this. I remember Helen. She came to us a few times only. But years ago, not recently. Really? We stopped her when we discovered items were missing. We worried for Sophie also” (O’Callaghan 2016: 74). The response from the German family aligns with the novel's overarching theme of inducing constant doubt in the reader. Why did Helen claim to have worked there for so long? Could they have contacted the wrong family? Is Helen the culprit behind the thefts? Or was it just an excuse to dispose of Helen’s services? Regardless, the excerpt highlights the swift movements and shifts forced upon those engaged in reproductive labor, as well as the vulnerability imposed by the lack of job security and contractual stability. The letter from the German family adds to the uncertainty surrounding Helen's disappearance, challenging her own narrative of her past life. This contributes to a partial obliteration of her personal history, coupled with her physical absence, prompting the reader to question whether Helen ever truly existed. Helen’s status as an invisible woman, echoes the invisibility of reproductive work within the radar of the global division of labour. In the case of Helen’s family, the workload is especially gendered, biologically divided (Mies 2014):

This is not only the reason for the lack of women's political power, but also for their lack of bargaining power. As the housewife is linked to the wage-earning breadwinner, to the 'free' proletarian as a non-free worker, the 'freedom' of the proletarian to sell his labour power is based on the non-freedom of the housewife. Proletarianization of men is based on the housewifization of women. (Mies 2014: 110)

Indeed, when analyzing depictions of work within literary texts, it is imperative to accord due consideration to social reproductive labor, akin to any other form of labor delineated within the narrative (Federici 2018; Mies 2014; Deckard & Houlden 2024). The inclusion of social reproductive work enriches our understanding of the multifaceted dynamics of

labor relations and societal structures portrayed within the text. By foregrounding the roles of caregiving, domestic responsibilities, and other forms of social reproduction, literary analysis can offer deeper insights into the intricacies of power dynamics, gender roles, and class distinctions embedded within the narrative framework. Therefore, a comprehensive examination of work in literature necessitates a holistic appraisal that acknowledges and interrogates the significance of social reproductive labor alongside other forms of work.

Consequently, after Helen's disappearance we see how Martina, without questioning, takes up her sister's social reproductive role, and asks to be laid off with benefits at the plant:

Martina was out the front, brushing dust that had blown in from the rest of the site, fighting a losing battle. The hot spell had wrung every ounce of moisture out of the muck. Flood's car was covered in it. Even Flood himself, when he climbed from the car, seemed coated in dust. Cleaning was one of several odd offshoots of Helen's disappearance. Martina had become house-proud in a way that she had never been before. Of the two sisters, it was Martina who had always been the slob. (O'Callaghan 2016: 54)

Martina is quite a different character compared to Helen. She is part of the share of the female population which entered the job market during the Celtic Tiger. Nonetheless, Martina's depiction catalyses the incongruities of the Celtic Tiger period with regards to gender equality and women's rights. Above all, the unchallenged, tacit agreement by which Martina assumes Helen's caregiving responsibilities, underscores how during the Celtic Tiger despite the *en masse* entrance of women within the job market, the gendered division of work within the household remained either unquestioned or externalised onto the cheap labour of migrant and/or marginalised people. However, Martina's situation also illustrates how state welfare during neoliberal times fails to cover care expenses, thereby leaving working-class women to decide between taking up a part-time job or quitting altogether. As Sinéad Kennedy says:

In 1994, eighteen per cent of women worked part-time; by 2000, that figure had increased to twenty-nine per cent. This increase in part-time employment has been one of the ways that women have attempted to get around the inadequate provision of childcare. The 1996 Living in Ireland Survey showed that seventy-three per cent of those who were in part-time employment were women and that women with children under ten years of age made up forty-one per cent of part-time female workers. The majority of these part-time jobs are regular rather than occasional and can, thus, arguably be seen as part of the restructuring of the labour force and capitalism's increasing need for a flexible and cheap workforce. (2003: 97)

As Kennedy continues, the feminization of the workforce instead of levelling class division, strikingly enhanced it. This was especially evident with regards to access to childcare. Furthermore, Martina exemplifies the prevailing attitude during the Celtic Tiger era, promoting a new model of the 'modern' woman while simultaneously maintaining strict control over sexual behaviors and reproductive freedom. In this respect Kennedy's article points out how the entrance of women within the workforce has happened within a patriarchal capitalist system, which necessitates the reiteration of gender control and stereotypes in order to endure (Kennedy 2003; Mies 2014; Rottenberg 2018). As Mies says: "sexual autonomy is closely connected with economic autonomy" (2014: 70), therefore what we witness in the depiction of Martina's character is the constant judgmental, controlling gaze of the people of the town, who both sexualise and judge her for her presumed promiscuous behavior. Martina's position within the family – an unmarried woman living with her sister and brother in law, is looked upon with suspicion, particularly due to the persistent insinuation of an extramarital relationship between Martina and Paul, despite the absence of any concrete evidence:

The female officer said, 'How would you characterize your relationship with Helen's husband?' 'Paul?' (...) 'What do you mean exactly?' 'Martina, we're not here to judge.' (...) 'We have lives of our own. We do understand how things can go.' 'No,' she said. Her way of clipping that came over every bit as horrified as she felt. 'Paul is my sister's husband. He and I . . .' She heaved an angry, protracted sigh. 'Just because I've lived with them . . .' She all but scoffed at the officers, with their studied familiarity, their residual acne and their questions copied from evening drama. 'Never.' (O'Callaghan 2016: 56)

In this context, it is crucial to notice how the depiction of Martina is imbued with male gaze, highlighting the enduring influence of Catholicism on women's bodies in Ireland, despite the claims of the Celtic Tiger era of surpassing Catholic precepts and perspectives. This is particularly striking in the scene where the priest observes Martina and the girl sunbathing. In an early passage we read:

She went topless. They had always gone topless before. Everyone did. Paul was at work all day, the girl accepted her going topless as second nature, and it wasn't as if there were many neighbours to scandalize. She had a bright silk scarf that she knotted across herself as a bikini top in case there was the stir of someone else around or Flood rang the doorbell, which he hadn't done in a while. Marcus didn't get there until six. They had the place to themselves all afternoon. The girl could be nervous. More than once she was convinced that she saw something flitting between the fences that partitioned the rear gardens. (O'Callaghan 2016: 61)

And then, when the priest is being interrogated, he comments on the scene by saying: “There is something about the flesh of young womanhood, a carnality so intensely consuming as to be almost ghostly” (2016: 90). The coexistence of societal control and objectifying male gaze collides in the contradictory trend of promoting a “sexually performative essentialized femininity into a culture where traditional and patriarchal tropes of ideal femininity as well as Catholic sexual morality still hold significant sway” (Sexton 2012: 213). This contradictory, stereotyping trend together with the persistence of social reproductive gender roles, and an unequal entrance into the work force ultimately results in a reduced agency on the side of women and a limitation on shaping their own futurity (Bracken 2022). It is not a case then that Helen and Martina are the first to disappear, in fact, especially following austerity measures:

By looking at women in the socio-economic climate of Ireland during and after the Celtic Tiger, we are able to see that neo-colonial outcomes create another form of the disappeared: the living “bodies” of those who have being forgotten in Ireland’s quest to modernise at unsustainable rates. (...) In this sense, spectres of the disappeared resulting from the profit-driven period of the Celtic Tiger reappear “with a vengeance” in its aftermath – almost like the Gothic return of the repressed – because of socially moribund neocolonial policies that favour the economic oppressors. In this scenario, the disappeared women suffer most. What might initially appear to be a forgotten past in the shadows of modernity is actually a remembered past of inequality “in expanded scale”. (Galdwin 2016: 199)

Galdwin’s statement of ‘remembered past of inequality in expanded scale’, echoes in the way in which the disappeared woman acquires a specific significance in contemporary texts also as a remainder of the long-lasting Irish architecture of confinement, which included Magdalene Laundries and Mother and Baby Homes. Especially, those church-run and state financed institutions saw unpaid reproductive work – washing laundry – as a punishment for immoral sexual activities:

In most contemporary discussions of this case of systemic exploitation of forced unpaid labour, emphasis is placed on the government’s alliance with conservative Catholic Church policy, which determined certain views of the female sex. This influence enforced the treatment of women in the Republic of Ireland as second-class citizens. (Urban 2012: 11)

The institutions became a site of the disappeared in which, women considered unfit for society would be hidden from the public eye even until their death. As a result, working class and peasant women were the most affected by the laundries, which underlines the specific class dimension of the institutions (Urban 2012). The ghost of the traumatic experience of the Magdalene Laundries haunts the text, especially in the way in which

Helen and Martina are progressively set aside by the persistent judgmental gaze of the town and entrenched in domestic unpaid labour. If the history of colonialism was systematically repressed during the Tiger following the will to “forget the past”, the equally traumatic history of the Laundries was also obliterated: “in 2012, the striking absence of a full engagement with the history of the Magdalene Laundries in Irish public discourse demonstrates that a common historical consciousness is still underdeveloped” (Urban 2012: 2). Contextually, the uncanny resemblance that Helen and Martina’s situation have with the Magdalene Laundries is a reminder of the diachronic, global, and site-specific systemic abuses perpetuated on young and adult women. The same role is played by fairy beliefs in the short story *The End of the World is a Cul de Sac*, which I will analyse in the next sub-chapter. Halfway through the novel, Martina disappears too. It is pivotal to notice how her disappearance coincides with Paul’s dismissal from work:

THE NEWS WAS not good. Paul asked how long, as if he were looking at lit X-rays in a consultant’s office. End of the week. The staff was skeletal. The operation was being moved to the East. Far or Near? Who knew? The guy even suggested that Paul would have been let go long before now, but for his circumstances. (O’Callaghan 2016: 85)

Upon coming back home, Paul realizes that Martina is not there anymore. She has disappeared into thin air like Helen. After Martina’s disappearance, it is Paul who takes up the work earlier performed by the sisters. In the context of a normative gendered, heteronormative patriarchal society Paul’s dismissal represents a failure to meet the normalized masculinity promoted during the Tiger. Diane Negra (2013) analyses how job-loss discourses appear as particularly gendered, focusing on male job loss while underestimating the effects of unemployment on women. Consequently, Paul after losing his job performs a frantic burning of his work clothes, while ignoring Martina’s absence:

He told her about the job. He said that he was delighted. To prove it, he burned his suit in one of the empty oil drums on the site. They sprawled out the back, splitting Martina’s last small bottle of rosé from the fridge, as ribbons of black smoke from Paul’s burning suit tangled upwards into the clear sky, and not once mentioning that there was still no sign of Martina. (O’Callaghan 2016: 86)

Paul then remains the only one who can look after the girl and stay at home, but he also eventually disappears. The correlation between the gradual disappearance of characters and the shift in caregiving responsibilities within the home opens avenues for interpretation regarding both social and narrative dynamics in the novel. Firstly, the invisibilization of care work in the global market reflects larger societal attitudes towards

traditionally gendered roles and the undervaluing of domestic labour. As social reproduction, typically associated with caregiving and housework, is marginalized within economic frameworks, those who perform these tasks become similarly marginalized and unseen. In the context of the novel, this invisibility is mirrored in the gradual fading away of characters who are engaged in these caregiving roles. Secondly, the correlation between the characters' disappearance and the time spent within the home suggests a deeper exploration of the significance of the domestic space itself. The home serves not only as a physical setting but also as a microcosm of broader societal shifts and power dynamics. As characters vanish, the focus shifts towards the domestic sphere, prompting readers to question the role of the house within the narrative and its implications for understanding the recessionary period in Ireland.

The first question to be answered in relation to the family's house is: who owns it? And further who owns the estate? The owner of the estate is an unsavoury character named Flood. He is part of the new class of the "Irish developers", who often from modest backgrounds, raised to the status of wealthy celebrities during the Tiger. It was Helen who contacted Flood at first to organize a rent-to-buy scheme for the property. What becomes clear is that Flood, despite knowing that working construction on the site will not resume, continues to feed into the family's disillusionment that sooner or later someone else will move into the estate: "When can we expect other neighbours?' 'We've a few nibbles.' 'Nibbles?' 'Possible buyers. Young family like yourselves. From the midlands. Any day now'" (O'Callaghan's 2016: 23). Moreover, we learn that Flood acquired the land from a previous owner, Slattery: " 'And pass no remarks to Slattery.' When Helen shrugged, Flood made a circle with his index finger. 'Used own this land' " (2016: 26). Slattery resembles a member of the colonial landed-gentry. This is enhanced by the description of his own house which is located on a low hill overlooking the estate:

It was sweltering and the climb was steep. From the gate you could see the roof. Halfway up, Slattery's house disappeared from view. At one point, a shotgun in the distance emptied one of its barrels with a lovely dull crack that echoed and scattered rooks. They stopped only when the ground levelled off and the house reappeared in its entirety. Big windows, old brick at one end, ivied pebbledash the other. There was no life. (2016: 28)

The idea of property exchange between Slattery and Flood underlines the diachronic possession of land by the landed gentry and subsequently by a new autochthonous class of landlords. Nonetheless, both forms of land-ownership are characterized by a colonialist

attitude towards the land, which, although presenting aesthetic differences depending on historical specificities, are rooted in the exploitation of extra-human nature and the humans who inhabit it. Nonetheless, Slattery's characterization as a modern representation of the landed gentry is put into question by the rumor that he acquired his fortune by selling dog food:

The one consensus seemed to be that nobody with a name like Slattery could be to the manor born. Dog food, some said. A handful of factories around the country. There was talk, too, that he had married into a dog-food fortune and had acquired the nobility of dog food overnight. (2016: 98)

Moreover, Slattery is also presented as a haunting character, who, after a prolonged absence, comes back to the site and behaves as if he still owns the place:

Slattery started putting in appearances. They knew it was him, even before they spoke to him. He had the very demeanour Flood had described – of one who forgot that he no longer owned that plot, making free with all the unoccupied houses and their flotsam. He came down the hill between the row opposite and the townhouses, across the green area that still had no grass seeded on it. One day he just seemed to fade into view out of scrub and bushes. After that, he came down so frequently that there were tracks from the tyres of his quad in the long grass on the hill up to his place. (O'Callaghan 2016: 102)

Consequently, various layers of land ownership collide in the plot, which makes the landlessness of the family stand out. They do not own the house, and instead they are constantly asked by Flood if they “have completed”, namely if they have paid the amount they owe. Moreover, it is important to stress that the house where the family lives is the ‘show-house’ of the site. A show house, also known as a model home or display home, is a fully furnished and decorated residence that is open to the public for viewing. Its primary purpose is to showcase the design, features, and craftsmanship of a particular housing development or architectural style. Show houses are often used by real estate developers, homebuilders, and designers to attract potential buyers and demonstrate the possibilities of living in a specific community or type of home. Therefore, a show-house is not really a house, instead it just displays the potentialities of living in it. From this perspective, the show-house needs to be kept available for possible visitors, therefore making the family always vulnerable to outside invasion. The only ‘visit’ they actually receive resembles an invasion, during which a couple just breaks into the family's house. Moreover, a show house does not display any sign of past proprietors, nor is it fit for long-time dwelling. In this respect, the only time when it is inhabited is during the visits of possible buyers. It is not a house where past or future histories can be recalled or built. In the novel we read: “The things of a show house belonged to lives that should have

happened but never did. They gave off no noise at all, and that was more deafening than anything” (O’Callaghan 2016: 34). Moreover, in order to fill the feeling of emptiness, rootlessness and lack of meaningful life experience within the show-house, the characters create a fake identity for the two elderly people portrayed in a picture that they found in the house. The couple is not a real couple, the picture is instead cut out from some sort of house brochure: “There wasn’t much: a coffee-table made from chrome and glass, a sleigh bed in the master upstairs, a photo in a walnut frame on the mantelpiece of some anonymous retired couple whom Martina had already christened George and Georgina” (O’ Callaghan 2016: 19). George and Georgina become two of the made-up characters who fill the life and imagery of the family. In a sense, then, they are haunted not only by the ghosts of the past (such as the laundries, the famine, and the landed gentry), but also by the ghosts of the present (such as the current collapse of the global economy). Additionally, they are haunted by the ghosts of the future lives that will never happen and have barely been imagined. Contextually, the inbetweenness of the show house is metaphorically hinged on the spectrality of home-ownership during neoliberal times, in which the constant pressure of debt makes future lives already mortgaged, already prescribed. Furthermore, debt culture posits people in a constant in-between status: “To be in debt today—to owe one’s livelihood to the willingness of a bank to extend credit, to owe the roof over one’s head to a lender who can take one late payment as cause for eviction—is to be caught in an endless cycle of discredit and dispossession” (McClanahan 2017: 185). Contextually, Flood’s constant question: ‘have you completed?’ linguistically shows the incompleteness of a life lived in debt, as if suggesting that a part of someone’s existence is perpetually at the mercy of creditors. Against this background, the threat of homelessness becomes a tangible reality. Throughout the novel, we witness how, as the characters’ monetary resources shrink, the show house progressively loses its sense of homeliness. The house is no longer able to provide basic living resources like electricity and water which are eventually completely cut off. The shortage in water and electricity is not only, as I will explore in the next paragraph, a consequence of dramatic climate change, but also the result of specific political measures aimed at establishing what Jason Moore would call a new relationship of double internality, in which natural resources are channeled into financial assets. In Ireland, the institution of Irish Water, in 2013, now known as Uisce Éireann, met the strong opposition of the public, which saw the move as a privatization of what Federici would call a common. As McGlynn says:

The establishment of Irish Water consolidated thirty-one separate regional water authorities, a conversion of a fully public utility funded by taxpayers into a private, semi-state company seeking to raise revenue from both household rates and market investors. Communal ownership by the Irish people was removed via what Patrick Bresnihan has labelled a “biofinancialization” that put in place a new relationship “between the flows of water in Irish taps and the flows of money in global financial markets” (2015, n.p.) (Mc Glynn, 2022: pp. 106-107)

Contextually, the privatization of water resources in Ireland during times of austerity is akin to what Federici identifies as the relentless appropriation of resources by capitalism, which is highly visible in the global privatization of water resources. More specifically, in Ireland, water-privatization was one of the consequences of the EU-IMF bailout: “one of the clauses of this agreement was the transfer of water service provision from local authorities to a water utility, which would then impose charges” (Fletcher et al. 2018: 241). Moreover, in the novel we can see how such measures (especially when coupled with climate-change-induced water scarcity) affect the most that share of the population which is marginalized and economically vulnerable. In fact, the “neo-liberalization of primary resources is sporadic and reliant upon profitability, and thus structural economic inequality becomes intertwined with the provision of water” (Fletcher et al. 2018: 241). Revealingly, while the family laments an unbearable lack of water and primary means of survival, the priest doesn’t seem to be affected by the issue. This is for example a dialogue exchange that the girl and the priest have on the topic of water: “‘Is there water?’ That was another oddity. She seemed preoccupied with water, its availability, its whereabouts, as if she had just returned from the missions. ‘Hot water?’ I said. ‘There’s loads.’ She looked puzzled. More than that, I would say. She looked amazed” (O’Callaghan 2016: 135). The priest is in fact a representative not only of the religious institution, but also of the political entity of the state. In this context we shouldn’t forget about the close bond established since the publication of the constitution between the Irish State and the Irish Catholic Church. This is why the priest, being part and representative of the ruling and privileged class of the country, doesn’t seem to be affected by the problems of water scarcity, precarious living conditions and economic instability. It is not a case then that the appearance of the girl at the priest’s door resembles the uncanny return of a thin-legged famine revenant, who is banging at the door of the Church, resembling by extension any powerful institution:

Breathless skin-and-bone, a girl of twelve or thereabouts. Her tummy, her breastbone, the edges of her ribs, were all visible. She looked like one who had neither eaten proper food nor inhaled fresh air for years. Her teeth were yellow, her nails uncut and filthy. Her skin was

sunburned, except for those white lines that had been covered by straps. (O'Callaghan 2016: 9)

On the other hand, the family doesn't fit into the triad Church, State and Family, inasmuch as they break the conventional nuclear family formation and therefore, they are looked upon in judgment by the town members and are systematically excluded from community life. Consequently, the same identities of the characters seem to fade away, the priest doesn't seem to remember their names, Martina and Helen are often thought to be the same person, and when one of them disappears another takes up parts of their identity. Moreover, over the course of the novel, their bodies and organic matter seem to be merging with the surrounding environment, their bodily matter becomes more and more like the construction site they are living in, their bodies are described as "grey", covered in dust, smelling of chlorine.

Following the analytical framework of Uncanny Realism then, the novel could be read from the perspective of multiple scales, which Chakrabarty calls the global and the planetary. For what concerns the first, the connection with Ireland's Celtic Tiger, the economic boom and its false promises of wealth is reflected not only in the ghost estate where the novel is set but also in the precarious economic conditions that the characters live through. Paul and Martina moved back to Ireland and started to work on a software plant, but when this is shut down and relocated somewhere in the East, they are left with no job and no money, with "no credit" as the girl says. Also, typical of the Celtic Tiger time there is the shift of values from a Catholic country, reliant on the institution of the church to one that must rebuild a new set of values for itself. Ireland took distance from the church especially when scandals and abuses perpetuated by representatives of the Catholic faith were uncovered, amongst which were abuses against children in parishes, churches, and church run-institutions. While these two aspects bring forward a harsh critique of contemporary Ireland, other aspects have a global echo. Especially the rising of temperatures, water scarcity and the idea of Ireland as part of a big global market which is always ready to change its game when things go bad. In *Nothing on Earth*, we can see how the family, while getting poorer as a consequence of the harsh peak of unemployment rates after the crash, can't afford to have water in their house. As stated before, the family lives in a liminal, marginal position, excluded by the community and pushed away from the job market as the IT company both Helen and Paul worked for, decides to relocate somewhere in eastern Europe. In this context, O'Callaghan text sheds light on how global

environmental issues are unevenly distributed amongst social classes, countries and racial groups. In the next section I will explore how these concerns merge and interlink with planetary scale phenomena, such as the numerous consequences and manifestations of the climate crisis.

4.1.2 Dust, heat and hyperobjective properties: the second scale of disappearance

As I've previously mentioned, the two scales of disappearance I am trying to visualize in my analysis are not at all separate from each other. Instead, following Chakrabarty's division between the global and the planetary they are constitutively joined and enmeshed. Nonetheless, looking at them in two separate sections allows me to account for their specific properties. Although, at the end of the section I will conclude by shedding light on how these specific properties constitute a bundle of events which project meaning onto each other.

If we want to look at how the novel bridges between locally specific narratives and global and planetary ones, we should look into more details at how the numerous and varied manifestations of global warming/climate change are depicted in the text. First of all, it is pivotal to remark on how the ghost estate, aside from catalysing the local, and historically specific history of Ireland during the Celtic Tiger, is also presented as a non-place: a post-modern, bourgeois, sub-urban set of standardised buildings which could be located everywhere in the world. Moreover, if, as we've explored in the first sub-chapter, the middle-class life promised by estate developers proved to be an empty projection of a future which was impossible to fulfil, the same material structure of the house, and the life of its inhabitants is threatened by the various manifestations of climate crisis. In the novel, three elements catalyse this concern: the uncharacteristic summer heat, the dramatic water scarcity, and the inescapable presence of dust.

From the very beginning heat is described as the ever-present, permeant feeling which characterizes the entire novel. Consequently, over the course of the novel references to heat are recurrent, pointing out the unavoidable nature of the same. Here are just some examples:

Early evening, the hottest August in living memory. (O'Callaghan 2016: 9)

It had gone eleven, but some light was left and it was still plenty hot. (O'Callaghan 2016: 34)

The black was impure. It wasn't the black you get in winter, which is so absolute as to sparkle. This was the virtual black of a May that was almost over and was already the hottest in recorded history. (O'Callaghan 2016: 46)

The road home was hot and depopulated, as if the whole world was observing a siesta. (O'Callaghan 2016: 48)

Outside, the bricks of their drive felt almost too hot for her bare feet. (O'Callaghan 2016: 49)

The decision to use heat as a narrative catalyst for climate crisis in Ireland enhances the uncanny nature of the text. In fact, as we've seen in Barry's *The Fjord of Killary* or Mac Síomóin's *Is Stacey Pregnant?* Ireland's climate futures are often imagined as watery/oceanic futures. Instead, the image of Ireland as permeated by an unavoidable heat engenders the juxtaposition with other geographies, especially located in the global south, where climate crisis takes the shape of scorching temperatures. Resultingly, the ghost-estate set in some part of rural Ireland becomes a blurred in-between space where the planetary, yet varied, consequences of climate crises can be displayed. The heat also assumes highly gothic characteristics akin to non-European genres such American Southern Gothic, or Mexican Gothic thus further blurring the border between specific local geographies and global and planetary spaces. This is further conveyed by the dramatic water scarcity experienced by the characters. Such elements enhance the distance between Ireland's likely future of estuarine floods and costal erosion, and a fictional one of draught and subsequent lack of water resources. Nonetheless, water scarcity conveys a wider global problem which sees access to potable water resources as increasingly scarce worldwide (Salehi 2022). As we will see in the last section of the analysis all these concerns emerge as an intersection of the unequal impact of climate catastrophe in terms of gender, race, class and material geographies, and the agency of the non-human other. Another element which haunts the novel is the ubiquitous presence of dust. In many passages we read:

Helen and the girl had both bathed, to wash off some of the dust, and put on fresh shorts and tank-tops. (O'Callaghan 2016: 28)

The weather held. She kept expecting to wake to grey and drizzle, for the dust on the close to turn to muck. If anything, the mornings got clearer and hotter. (O'Callaghan 2016: 38)

Martina was out the front, brushing dust that had blown in from the rest of the site, fighting a losing battle. The hot spell had wrung every ounce of moisture out of the muck. Flood's car

was covered in it. Even Flood himself, when he climbed from the car, seemed coated in dust. (O'Callaghan 2016: 54)

Red dust off the site had stuck to the oil on her skin. From the way her skin glittered, there must have been particles of mica in the dust. (O'Callaghan 2016: 69)

The widespread presence of dust is not just a further materialization of global warming, especially in the way muck is transformed into dry dust particles, but it also encompasses other multiple functions. Especially, dust appears as an object of highly uncanny properties. Teresa Stoppani (2008) sheds light on the uncanny characteristics of dust by describing it as an object which is not only both formless and multi-form (since it assumes the shapes of the surfaces it lays on), but also:

It changes its composition and texture by constantly exchanging particles with its environment. It is open. It has not raceable beginning and no end. Dust is open and it opens. Pervasive and omnipresent, it penetrates everywhere. It knows no interior and no exterior. It has no boundaries. It does not transgress; it invades and pervades. (...) In this sense, more than in relation to physical and hygienic concerns, dust is relevant in architecture, as it unsettles regimes of order, propriety, permanence, control, that have otherwise and so far characterised and defined the discipline. (2007: 437)

Therefore, dust is uncanny because it trespasses inside and outside borders, it is both revelatory and abject and it opposes modernity's discipline. Moreover, dust also materialises the image of the return of the repressed, since while it is constantly hidden away, cleaned up and dusted off by human beings (especially within domestic spaces), it always comes back. Contextually, Carolyn Steedman in her book *Dust* (2002), stresses how the same idea of dusting is linked to the Freudian concept of constant repetition. Concurrently, according to Stoppani, dust's cycles render visible patterns of time within apparent still settings:

(...) dust inscribes time and produces a trace of duration in the frozen palace, on and around the architecture of the coffin (tomb, monument, architecture), and perhaps even on its content (...). Dust turns the container of idealised perfection — tomb or palace — into a collector and instigator of that which is other, the informe: time, and with it memory and forgetting, waste and entropy. From here dust spreads contagiously to claim other forgotten, unused, unnamed spaces — no longer the woods surrounding the palace, but the dormant spaces of the city, those 'immense ruins of abandoned buildings, of deserted dockyards' of the urban peripheries. (Stoppani 2007: 447)

Consequently, if the characters live in a limbo-like, static, interworld – especially epitomized by the ghost estate, dust stresses the passage of time by contrasting the stillness of its surroundings. While the characters within the ghost estate live in a perpetual state of waiting – waiting for some neighbours to come, for the construction to

resume, waiting for Flood or for Marcus, dust reverses such temporal stillness by continuously depositing on surfaces, on concrete blocks, on windows and pieces of furniture. Dust does not respect temporal nor space boundaries, it is a matter which belongs to both the past –as shattered reminders of deep past mineral and biological matter, the present, and the future – since dust will last also into the deep future. Contextually dust appears as one of the material agents which engenders what Morton calls the end of the world, and what in the first chapter I called uncanny un-worldling. In this respect, Morton says: “The end of teleology is the end of the world. (...) For the end of the world is the end of endings, the end of telos, and the beginning of an uncertain, hesitating futurity” (Morton 2013: 95). Moreover, by disrespecting space boundaries, dust mixes and matches all kinds of mineral and biological matter, shedding further light on the abstraction of inside/outside borders which is at the basis of the nature culture divide. This aspect appears as particularly striking in the way in which the bodily matter of the protagonists is modified by the presence of dust. In this respect, their human bodies start to appear as skewed from the consolatory familiarity which we are used to. There is a specific passage which strikingly elucidates this point. The girl and Paul are having dinner at Slattery’s, when she starts to feel sick:

‘Something didn’t agree with you,’ Slattery said. Paul hauled her to the sink. With the second substantial heave came stuff other than food or bile. There was dust in there, sawdust. There were also tiny shards of wood, masonry and steel. Paul tried to run the taps to wash it away before anyone else saw, but nothing came out. (O’Callaghan 2016: 110)

On the one hand, the image of vomiting as stated by Houlden (2024), “draws attention to ingestion and depletion conterminously” (189), therefore conveying through the body of the girl what Jason Moore calls “nature as tap” and “nature as sink”. In this respect, the body of the girl and of the other characters in general, are conceived of as Nature, in capitalist terms: they are in fact both a source of extraction of reproductive and productive labour, and the material terrain onto which pollution and contamination are sunk. It is not a case then that the body of the girl appears to be made of the same materials of the construction site. In fact, her body and future are contaminated in the same way in which the flora and fauna which occupied that space before the construction of the building site was eradicated. Therefore, the body of the characters uncannily start to act as a metaphorical site for all living beings, both human and non-human which are threatened by the consequences of capitalogenic climate crises. The uncanny shifting of the characters into a liminal place between human and non-human, biological and mineral

allows the plot to heighten the shift between mimesis and estrangement. Especially, the now liminal position of the characters allows them to trespass not only inside-outside borders, but also to skew the separation line between past, future and present. Contextually, realism's time and space unity and linearity are put into question and the plot makes space for the uncanny, the unpredictable, the inexplicable. Moreover, their liminal place devoid of boundaries also constitutes them as un-dead entities: "When the inside of a thing coincides perfectly with its outside, that is called dissolution or death" (Morton 2013: 31). Especially, irreality peaks during the moments of disappearance of the characters. Here I quote the passages from Martina's disappearance:

She stood gazing at it for the longest time. The more she stood gazing at the ball, the huger its glow became. It drew all available light into itself and burned it like fuel. She could almost smell her skin burning, the singeing of her hair. You would never have imagined that there could be any light in there to draw upon, but there must have been. There must have been zillions of sparks and scintillas and rays and glimmers swimming around and yet so infinitesimal as to be invisible to her naked eye. Now they were being sucked into the magnetic field that the ball appeared to radiate. Now they were burning, being renewed and being burned again. (O'Callaghan 2016: 82)

Considering the theoretical basis of Uncanny Realism, Morton's hyperobjects are the most apt way to analyse the second level of disappearance of the characters. In fact, through the properties of viscosity, non-locality, phasing and interobjectivity, Morton sheds light on how the interrelation of various objects possessing different time and space coordinates skews our anthropocentric understanding of the world. Contextually, hyperobjects question our limited notion of reality:

The vastness of the hyperobject's scale makes smaller beings—people, countries, even continents—seem like an illusion, or a small colored patch on a large dark surface. How can we know it is real? What does real mean? The threat of global warming is not only political, but also ontological. The threat of unreality is the very sign of reality itself. (Morton 2013: 32)

In this respect, the disappearance of the characters appears as the explosion of a bundle of contingencies. Firstly, as we've already explored, the invisibilization of the reproductive work, the vulnerability of economically and socially marginalized people and their heightened vulnerable position in the face of climate change as well as the precariousness of all life on earth both human and non-human, shedding light on our enmeshment with our surroundings. Consequently, what happens to the bodies of the characters emerges from their inter-objective relation with other entities, which therefore

makes the disappearance completely plausible as the outcome of the interrelation with other objects emanating different time scale coordinates:

The abyss opens up in the interaction of any two or more objects. Indeed, since objects are inherently inconsistent (a fact to which we shall return), an abyss opens up simply because of the Rift, the fact that an object can “interact with itself” because it is a spacing and a timing, not a given, objectified entity. (Morton 2013: 80)

I just can't tell whether it occurs in the “present” or the “past.” Time as such, construed as a series of points that extends like Cartesian substances “into” the future “from” the past, is itself an aesthetic phenomenon, not a deep fact that underlies things. (Morton 2013: 67)

Moreover, the disappearance puts into question the idea of locality or situatedness in time and space, which is exposed as deeply partial:

Nonlocality means just that—there is no such thing, at a deep level, as the local. Locality is an abstraction. (...) In an age of ecological emergency—in an age in which hyperobjects start to oppress us with their terrifying strangeness—we will have acclimatized ourselves to the fact that locality is always a false immediacy. (Morton 2013: 47-48)

Furthermore, the disappearance of the characters also engenders questions on the time-coordinates which the characters now occupy. In this respect, the time-scale coordinates emanated by the characters surpass the stillness of their lives inside the ghost-estate by capturing the depths of the human-species evolution. Their flesh “emerges from the gyrations of DNA and RNA molecules, struggling to solve their inherent inconsistency, and ending up repeating themselves in the process” (Morton 2013: 63). Moreover, the characters disappearance also calls into question their idea of futurity, inasmuch as by materially enmeshing with other objects they overcome anthropocentric and capitalogenic futurity by projecting their lives into a far future:

For every object in the universe there is a genuinely future future that is radically unknowable. There is a genuinely elsewhere elsewhere that is radically unknowable. Yet the future future and the elsewhere elsewhere exist. They are, in my terminology, strange strangers, knowable yet uncanny. (Morton 2013: 61)

The time-space correlation engendered by the disappearance of the characters also sheds light onto another deeply uncanny aspect of the plot, namely the numerous apparitions, noises and banging that the characters experience. Here are a few examples:

They were woken by banging. Or, rather, Paul had been woken by banging and shoved Helen until she was conscious enough to see him standing at the end of the bed. ‘What time’s it?’ ‘There it is again,’ Paul said. That was the one time Paul looked scared. He struggled into his

cycling shorts, which had been lying on the floor on his side of the bed. Helen heard his footfalls on the varnished stairs, his eventual muttering, the chain, the lock snicking open, and Martina down in the hall complaining that her key wouldn't turn. (O'Callaghan 2016: 37)

It was that night, the night of Harry's removal, when the girl screamed. That night, or the night immediately after. It was near eleven. Helen was in the bath and the girl screamed, 'There's someone in the garden!' 'What, now?' Helen climbed out of her lukewarm suds, wrapped herself in a beach towel and went into the second bedroom, where the girl was standing at the window. Against their rear wall was a pale thumbnail that might well have been a face staring up at them. They ran downstairs. Paul was at the patio door, trying to peer through his own reflection, flicking the switch of the outside patio light. (O'Callaghan 2016: 45)

Since they are the sole occupants of the estate, the noises and writings can be seen as projections of their future disappearance onto the present. This perfectly illustrates the concept of "non-locality." Here, past and present intermingle, along with other elements foundational to literary realism, such as cause-and-effect relationships: "Hyperobjects seem to inhabit a Humean causal system in which association, correlation, and probability are the only things we have to go on, for now" (Morton 2013: 38). Thus, the knocks on the wall and the writings on the windows do not directly come from Paul, Helen, Martina, or the girl, but they are rather traces left by their withdrawal, akin to a dinosaur's footprint on a rock:

There is something even more startling about the footprints of hyperobjects. These footprints are signs of causality, and of here is both subjective and objective genitive. Causality and the aesthetic, the realm of signs and significance and sensation, are one and the same. Hyperobjects are so big that they compel us toward this counterintuitive view. Interobjectivity eliminates the difference between cause and sign. (Morton 2013: 88)

It is the future influencing the present, just as our current actions have already significantly impacted the future of our species and the entire planet: "We know this now, just as we know that we have changed the future fossils of Earth. The future hollows out the present" (Morton 2013: 60).

Moreover, by becoming part of the hyperobjects they become the material site onto which the end of the world plays out. In fact, if on one hand their lives already show the failing of the capitalist world-ecology in sustaining life, on the other hand, the permeability of their skin and bodily tissues dismantles the time space coordinates which constitute that system on an abstract aesthetic level. Therefore, they become a past/present/future entity which haunts the moribund capitalist system, epitomized by the ghost estate. They bang at its doors demanding its dismantling. Therefore, the characters

are uncannily doubled as both still inhabiting the system – and hearing the banging on the doors – and having exited it – and therefore producing the banging. In this respect, their disappearance negates their investment in such system by embracing other temporal and spatial relational coordinates and thus stretching forward to another way of constituting interrelations with other beings and entities. Consequently, even though we can't visualize what their status is now, their same invisibility produces space for reimagining alternatives against the system that is depicted at the realist level of narration. This aspect is further heightened by the disappearance of the girl. We learn that after the disappearance of Paul the girl sought help at the local priest's house. The novel opens with the arrival of the girl at the priest's house:

It was around about then that the door started banging. The wood shook with the banging. So did the letterbox's brass-plated inward flap. Even the cutlery in its open drawer, the delft drying on its drainer, seemed to tremble a fraction. It was a time when nobody called. Early evening, the hottest August in living memory. (O'Callaghan 2016: 9)

Therefore, the novel begins with a banging noise, mirroring the sounds the characters hear inside the show-house of the ghost estate. Additionally, the banging on the priest's door causes a tremor that shakes both the exterior and interior of the house. In a certain sense, the girl represents the uncanny invasion of domestic space by 'the other,' something that is both semantically and materially excluded from it. The priest's house can be seen as the centre of a dying power, akin to the Catholic Church during the Celtic Tiger era, and thus vulnerable to external invasion. The girl's banging is perceived as an unreal, powerful force that shakes the foundation of the system, since the girl herself—weak from hunger and neglect—couldn't physically generate enough force to shake the house. By extension then the priest's house also encompasses the centre of other systems of power, especially the capitalist world-ecology. The description of the girl as an alien other is further conveyed in another description that the priest gives of their encounter:

You know those stories, where the child is lost in the wilderness and presumed dead? For years her family keeps returning. Eventually, their hope dwindles. The family disintegrates: the mother remarries, the father lives alone. Then a creature wanders into the nearest village, semi-feral and with scant language. The villagers form a circle and stare. Someone asks questions she doesn't answer or can't. (...) That's what it was like. It was as if she had come running, for all she was worth, out of some urban legend or 'real life' story in one of those magazines you read in a doctor's waiting room. (O'Callaghan 2016: 119)

From this juncture, the narrative illustrates the defiance of any remaining hope vested in the system. In this regard, the novel diverges from the portrayal of uncritical investment in a failing system, as depicted in *The Fjord of Killary* and *Is Stacey Pregnant?* by highlighting the absence of futurity within a disintegrating structure of centralized power and systemic abuse, epitomized by the capitalist world-ecology. The representation of the Catholic Church as a locus of trauma and abuse functions as a warning against the adoption of unfettered neoliberalism during the Celtic Tiger period and its persistence after the crash. By juxtaposing the Church's perpetuation of abuse with the inherent unsustainability of the capitalist world-ecology, exemplified by the ghost estate, the novel interrogates what Carmen Kuhling has termed the re-enchantment of Ireland under the neoliberal paradigm:

Irish people's collective self- understanding self- definition, formerly organised around the dual pillars of Catholicism and Nationalism as higher ideals, came slowly to reside in the principles of Neoliberalism during the time of the Celtic Tiger. Astronomical rates of spending in what Ritzer calls "cathedrals of consumption", particularly around Christmas in the early part of the decade (when Irish Christmas spending outstripped other EU countries, and even the US) have led to the somewhat accurate claim in the media that Irish spiritual life has shifted "from the parish hall to the shopping mall". (2014: 178-179)

Contextually, although the priest never openly confesses, the proof of his guilt emerges quite clearly in the sexualised description that he gives of the girl. In this context, the disappearance of the girl at the end of the novel shows the lack of futurability within the system:

Even when her door slammed around dawn and I could have sworn I heard screaming, I did nothing. The screams were muted by the walls and wood between us, but they were clear enough and they were clearly hers. She was gone the following morning. She was gone and her made bed looked as if it had never been slept in. But that's not right, since 'gone' implies a where to be gone to. She wasn't anywhere. That's the way I have come to think of it, to phrase it. By the following morning she was nowhere, and I was the last to have seen her, and all hell broke loose. (O'Callaghan 2016: 151-152).

From a Chakrabartian global perspective, the disappearance of the girl symbolizes the broader invisibility and disposability of large segments of the global population within the capitalist world-ecology. However, viewed through the lens of planetary and hyperobjective frameworks, the event opens up alternative possibilities. The act of vanishing into thin air can be interpreted as a reclaiming of agency, as the girl disengages from and renounces her participation in a collapsing system. In this context, her disappearance and subsequent invisibility serve as a critical juncture for imagining

potential new futures and alternative modes of existence. The text's intrinsic ambiguity allows these two interpretive frameworks to coexist, resisting binary or oppositional conclusions in favor of a more intricate, layered analysis of the events depicted. This ambiguity fosters a reading that embraces complexity rather than simplistic resolutions, encouraging multiple, coextensive interpretive possibilities.

In conclusion, the invisibility imposed at the first level by the capitalist world-system, which systematically marginalizes and renders a significant portion of the population invisible, is subverted at the second level. Here, disappearance becomes a site of subversion, allowing individuals to disentangle themselves from capitalist realism and its defining spatio-temporal coordinates. This opens the possibility of learning new ways of relating to space and time, rethinking ideas of cause and effect, and creating new interrelationships with the entities that constitute what Morton calls 'the mesh'.

4.2 Ghost estates and faery trees in *The End of the World is a Cul de Sac* by Louise Kennedy

Louise Kennedy debuted with the short story collection *The End of the World is a Cul de Sac* in 2021. The short stories paint a picture of contemporary Ireland grappling with various challenges, including failed relationships amid harsh circumstances such as abortion, abandoned housing estates from the Celtic Tiger era, farmers resorting to illicit activities like operating cannabis farms, and individuals haunted by the legacy of Northern Ireland's conflict. What distinguishes Kennedy's work is her incorporation of rich Celtic culture and tradition, seamlessly blending the modern with the ancient. Her stories are infused with references to fairy forts, healing wells, and megalithic tombs, alongside ancient Irish beliefs such as the connection between hares and shape-shifting *sídh*e. In this context, Kennedy's writing is an interesting case study for the analytical framework of Uncanny Realism. In this section I will focus on her short story *The End of the World is a Cul de Sac* which gives the name to the entire collection. The story first appeared on *The Stinging Fly* in 2018. In the story, the protagonist, Sarah, finds herself abandoned by her husband, whose questionable business dealings have left her with ownership of a dilapidated ghost estate constructed upon a fairy fort in a rural setting. Additionally, she inherits a lavish, ostentatious house that feels more like a showroom than a home, prompting her to retreat to the modest boot room for sleep rather than the opulent bedrooms. When a donkey wanders onto the estate, Sarah encounters a young man whom she agrees to accompany for a drink. However, she soon discovers that this new acquaintance is similarly entangled in criminal activities, mirroring the behaviour of her estranged husband.

4.2.1 A spectre in a haunted house

Before delving into specific aspects of the plot, I want to focus on how Sarah's house is depicted as a modern haunted space and how Sarah herself is configured as a spectral, undead presence within it.

The End of the World is a Cul de Sac opens with a piercingly estranging landscape description:

The dereliction was almost beautiful, the houses dark against the mauve dawn, pools of buff-coloured water glinting briefly as a passing car took the last bend before town. Number 7 was starting to look like the other units, the lawn stringy with brown weeds. The footpath petered out and Sarah landed hard in a puddle, picking her way over broken masonry and loops of cable until she reached the end of the cul de sac. (Kennedy 2021: 1)

The first sentence introduces the reader to the view of a series of derelict houses set against a violet crepuscule. This image echoes the trope of the arrival at a derelict or haunted dwelling place which reminds us of the arrival to the house of Usher, or Jonathan Harker's first sight of Dracula's castle. Nonetheless, the gothic image that sets out the narrative is merged with a seemingly post-apocalyptic landscape dominated by the scattered waste of anthropic activities, such as debris, torn cables, and concrete. Contextually, the gothic and/or postapocalyptic feel that pervades the first section of the story is highly permeated by anthropocentric semantics, which makes it akin to what Mikkel Krause Frantzen and Jens Bjerling call "the hyperobject", and especially that kind of hyperobject that the two scholars identify as "global waste". In this context, "the dereliction" that Sarah talks about dismantles the unified image of a group of houses into a vast, dispersive image of waste, which estranges the reader. Consequently, the estranging gothic image which opens the story is akin to Uncanny Realism's property of bringing forward the hidden dynamics of the capitalist world-ecology. In this context, in their introduction to the volume *Ecogothic*, Andrew Smith and William Hughes say: "The process of ecological unscientisation is deliberately revered through stagings of uncanny states that dramatize the traumatic impact of abstract economic systems on local ecologies" (Smith & Hughes 2015: 13). In this respect, the hyperobject also connects us to the idea whereby abstract human driven activities shape site-specific material geographies. Moreover, the progressive de-shaping of the landscape through images of scattered waste, starts to merge with the haunting presence of an indefinite noise: "The noise was coming from the showhouse" (Kennedy 2021: 1). Contextually, the sense of hearing proves again to be a catalyser for the uncanny. The shapelessness of the noise merges with the rest of the description and creates a void in the narration, a feeling of threat and uncertainty. In fact, if, as Shelling says, the uncanny is what comes to light, Sarah's journey towards the noise is also a journey in the direction of something that will soon be revealed. Nonetheless, when Sarah arrives at the show house, she discovers that:

All the doors had been taken, including the front one, which only seemed to emphasise how small the rooms were. The donkey was in the living room, by the cavity in the chimney breast

where the granite fireplace had been. It was plump and skittish, pastilles of dried sleep at the corners of its eyes. Sarah whispered to it, cajoled, pleaded. She tried shooing it, spreading her arms to drive it out to the hallway. It pawed and snattered, and a flume of shit hit the wall behind it. She would have to go and get her neighbour. (Kennedy 2021: 1)

Contextually, the anthropic image of scattered construction waste is set against the agency of the non-human other, in our specific case, a donkey. The description of the donkey within the show-house is significant in multiple ways. First, the donkey, a domestic animal usually employed in farming activities, is depicted outside the space that humans prescribed for it. The donkey decides to get into the show house and make it its own. The presence of the donkey inside the show house re-signifies that space. In fact, the show house is not meant to be lived in, instead is a place where the future is imagined through abstract, romanticised projections, which is akin to Keohane and Kuhling description of real-estate brochures:

In the real estate brochures and property supplements we were promised a ‘home with character’, a house with ‘personality’, a ‘starter family home’ in a ‘new neighbourhood community’; an ‘executive residence’ in an ‘exclusive gated enclave’; all simulacra of the wholeness and continuity of neighbourhood, community, society and of collective life. (Keohane and Khuling 2016: 26)

Especially, in the case of ghost-estates, the show houses did not necessarily turn into actual houses. They are instead places where the abstraction of financial capital and the desire for a dwelling space is merged and agreed on, places which only possess exchange value. Nonetheless, the cumbersome presence of the donkey within the show house not only fills the place with a new use-value, namely a place which was never inhabited becomes the chosen shelter for the donkey; but also, the intrusion of the donkey within that space signifies the abstract margins that divide nature and culture, immaterial finance and material environmental outcomes. This aspect is further underlined by the stripped-off look of the show house, where doors and furniture pieces had been taken away, clearing the way for the “outside” to come in.

As the plot goes on, we get a better visual idea of the structure of the estate Sarah lives in, namely twelve semi-detached houses which revolve around a lollipop shaped cul de sac, plus her own house. In fact, Sarah and her husband lived just outside the housing estate, in a huge Celtic Tiger monster house that overlooks it. The set up of the estate strongly reminds us of the Irish colonial estates dominated by the landed gentry’s big houses. In this context, Sarah’s house becomes a modern doppelganger of the dwelling

place of the landed gentry. In this context, the management of the land and real-estate industry during the Celtic Tiger reflected the colonial attitude towards the land that could be traced in the history of the Capitalocene. In this respect Duffy says:

Many of the projects of settlement and survey which were undertaken in Ireland from the 17th century were essential components of colonial enterprise, measuring and mapping a conquered land for appropriation and domination. The construction of the landed estate system was largely a product of such a mapping enterprise. (Duffy 2005: 15)

Seemingly, the mapping, surveying and appropriation of land was carried out during the Celtic Tiger by the raising social class of the real estate developer, which reached a highly regarded central status within public discourse:

Irish developers were not only involved in the physical construction of place(s); they were very public actors in the construction of discourses of Ireland as a place of opportunity, entrepreneurialism and success. In contrast to the relative anonymity of high-rolling financial traders, property developers were celebrated media stars. Indeed, as the property boom gathered pace, stories of past property successes arguably became an essential prerequisite for mobilising new rounds of property investment. (Murphy & McGuirk 2013: 152)

Consequently, the juxtaposition between the landed gentry and the new social class of the developers traces a line that cuts through the history of Capitalocene, signaling the endurance of a worldview based on the systematic exploitation of human and non-human nature. Against this background, Sarah's house and estate are permeated by several layers of uncanny haunting. Here is a specific passage in the story that points out these levels:

Hawthorn Close was beyond it, lollipop-shaped: twelve semi-detached houses either side of a track that led to five detached houses around the bulb of a cul de sac. From here you could see things you couldn't see from the road. That one of the units had been occupied, that someone had tried to tame a garden and make a home. That the granite dome which read HAWTHORN CLOSE had been deposited on to a fairy fort. That beside the dome a tree had been torn down, its roots leaving deep velvety furrows which seemed to bulge when light fell across them. (Kennedy 2021: 7)

The proxemics of the scene directs the eye straight from Sarah's house towards the estate, from where we can "see things you couldn't see from the road". The passage metaphorically exposes the hidden aspects which sustained the Celtic Tiger economic boom, and which became haunting presences after the crash. Furthermore, it shows how systemic (both national and global) events such as the economic boom and crash reflect onto individual and personal lives. This aspect is especially signaled by the name of the estate, Hawthorn Close, which is inscribed in a Celtic font on a granite dome placed on a

fairy fort. The Celtic references present in the name itself, a hawthorn tree is a fairy tree, and its placement on the fairy fort indicates the subsumption and marketization of Celtic, pre-colonial history during the Celtic Tiger. Nonetheless, Sarah, despite having access to revelatory information, is in a profound state of denial. Consequently, she is constantly haunted by hidden truths which come back to her in an uncanny manner. In the passage we can see three levels of uncanny haunting, which will be slowly revealed over the course of the plot. Especially the use of the indefinite pronoun “someone” or the use of the passive voice “had been deposited”, “had been torn down”, create a void which obscures the agent of those actions while still constantly pointing them out. Such language choices are akin to the use of deictics, in the way in which they refer to something without making it visible. Rachael Hayward, Robin Wooffitt, and Catherine Woods analyze the use of the deictic *that* as a way in which speakers refer to something which appears to be guided by undefined phenomena:

(...) participants respond to phenomena that are essentially ambiguous: they may be truly unusual and suggest the existence of entities and objects that are rejected by orthodox science (and common sense), or they may be events, which, though perhaps unusual, have ordinary causes. (...) In short, *that* can be a resource by which the uncanny properties of the world can be made manifest and warrantable. (2015: 704)

Moreover, the indefinite reference to the agent of such actions points out Sarah’s reluctance to openly speak about what happened. Therefore, the short story, which follows Sarah’s point of view in third person, presents a highly unreliable narrative structure. Consequently, the passage by also referring to things such as fairy forts, or trees, blurs the boundary between what could be a mundane explicable cause for the events narrated, and what could instead be a paranormal, inexplicable source. Especially, the passage, along with other references to fairy beliefs in the story, befogs the separation line with persistent references to the aftermath of the economic crash – perpetually present within the depiction of the ghost estate. Therefore, the underlying question in the story is: what has caused the dereliction which opens the narration? The economic crash? The disturbance of the fairy fort? The question both engenders an uncanny estrangement in the reader and doesn’t allow her to divert her attention from that central doubt, therefore enhancing its urgent importance. Consequently, the reader is positioned in an in-between, liminal space where the rules of rationality which should be governing our worldview are constantly called into question. In this context, Fuchs words are particularly apt:

Thus, the uncanny is also caused by the endangering of a worldview in which rationality has erected reliable order structures against the darkness, chaos, and deliquescence of the mythical-animistic world. It is aroused by the recurrence of what was thought to be already overcome, but what still lurks in the interspaces of the world of constant, distinct objects and calculable causal relationships, both threatening and fascinating at the same time. (2019: 108)

Therefore, the short story produces a constant oscillation between our dominant world view and a past one. It refers to folk beliefs which used to be a way of organizing, giving meaning to, and shaping a specific worldview and a different way of relating to the world (Burke 2006). In the story there are constant references to fairy forts. The fairy fort is the place where fairies reside, and which should not be disturbed by any human. Angela Burke describes fairy forts in Ireland as:

Before the investigations of antiquaries and the depredations of agribusiness, fairy forts were left largely undisturbed, and it is estimated that there were as many as sixty thousand in the Irish landscape (...) In the narrative maps of oral storytelling, ringforts function as alternative reference points to places of human habitation and activity. The fairies are the invisible neighbours who must not be antagonized, Ordnance Survey maps show roads all over Ireland which abruptly detour in semicircle, and stories are told, and places pointed out where the progressive, linear optimism of the nineteenth-century engineering fell fool of fairy belief. (2006: 47)

The haunting presence of the fairy fort becomes a linking point and a way of reflecting on various historical and time scales. In this respect, the constant juxtaposition of the ghost-estate with the fairy fort allows questioning and relativizing the world view tied to the capitalist world-ecology, by constantly infusing into it what used to be a completely different way of relating to the world. Moreover, the story posits an even deeper question aimed at relativizing our world view: why do we consider a world made of fairy trees, fairy tricks and changelings less real than a neoliberal one based on the abstraction of financial capital? Aren't those two worlds based on different but equally abstract beliefs? Aren't they based on two different forms of magical thinking? In their book *Magical Capitalism. Enchantment, Spells, and Occult Practices in Contemporary Economies* (2018), Brian Moeran and Timothy de Waal Malefyt say:

The modern world is no less mysterious, more rational, knowable, predictable, and thus ultimately manipulable, than the premodern world. Magic has not declined, to be replaced by science, bureaucracy, law, and power. Rather, modern societies thrive on glamour (...) deception, illusory feats, ritual, symbolism, drama, theatricality, fake news, and tweets that reveal "a state where 'rational' and 'irrational' modes of thought coexist and continuously make contesting claims for definitions of reality" (Jöhncke and Steffen 2015: 10). (2018: 3)

The aspects of magical thinking came to the fore in what John Clarke and Janet Newman call: “the alchemy of austerity”, which bases its powers on a specific kind of modern, neoliberal fairy, “the confidence fairy” which includes “the belief that if one says things often enough, they will come true” (Clarke and Newman 2012: 301). This aspect became prominent in Ireland during post-crash austerity measures. Consequently, the ghost estate, and Sarah’s house, are configured as in-between, threshold spaces, or, as we’ve seen in *Notes from a Coma*, *The Fjord of Killary* and *Is Stacey Pregnant?* as ‘inter-worlds’. In this in-between liminal space, the proclaimed rational laws of capitalism are constantly called into question, showing the inadequacy of a world view tied to capitalist-realist logics. In this context, Sarah is living in the aftermath of the economic crash, and she is dealing with the harsh consequences of real estate speculation and debt culture. Against this background, Sarah appears as a ghostly presence in her own house. Therefore, the constant parallelism between Sarah and her house produces an identification between the walls of the building and her human body. Especially, both Sarah and her dwelling place are described as in-between, liminal entities: the house is both abandoned and un-abandoned, and Sarah appears as an un-dead, ghostly presence within it. One of the first descriptions that we get of Sarah’s house and interior is:

She opened the front door. Bills and fliers were strewn across the entrance hall. The art was gone, lifted off the walls by the owner of the gallery on a tip-off from the architect. Davy had taken the buffalo hide he had bought when he went to the Super Bowl. It was the only thing he took with him. (Kennedy 2022: 5)

The very first image we encounter is a pile of un-paid bills and fliers scattered around. This description epitomizes the uncanniness of debt, which is ever present within the short-story, and which also permeates the following narrative image of the missing art works, as well as the missing bull-hide. Contextually in her analysis of the photographic series *Foreclosed Homes* by Todd Hido (1996), McClanahan describes the stripped off appearance of those houses:

These photographs also attend to the traces of items that have been removed: plugs and cables connected to nothing, shadows on the wall where pictures were hung, impressions on the carpet. These are the ghosts of the lost material of daily life. They point toward lacunae in the spaces once given over to commodity value, capturing in that absence what Ann Carson, in *Economy of the Unlost*, describes as “an uncanny protasis of things invisible, although no less real”. (2017: 123)

Contextually, Sarah's house is haunted by things lost to debt which also project the image of a future that will never happen. In this context, the oscillation between presence and absence, void, and plenitude, evokes a feeling of uncanniness especially in the way in which they transform Sarah's mansion in an extremely un-homely place. In this context, still following McClanahan, it is pivotal to stress how the uncanny is a deeply bourgeois phenomenon which especially threatens the security of ownership. Contextually, Sarah's house and her bourgeois future, were based on the abstraction of financial products and the debt they generated, which transformed "the grounded stability of real estate and the foundational security of bourgeois domesticity" into "a more unstable, uncanny liquidity" (McClanahan 2017: 125). If Sarah's house is not a homely place anymore, it is also because, following the first chapter of this thesis, debt blurs the line between nature and culture by showing how abstract financial products shape and organize what is categorized as Nature. In this context, and especially in the case of Ireland's Tiger economy, the permeant, haunting presence of debt brings to the fore one of Jason Moore's seven cheap things, namely 'cheap money'. By looking at money through the lenses of the capitalist world-ecology we can see that "if modernity is an ecology of power, money binds the ecosystem, and that ecosystem shapes money" (Moore 2017: 26). This further echoes Jason Moore's statement that "Wall-street is a way of organizing nature", which was adapted in the Irish context by Sharea Deckard in her article *IFSC is a way of organizing nature* (2014). Deckard especially looks at how the pharmaceutical, tech and real estate industries managed and shaped natural resources through the financial frenzy of the Celtic Tiger and Post-Crash period. By looking at debt through these specific lenses, we can see how a debt-ridden landscape also becomes a site where the entanglement of various spatial and time scales is made visible:

Cycles of nature into money and then into capital have brought us to this moment in geological history. That's why we need to explore the thing that Columbus desperately wanted to see when he looked at New World natures, which has remained in the background of our account so far, yet without which modern capitalism would be unthinkable: cheap money. (Moore 2017: 72)

In the short story, the power of debt and money to shape and guide the fortune of human and extra human nature becomes particularly evident in the way in which Sarah's house becomes unfit to sustain her primary biological needs. In this respect, the description of the house as a failed financial investment is also underlined by the parallelism with Sarah's lack of credit, epitomized by the cancellation of her credit cards. Contextually,

the erasure of Sarah's bank account positions her life within the house in a ghostly unescapable present, where even the bare minimum survival resources are denied. In this context, we witness the haunting presence of hunger especially. In fact, Sarah only has a spoiled yogurt in the fridge and her body is becoming increasingly skinny: "She ran her wedding finger around the inside of the pot and licked it. Her rings were loose" (Kennedy 2022: 8). Here as well, we see how the reminiscence of the Famine comes back to shed light onto the current present of post-crash Ireland. As highlighted by Buchanan, the frequent juxtaposition of images of the famine with questions of real estate speculation and gentrification underlies the inherent threat posited by Ireland's entrance into the clinks and grids of unfettered global capitalism. While commenting on Donal Ryan's novel *The Spinning Heart* he says:

The ghost estates are the legacy of how the Celtic Tiger was a period of radical disorder in which the nation was battered, both within and without, by the unstable forces of global capitalism. Ryan's text frames rural gentrification as a famine in which ghost estates are emblematic not only of a lost age (that is, of history) but also of a future un-lived. (2017: 65)

Therefore, the progressive decay of Sarah's body, together with the porousness of the house to both past histories, non-human others, and financial debt, shows the unfolding of the current multiple and singular crises of today (Klein 2014) on many scalar levels. The house appears particularly permeable to the "outside", which can be analysed both as a positive and negative aspect. We can observe this aspect especially in the description of the veranda, and of the garden. In the first we read: "He opened the lock and slid it across until it vanished into the wall. The room filled with autumn. The must of leaf mould, the complaints of robins. You could see over Mattie's place and across the glen to the mountain. It was like being outside" (Kennedy 2022: 6). And then: "Terraces of shrubs were growing thickly all the way to the wire fence, the spherical shape the gardener had once imposed on the box trees blurred with new shoots, the lavender silvery and woody and still flowering" (Kennedy 2022: 6). In both passages the generally externalised realm of Nature invades and comes into the domestic space. It does it not just visually, but also molecularly and phonetically by diffusing smells and sounds into the house. These elements echo the role of the donkey within the show house, in fact, they appear to re-fill the void left behind by a future built on the premises of debt. In those passages, the un-homely atmosphere of the house becomes homely again. It is as if they are suggesting a way forward. In the second passage especially, we witness the unbridling

of non-human agency. The garden, a tamed botanical space were plants, trees and shrubs follow imposed patterns, unleashes its spontaneity. In this respect the semantics of austerity and wretchedness that characterize the interior of Sarah's house, are questioned by the opulence and vitality of the flowering garden.

Nonetheless, and on a less positive ground, the porousness of the house also indicates the impossibility of protecting the dwelling place from the external invasion of creditors, voyeurs, and, as in the case of Ryan, strange characters:

Everyone wanted to see the house. Strangers rang the bell on vague pretexts. Selling calendars. Asking for directions. Straining their necks to look into the hall when Sarah opened the door. Walking around the side for a view of the housing estate her husband had thrown up and abandoned to her. (Kennedy 2022: 5)

And moreover:

A car pulled in by the gate of the estate. The driver got out. He had greased back red hair and an off-the-rack suit. He stuck his phone through the railings to take photographs. Before he drove off he made a call, his voice indistinct. He was probably from the bank, or from a firm of solicitors acting for a contractor who was owed money. The reporters had stopped coming, although she feared they would return after the inquest. (Kennedy 2022: 8)

The feeling of being constantly watched enhances the unhomeliness of Sarah's house, since her privacy is constantly disrupted and breached through by strangers. The people who constantly watch Sarah are for the most part unidentified. This aspect enhances the uncanniness of being watched since the source of the gaze is unknown. Nonetheless, these faceless watchers are the anthropomorphic representation of debt, and their constant presence signals the ongoing dismantling of what is left of Sarah's home security. Sarah's house is constantly under siege, which increases the precariousness and the temporary nature of her dwelling place. This further enhances the uncanny feeling provoked by the uncertainty of ownership, and especially by the constant silenced threat of homelessness. In this respect, *The End of the World is a Cul de Sac*, appears akin to the novels analysed by Malcolm Sen in his article *Risk and Refuge: Contemplating Precarity in Contemporary Irish Fiction* (2019), when he says:

Confrontations with the logic of capitalist accumulation and the real estate crisis underwriting the post-Celtic Tiger landscape result in narratives in which terrains and habitability are continually deemed treacherous, and in which everyday life is overshadowed by the precarity of homelessness. The context of these works, although initially personal and national,

broadens to encompass the slow evolution of a precarity that is planetary in scope, ecological in nature but also political in effect. (2019: 15)

Consequently, Sarah's precariousness sheds light both on her life as an indebted subject, but also the skinniness of her body and her lack of food signals the threat of biological human and non-human beings in our times of crisis. In this respect, Sarah's body and house should be read in a multiple entangled way, in which the history of capital is not disjointed from planetary phenomena. In this respect Sen continues:

The visual economy of the ghost estates in particular provides the nomenclature of both recent fiction and critical analyses but I am contending here that the register of spectrality cannot be fully processed or critiqued if these un-inhabited spaces are rendered only as gothic excesses of capitalist accumulation. They may well be, but to see them solely as architectural remnants of an economic crisis is reductive. What might have been fit categories to read the history and literature of the Irish Big House fall short as critical trajectories that explain the ecology of contemporary Irish literature. (2019: 25)

The presence of 'unknown watchers' also points out at the various levels of societal control which Sarah is subject to, as a living being, an indebted person and a woman. The gendered aspect in the story is pivotal for the understanding of the role of women during the Celtic Tiger and after. This brings us back to the permeant presence of fairy beliefs in the plot. In fact, their constant presence within the story becomes not only a connection with deep and recorded histories, but it is also a way of pointing out to the specificities of gender roles in Ireland. In particular, the reference to fairy beliefs sheds light into the diachronic exploitation of women as a source of social reproduction, before, during and after the Celtic Tiger. In this respect, fairy beliefs served as a constant warning and way of controlling women's potentially deviant behaviours and to constrain them into the domestic sphere. It is not a case then that most of the fairy beliefs concerning fairy abduction were related to stories of women which had ventured outside the material, or metaphorical, landscape which societal and religious rules assigned to them. This puts into perspective the long history of exploitation and control over the body and lives of women which has been a pillar of the history of capital (Federici 2018; 2020; 2023). In the historical chapter I widely explored the connection between patriarchal gender roles and the way in which they were carried on through the Celtic Tiger. During the period, the promise of 'equality' and the 'feminization of the work force' (Kennedy 2003), disguised and hid the endurance of patriarchal gender roles, which were particularly evident in the lasting power of the anti-abortionist law. Women's lives were caught in an in-between position, between care work and business. In Sarah's case, this becomes

evident in the way in which her future was already assigned to her. Spatially, her prescribed future is epitomized by the house's boot room: "She had started sleeping in the boot room Davy had built off the kitchen for their sons to use after football training. The arrogance seemed spectacular now; they didn't have sons, or daughters" (2022: 8). The boot room is a connecting space between the inside and the outside of the house, where people can take off their shoes and coats before getting properly inside. In the passage we see how Sarah's future as a mother was unquestionably built as part of the structure of the house. Contextually, we see how Sarah's house epitomizes the link between neoliberal capitalism and patriarchy which are constitutively connected in one single system. The generation of a male offspring, possibly playing soccer, suggests the intergenerational reproduction of patriarchal capitalism through the necessary reproductive work of women (Federici 2018; 2020; 2023). Ultimately it was Sarah's husband Davy, who decided both for her future and the future of their children. Correspondingly, there emerges another parallelism and connection between the house and Sarah's body as a site in which a specific, middle class, domestic and reproductive futurism could be set in place. As Claire Bracken states: "The 'body' that is written in' is in the Irish context, the mother's body, thus figuring a gendered separation between making the future (feminine) and having a future (masculine)" (2022: 7). Nonetheless, Sarah should not be mistaken for or interpreted as a passive victim. In fact, especially in the description of her past life it becomes clear that she accepted and embraced the new, fake prosperity she was exposed to. We can grasp this aspect in her description of a shopping session in New York: "She took out make-up brushes she had bought in Saks on Fifth Avenue – after a boozy lunch, for \$314 – and applied liquids and gels and powders" (Kennedy 2022: 9). Therefore, Sarah had embraced the new 'status quo' brought forward by the Tiger. Sarah's attitude appears to be akin to Catherine Rottenberg's conceptualization of neoliberal feminism in the way in which

By paradoxically and counterintuitively maintaining reproduction as part of 'aspirational' women's normative life trajectory and positing balance as its normative frame and ultimate ideal, neoliberal feminism helps to solve one of neoliberalism's constitutive tensions by maintaining a distinctive and affective lexicomic register of reproductive and care work, and by helping to ensure women desire work-family balance and that all responsibility for reproduction falls squarely on the shoulder of individual women. (2018: 30 epub)

Nonetheless, we never have access to Sarah's desires: did she actually want kids? Does she have any sort of inspiration? What does she like doing? Contextually it appears that

Sarah's future projections were built on the hollowed-out promises of possibilities for choice:

Post-feminist discourse trades on the language of choice buy, choice to shop, choice to groom. Thus, it consistently and routinely puts forward the idea of women's active subjectivity. However, as critics of post-feminism have noted, this subjectivity is an empty one, attempting to cover over capitalism's vigorous and systematic objectification of women and their bodies. (Bracken 2022: 12)

Contextually, Sarah's silence in front of her husband's murky, fraudulent business, can be seen as a passive acceptance of the status quo that took shape during the Celtic Tiger. In this context, as we will see in the next paragraph, the concept of futurity becomes pivotal in the way Sarah challenges her present of stasis and debt by projecting herself into an open-ended future. To do so, she must also let the past surface in order to demystify the passive acceptance of the status quo that she has shown so far.

4.2.2 Re-signifying the haunting, breaching through the cul de sac

At the start of the short story, after finding the donkey, Sarah walks through the countryside towards her neighbour's house, who is also the owner of the donkey. Sarah's departure from the estate recalls the fairy-tale trope of a woman leaving the domestic space assigned to her and therefore exposing herself to some unspeakable danger. When she arrives to the place, instead of finding her neighbour Mattie, she finds his 30-year-old nephew Ryan. Within the story, Ryan's depiction manages to enhance the uncanny and estranging nature of the text in various ways. In fact, as I will explore, Ryan is always placed in-between reality and unreality, in the way in which his behaviours and attitude appear constantly strange and almost paranormal. Especially, Ryan is depicted as both a trickster and the doppelgänger of Sarah's husband. Moreover, through her encounter with Ryan, Sarah will retrace her own recent past and, in this respect, Fuchs says: "a particular occasion for the uncanny is also the encounter with one's self and one's own past, in other words, the phenomenon of the 'double'" (2019: 102). In this context, the time that Sarah will spend with Ryan will prove both disconcerting and revelatory. Contextually this is how their first encounter is described: "The speaker was barely thirty, with a clipped beard and hair brushed to one side. The thin electric light made him look drawn. Did I scare you? he said to her hands. She looked at them. They were trembling" (Kennedy 2022: 2).

In this respect Sarah's encounter with Ryan is permeated by the uncanny in the way described by Fuchs:

Timidity or fearfulness (Bangnis) in the face of the uncanny is bound up with typical bodily feelings, above all with shuddering, quaking or shivering, in which something "cold runs down one's back" or "ruffles one's hair". Our skin and sense of warmth, that is, the sensitive surface of the body, are thus special resonance organs for the uncanny atmosphere. Closely linked to this is intermodal sensory perception, with which the weather or the climate is also perceived. It is for this reason that one also speaks of "feeling", "scenting", or "smelling" the uncanny. (Fuchs 2019: 105)

After having brought the donkey back to his barn, he gives Sarah a lift home. When they arrive to the place Ryan starts to behave as if he was familiar with it, and almost as if it was his own house:

"He moved around the room, taking it in". (...)
"He pulled a face and inclined his head at the Bakelite coffee machine that was plumbed in near the sink. How come I got the cheap shite?". (...)
"He followed her in and opened the fridge". (Kennedy 2022: 5-7)

Firstly, Ryan's invasion of Sarah's private space aligns with the porosity and vulnerability of her dwelling site in the face of the threats posited by debt and austerity measures. Moreover, Ryan's attitude around the house estranges the reader, it makes her question the credibility of what she is reading, leaving her in a perpetual state of uncertainty. In this respect, Ryan's character is akin to Bracken's description of Lehiff in the movie *Intermission* (2003), especially when she says that the character "operates throughout the film as a symbol of undeterminable change, and unpredictable gangster that refuses to adhere the law" (2022: 3). More specifically, Ryan's character is adjacent to the archetypical figure of the trickster, which enhances the reminiscence of fairy beliefs within the story. Tricksters can be defined in many ways. They appear to be "the enemy of borders, he refuses the narrow frame of definition" (Bassil-Morozow 2013: 30); "the trickster has a dualistic nature in that he contains binary oppositions within himself as he can be both good and evil" (Elif 2018: 31); the trickster is also a shapeshifter and "the demonic incarnation of liminality, ambivalence and paradox" (Keohane and Kuhling 2014: xii). Tricksters are archetypes present in a huge variety of different cultures, and it is therefore difficult to give a unified definition (Bassil-Morozow 2013; Elif 2018). Moreover, tricksters change their role and shape depending on historical contexts. Contextually, in neoliberal times the trickster has been analysed as an agent of continuous unpredictable change and precarity. This is particularly true in Ireland's neoliberal present

(Keohane and Kuhling 2014). In the context of Ireland's folklore beliefs, the figure of the trickster is generally represented by what is known as 'the pooka' or 'púca'. The púca is described as a cunning trickster, finding joy in sowing confusion and fear among those it encounters. Despite this mischievous nature, it is also acknowledged for providing advice and guidance, albeit in a cryptic and enigmatic manner. One prevalent tale involves the Púca assuming the guise of a horse to entice an unwitting traveller into riding on its back. Once the rider is aboard, the Púca takes them on a wild and terrifying journey through the night, only to return them safely to their starting point by dawn, leaving them shaken but unharmed by the experience (2021 online). Contextually Ryan's character could be considered as a modern, contemporary version of the Irish Púca. Especially, he decides to bring Sarah out for dinner without waiting for her answer or approval. At seven in the evening, he parks in front of her house and waits for her to get into the car. The following scene is described as:

He had arrived in a silver convertible with leather seats. (...) Where are we going? I'm taking you for a spin. I'll have you home before midnight. The short stretch of dual carriageway narrowed into a road without verges. They passed wooden crosses, sometimes alone, sometimes in twos and threes, that marked the sites of fatal crashes. He drove fast, even on hairpin bends where most drivers would have braked, his left hand splayed on the gearstick, fingers flexing and tensing, the rush doing something almost kinetic to him. He turned left at a derelict filling station and drove a couple of miles down a gentle hill. He parked behind a line of cars at a lakeside pub. (Kennedy 2022: 11)

In this respect, both the drive to the pub and the entire evening that Sarah spends with Ryan appear akin to the Púca's attitude to bring their chosen victim for an unsettling ride. Moreover, the scene takes place at nighttime, during which according to Elizabeth Bronfen, "in contrast to its appearance in daylight, the world surrounding us is harder to characterize; it shifts between the familiar and the unfamiliar" (Bronfen 2008: 51). As a modern version of the Púca archetype Ryan resembles both what we have identified as "petromasculinity" in the previous chapter, and the risks posited by neoliberal risk society and debt culture. Contextually, what appears quite striking in the story is both Ryan's attitude as an unquestioned decision maker, and Sarah's passive acceptance towards his behaviours. Especially, when sitting at the dinner table Ryan orders for both of them, without asking Sarah:

He ordered dinner for them both, the most expensive dishes on the menu. Buttered Dublin Bay prawns with garlic chives. Organic fillet steak, well done. Sarah asked the waitress if she could have hers medium rare. (...) She'll have a glass of red with the beef, he said. Sarah tried to put aside the feeling he had taken charge of her. The food was good, the wine not bad

either. It was nice to sit at a table in a restaurant. She'd had worse nights. (Kennedy 2022: 12)

Sarah's passive behaviour towards Ryan's decision making is a reflection of her precarious state, especially epitomized by panging hunger, which gives her a limited margin for choice: "Hunger was hard to conceal when there was food in front of you. (...) When their plates were cleared, Sarah leaned back and smiled. Her belly was quiet for the first time in weeks" (Kennedy 2022: 12). In this context, hunger comes again not only to represent the threats of high dependency posited by Ireland's neoliberal regime, but also the increased vulnerability of that share of the population which has been left behind by the Tiger economic policies. At the same time, Sarah's apparent lack of agency is also a reflection of the austerity measures put in place after the crash, which completely overstepped the public consensus, portraying it as unnecessary and possibly useless (McGlynn 2022). At the same time, Sarah's passivity echoes her attitude towards her ex-husband Davy. This aspect is oftentimes repeated in the story:

Ryan pulled in beside a dome of polished granite that had been sandblasted with the words HAWTHORN CLOSE in a Celtic font that Sarah had thought at the time might tempt fate. Not that she had told Davy so. (...)

What's the story with your house? he said.
The bank is trying to sell it.
How's that going?
How do you think?
Why did you build the estate so close to your own place?
Davy was in trouble. He thought he could turn the development around fast, generate some cash flow.
Ryan gave a short laugh. He was in trouble, all right. What did you think?
I thought it would look ugly. That it was a huge risk. But he didn't ask me.
But you didn't say anything?
I'm the kind of girl men order dinner for, she said. (Kennedy 2022: 3-15)

Moreover, Ryan's appears as a doppelgänger of Sarah's husband in many ways. Especially, Davy was himself a trickster of neoliberal globalization as identified by Keohane and Kuhling:

he is a two-faced friend who turns on those who thought they were his masters and savages them, just as global neoliberalism and our own local development strategy we thought would give us prosperity and security and we assured ourselves we were in control of, now turns on us and tears us apart. (2015: 2)

And furthermore:

We are now living through catastrophic market failure caused by financial wizardry and bankers' tricky deals and pyramid housing schemes, and some of our local tricksters, Charlie,

Bertie and their developer friends, have, as Trickster typically does, slipped away quietly from the scene of disaster. (2015: 24)

Contextually, if Sarah's past acceptance of Davy's behaviour could be analysed under the light of neoliberal feminism's false promise for choice, Ryan's acting as a decision maker further emphasizes the actual lack of choices posited under neoliberalism at large. In this context, Sarah's lack of choice sheds light on neoliberalism's false claim of gender equality, showing instead how the neoliberal present gains from the re-establishment of heteronormative patriarchal gender roles. In this context, Margaret O'Neill says:

With the return to the domestic ideal in the Great Recession, wherein under neoliberalism women's and men's roles are strategically redefined under the false premise that equality has been achieved, it is possible to identify reworkings of Victorian domestic gothic as a mode of articulating the experience of the financial crises and entrapment in the home. (2021: 65)

And moreover:

This further speaks to the Gothicized nature of the text, as it moves into a darker world. In this manner, these texts draw attention to the gendered division of labour and the violence inflicted by unequal power relations in recession era homes and society more widely. (2021: 65)

Contextually, the prescribed futurity that neoliberal Celtic Tiger Ireland had lined up for Sarah, a reproductive futurity, also envisioned an escape route for her husband Davy. This aspect points to how the austerity measures of the recession years fell more heavily on the shoulders of women, the working class, and marginalized people. Therefore:

By looking at women in the socio-economic climate of Ireland during and after the Celtic Tiger, we are able to see that neo-colonial outcomes create another form of the disappeared: the living "bodies" of those who have been forgotten in Ireland's quest to modernise at unsustainable rates. (Gladwin 2016: 199)

Moreover, Sarah's night with Ryan and the reminiscence of both her husband and her past life can be analysed under the light of involuntary repetition, which enhances Sarah's present immobility: "The feelings of helplessness and drift these distracted perambulations inspire locate the uncanny as a spatial and temporal resting-point which never allows us to advance, and yet which never allows us to stand comfortably still" (Brewster 2008: 114). Nonetheless, Sarah's passive behaviour is challenged by her decision to move from the marital bedroom into the boot room. As I explored earlier, the boot room represented the site into which Sarah's reproductive futurity was inscribed.

Therefore, the boot room both points out to Sarah's life as an individual and more in general at the hidden reproductive work of women which is a pillar of the capitalist world-ecology. Nonetheless, it should not be forgotten that in our neoliberal era a good share of care work is externalised through the cheap work of migrant women and men, working class and marginalized people (Rottenberg 2018). Therefore, Sarah decides to move into the boot room, and she says:

The morning, they found the body, Sarah had abandoned the master bedroom and dragged a mattress downstairs. Now she lay every night under the high shallow window with the white blind. There were grey stone slabs on the floor. The modular shelving that ran along one wall was empty. It resembled a clinic you saw on television where rich women went to lose weight or go mad. (Kennedy 2022: 8)

Contextually it stands out how, contrary to Sarah's passive attitude throughout the story, the only time she opposes to someone's proposition is when Ryan asks her:

Did you ever hear of tidying your room?
It isn't my room anymore. I sleep in a room off the kitchen.
Do you want to go downstairs?
No. There was something vestal about the boot room. She didn't want to bring a man in there, especially this man, who was moving around the house as if he owned the place. (Kennedy 2022: 16-17)

By saying no to Ryan, Sarah defends her own space and declares her own agency. It is important to notice how the boot room is a liminal area of the house, posited between the outside and the inside. Therefore, the spatiality of the place signals Sarah's liminal state, her inter-world position in which she is now metaphorically able to re-signify her own future.

Nonetheless, Sarah's decision to move into the boot room is not the only liberating act that she has to go through in order to imagine a different future for herself. In this context, if Sarah's future was already prescribed, her past, especially her recent one, is widely silenced within the story, is a buried, unspeakable memory. Therefore, Sarah's past, and especially the events that revolve around Hawthorn Close Estate, are just mentioned in brief glimpses which infuse a constant sense of uncertainty into the reader. Especially, we get unsettling, sparse information such as: "The morning they found the body, Sarah had abandoned the master bedroom and dragged a mattress downstairs" (Kennedy 2022: 8). This brief mention of a found body is not followed by any explanation

until the very last page of the story. Resultingly, this image haunts the rest of the narrative, leaving the reader wondering what had really happened. Sarah's unwillingness to face her past also mirrors her passivity and quiet acceptance of both her husband and Ryan's behaviours. This is where the trickster characteristics of Ryan are put in place. As previously explored, a trickster and especially the Irish Púca, tends to teach their victims through cryptical means. In this respect, the threat posited by Ryan is an apparent one. In fact, if Ryan is a modern version of an Irish Púca, then the last stream of confession by Sarah appears more as a trickster's cryptic teaching. In fact, although Sarah recalls reading about Mattie's nephew's alleged involvement in criminal activities, the person she has in front could as well be a shape-shifting trickster. If Ryan really wanted Sarah to give him the money Davy owed him, why didn't he try to find her in the first place? The fact that Sarah seeks him out rather than the other way around raises doubts about Ryan's intentions, particularly regarding the money owed to him by Davy. In this respect, the character of Ryan constantly calls into question the barrier between reality and unreality, as well as the familiarity of a human body with the strange familiarity of a shape shifter. Contextually, we could also interpret the night that Ryan and Sarah spend together as an unreal litmus test of her own reality governed by a complete adherence to the status quo. In this respect, all the short story plays on the fine edge between what is real and what is not, what is familiar and what is un-familiar, between what belongs to the world of the living and the world of the dead. Also, space and time scales reinforce this reading, because, as we've seen, Sarah's house is depicted as a liminal space, and she herself appears as a liminal, undead character. This liminal space, the space of the uncanny is the favoured place for long due revelations. Also, the fact that the scene is set in nighttime enhances this revelatory liminality. In this context Bronfen says: "the night requires a higher degree of vigilance than the day, its darkness affords revelations (...) for seeing in one's dreams things one's conscious mind would censor during the day" (Bronfen 2018: 51). This becomes especially evident during the last section of the story. Once they are back at Sarah's, Ryan confesses his real identity: he is a gangster who is looking for the money that Davy owes him. And at that point, Sarah in a fit of fear just tells Ryan her whole story:

She had persuaded Lizzie, her sister, to buy Number 7. Davy said if they got one family in, the estate would fill up in no time, it had happened with the other developments. He knocked ten grand off the price and threw in geothermal heating that never worked; they had only dug deep enough to disturb a nest of rats. By the end Sarah was hardly sleeping, Davy beside her with his laptop on, chopping out powder in Morse-like dashes on the bedside table.

Sometimes he watched porn, turning to her for rough, jittery sex that never brought either of them to climax. The sitting-room light in Number 7 stayed on through every night, and every night Sarah wanted to knock the door and say how sorry she was. One night the light went out just after three. When dawn gave up the silhouette in the fairy tree she knew it was Eoin, a steadiness about him even in death, in the pendular swing of him. Davy ripped the fairy tree from the ground the day of the funeral. He said the bad luck had already come. Sarah watched him operate the JCB and remembered who they were. (Kennedy 2022: 18)

In the narrative, Sarah undergoes a significant transformation, in which she confronts and articulates everything that she had suppressed and kept hidden during the story, and that she had normalised in her past. This act of verbalization enables her to visualize, critically analyse, and ultimately exorcise these internalized issues. The cathartic process facilitates a reimagining of her future, possibly free from the constraints imposed by neoliberal and patriarchal paradigms. The conclusion of the story distinctly contrasts with its beginning and the connotations of its title, both of which suggest entrapment and limitation. The narrative culminates in a sense of openness and possibility, as evidenced by Sarah's final reflections. As the story progresses from the claustrophobia implied by the title's "cul-de-sac," towards an ending imbued with hope and potential, Sarah articulates her vision for a future that diverges from her past: "Lines had begun to crackle across the yellow plaster of the houses; the roadway appeared sunken, even where there was pavement, the gardens too. Another day was breaking over Hawthorn Close" (2022: 19). The concluding part of the story illustrates how Sarah's world is metaphorically 'crackling' and 'sinking,' signifying the breakdown of the passive acceptance that once anchored her to its restrictive norms. This symbolic rupture in the narrative's final passage metaphorically breaks the dead-end fate represented by the 'cul de Sac,' thereby opening up the possibility of new, divergent futures. Both *Nothing on Earth* and *The End of the World is a Cul de Sac* explore this theme, albeit in different ways, suggesting a potential future beyond the confines of patriarchal and capitalist frameworks.

In conclusion, this chapter examines two novels set within domestic spaces, particularly within ghost estates. The domestic setting in these works serves as an ideal backdrop for the emergence of the uncanny. Traditionally viewed as a cornerstone of bourgeois life and as a self-contained entity disconnected from external influences, the house becomes permeable and vulnerable to the intrusion of outside forces. In the two analysed texts, ghost estates function as sites where the aftermath of the Celtic Tiger's economic collapse, environmental crises, and gender discourses converge. Within this context, the house

transforms into an inhospitable, unhomely space, no longer capable of sustaining the lives of those who reside within its walls.

Throughout the chapter, the framework of Uncanny Realism has proven effective in highlighting the complex and multifaceted ways in which these domestic spaces become estranging, unfamiliar, and unwelcoming. First, the ghost estates encapsulate numerous historical recurrences, such as the Irish Big House, the Great Famine, and the more recent rise and fall of the Celtic Tiger. Furthermore, the portrayal of houses as confined and confining spaces offers insights into the deep connections between the history of the Capitalocene and patriarchal structures. The depiction of women in these texts opens avenues for reflecting on reproductive labour, a central yet often invisible pillar of capitalist world-ecology. In *Nothing on Earth*, for instance, the disappearance of characters symbolizes the erasure of those engaged in reproductive labour within capitalist systems. Additionally, the ghost estates invoke historical echoes of the patriarchal regime in Ireland, exemplified by the "architecture of confinement" seen in institutions like the Magdalene Laundries and Mother and Baby Homes. Uncanny Realism also helps illuminate the scalar dimensions of the household, underscoring how these domestic spaces are part of a larger planetary network that sustains life on Earth. This interconnectedness is evident in both novels, where a stark scarcity of resources—water, food, and electricity—reflects the depletion of the "four cheaps" (Moore 2018), which are foundational to capitalist world-ecology. This theme of exhaustion generates what I term 'clusters of the uncanny,' disrupting the assumption that these resources are limitless and creating a sense of profound defamiliarization.

In this regard, the ghost estates in the novels function as uncanny, unsettling objects. Similarly, in *Nothing on Earth*, dust and heat emerge as two additional uncanny elements, both of which blur the boundaries between inside and outside, and between nature and culture, while navigating across various scales. The novel also features a dramatic scalar upheaval, especially in its portrayal of the main characters. Their disappearance represents a transgression of human-centred, teleological conceptions of time and space, allowing the characters to transcend their human limitations and become part of what Morton terms "the mesh." The novel's distorted sense of time reinforces this theme. Both *Nothing on Earth* and *The End of the World is a Cul de Sac* offer visions of a possible future that transcends patriarchal and capitalist structures.

Finally, both texts display a high degree of narrative hybridity, particularly through the use of gothic tropes. *The End of the World is a Cul de Sac* also blends modern and pre-

modern belief systems, as seen in its depiction of fairy forts and trees. The exploration of non-secular themes, which will be addressed in greater detail in the following chapter, adds further depth to these works.

5. Infrastructures, urbanization and otherworldly presences in *The Devil I Know* by Claire Kilroy, and *Solar Bones* by Mike McCormack

This chapter builds upon the previous one, not only by addressing similar themes related to real estate development during periods of financial neoliberalism but also by deepening the exploration of the undead entities discussed in Chapter Four. While Chapter Four examined characters who interact with otherworldly entities or exist on the threshold of death, this chapter shifts the focus to protagonists who are unequivocally deceased. From this point of view, the protagonists benefit from an ability to perceive the whole and “they are given a privileged insight into capital’s disasters” (Deckard 2017: 97). Moreover, in Derrida’s terms, spectres are able to provoke deep critical reflections during times of crisis; therefore, the living should always listen and keep in touch with them (1994). In this regard, the deceased status of the protagonists creates “not so much a difference in type as in scale” (McGlynn 2022: 137), thereby challenging the normalized time-space coordinates of the capitalist world-ecology by engaging with different temporal and spatial scales. This approach allows for the contemplation of deep time and deep future, as well as the incorporation of non-human agencies within the narrative. Relatedly, the persistent presence of the otherworld parallels the depiction of real estate and infrastructure development, thereby enacting an uncanny unworlding that occurs simultaneously with the construction of yet another component of the capitalist world-ecology. According to Chakrabarty the more intensely we exploit the earth to achieve widespread human prosperity, the more we come into direct contact with the planet (2021: 90), and this encounter therefore engenders the process of outscaling and border collapse that Morton identifies with the end of the world. Moreover, if we follow anthropologist Mayanthi Fernando, the current phase of capitalogenic environmental disaster should be recognized also from a non-secular point of view, in which “uncanny ecologies” emerge, which give space to both natural and supernatural entities (2022). This discussion tackles various intertwined scales.

Firstly, infrastructure development should be conceptualized as a dynamic process of continual restructuring, in which anthropogenic activities unfold within the broader web of life. In this framework, both human and non-human entities play integral roles in the process of world-building, a phenomenon that has been intertwined with capitalist world-ecology over the past five centuries. Consequently, the processes of urbanization

and infrastructure development serve as mechanisms of both "exploitation and improvement" (McGlynn 2022: 108). Within this context, essential human needs, such as housing, water, and food provision, are intricately managed through financial imperatives and economic adjustments (Crowley & Linehan 2016). This aspect could be further complicated by Schmid and Brenner's idea of "planetary urbanization" which challenges common understandings of urban spaces by theorizing urbanization as "not as a single encompassing urban process, but rather as a complex interplay of related but contradictory processes marked by the uneven development of capitalism as well as by manifold, specific social and political determinations" (Schmid 2018: 576). A pivotal contribution to this discussion, about urban, non-urban and urbanizing places was given by Chris Otter's theory of the Technosphere, which sheds light on the complex network of infrastructures which spread at a local, national and global level, consequently affecting planetary dynamics. Otter describes the Technosphere as:

(...) cities have become so networked and dispersed that we might plausibly reconceptualize the urban as the technosphere, an entirely artificialized environment, a hyperobject within which most of the world's human beings increasingly live. The technosphere is the sum total of all the earth's physical infrastructure. The city, in contrast, refers to specific areas of the technosphere whose physical density, history and individuality produce and sustain unique, and attractive, cultural characteristics. (...) The technosphere is powered by fossil fuels, which sustain its transportation systems, housing, office complexes, food systems, water supply, heating, air-conditioning and electronic devices. The repeated use and collective interaction of these devices and systems has created a new ecological niche for human beings and a disposition towards high energy use, carbon emissions and other forms of pollution. (2017: 146)

The Technosphere gives a nuanced and complex explanation of the interactions between humans and non-humans, and of the way in which anthropic activities have brought about environmental disaster. Moreover, the Technosphere, by encompassing the large network of buildings and infrastructures which spread across the world, help problematize the concept of the urban by considering traditionally non-urban places as also a specific manifestation of the Technosphere:

The technosphere covers the planet, albeit unevenly. It is densest in the global north, but its characteristic qualities make themselves felt, in one form or another, everywhere. It has geological and climatic effects: it is responsible, for example, for moving more solid materials over greater distances and at faster speeds than any natural processes except sediment transportation in rivers. (2017: 151)

The concept becomes increasingly intricate due to Otter's characterization of the Technosphere as a hyperobject, thereby encapsulating temporal scales that diverge

significantly from those familiar to human experience. Consequently, and particularly in light of the Technosphere's association with environmental degradation, it is pertinent to acknowledge that its impacts on the planet will extend far beyond their immediate aesthetic manifestations. Accordingly, when contemplating the development of the Technosphere, it is crucial to consider its profound connections to both deep past and deep future. David Farrier explores this idea through his examination of "future fossils" (2020). Farrier uses the term "future fossils" to describe the lasting physical remnants of our current world that will persist far into the future, long after human activity has ceased. These remnants include everything from plastic waste to urban infrastructure, and they serve as enduring markers of the Anthropocene. "Future fossils" encapsulate the idea that our current environmental footprint will be fossilized, leaving a permanent record of our existence and the environmental transformations we have caused. According to Farrier: "Humans now move more sediment on an annual basis than all the world's rivers combined, around forty-five gigatons, increasing the likelihood that traces of us, including the roads themselves, will be buried and preserved as future fossils" (2020: Kobo version 85). This aspect echoes also the idea of 'environmental indebtedness'. In fact, capitalist and neoliberal practices have incurred significant environmental costs that future generations will have to address in various ways. Although the economic implications of environmental indebtedness are substantial, the more profound effects will be the displacement of people and communities, as well as an increase in vulnerability and inequalities. Consequently, the future, which is a crucial aspect of life, becomes so uncertain that people find themselves trapped in a precarious, death-like present where every action must be meticulously planned. Moreover, the physical effects of climate change on people's bodies further undermines the nature-culture binary by showing that there is no degree of separation between human and non-human especially in a time of increased intimacy, as stated by Morton. In this respect, Chakrabarty says:

(...) the inhabitants of New Delhi and Beijing know all too well—when inflamed lungs and sinuses prove once again that there is no difference between the without and the within; between using and being used. These too are moments of recognition, in which it dawns on us that the energy that surrounds us, flowing under our feet and through wires in our walls, animating our vehicles and illuminating our rooms, is an all-encompassing presence that may have its own purposes about which we know nothing. (2016: 10)

These discussions prove to be particularly useful when analysing works written in Ireland especially during and after the Celtic Tiger in which, following Keohane and Kuhling the

urban, rural, infrastructural and natural have collided. Dublin as a city, the centre of financial transactions and political activity, is as much part of the Technosphere as the water system which runs through the entire country. The Celtic Tiger and the economic crash reshaped local and national geographies:

The geographies of boom and bust mark the landscape. The boom is represented in the spectacles of construction and motorway expansion, the housing bubble, and the significant regeneration and transformation of the built environment and public space. The bust is represented in ghost estates, zombie hotels, half-empty trophy airport terminals, vacated retail units and the cars of emigrants for sale along country roads. (Crowley & Linehan 2016: 8)

Especially related to the Celtic Tiger is the management of financial products as a way of reorganizing and managing the land in terms of new frontier expansions, and primary accumulation. Here, finance should be understood as a nature-culture entity (Van Aken 2020), which spreads across the biological, political, economic, and personal spectrum. As Deckard says:

(...) what is crucial to a macro-ecological understanding of Ireland's role in the world-ecology is the inextricability of its financial role as a tax haven and secrecy jurisdiction zone from its environmental function as a semi-peripheral pollution and water haven. We can adapt Jason W. Moore's slogan that "Wall Street...becomes a way of organizing all of nature, characterized by the financialization of any income-generating activity" (Moore 2011b: 39) to say that the "IFSC is a way of organizing nature," with pernicious consequences for water, energy, and food systems in Ireland. (2016: 158)

In the two novels under analysis, the focus on world-building and infrastructure - exemplified by the real estate industry in the first and engineering plans in the second - is continually counterbalanced by the haunting presence of underworld creatures. Both protagonists inhabit a liminal space between life and death, symbolizing the breaking of the boundary between the realms of the living and of the dead. While the novels previously examined depict blurred boundaries between life and death, this theme is particularly accentuated in *Solar Bones* and *The Devil I Know*, becoming the central crux of their narratives. In the novels, the haunting, uncanny presence of undead and otherworldly entities, help question the accepted narrative of the Celtic Tiger as a prosperous time by exposing its vampiric nature. This otherworldly imagery "eviscerates the images and iconography of the Celtic Tiger" (Crowley & Linehan 2016: 1). The dismantling of the Celtic Tiger narrative after the crash:

(...) represented not only the decline of a certain economic model but also the disintegration of the powerful national narrative that imagined the State as a perpetual growth machine. The State's self-congratulatory story of its exemplary success, and with it the international community's portrayal of Ireland as a role model for globalisation, has imploded. (Crowley & Linehan 2016: 2)

In this context, the underground was always conceived of as a functional place which should preserve a pristine, coherent image of the surface (Lidsky 2022). Moreover, if: "as man-made spaces, all mechanisms shaping life above are mirrored underground" (Lidsky 2022), the underground becomes an integral part of the capitalist world-ecology which is both extremely necessary for the construction of the first and also hidden from sight. Furthermore, the underground – especially in its far depths, addressed questions of deep time, allowing for an envisioning of different temporal perspectives. In addition, the underground allows for the resurfacing of the supernatural. In fact, the underground is inhabited by various entities – spirits, gods, and souls (Punter 2008: 5), which were traditionally suppressed by a normalized modern worldview:

Modern conceptions of humanity were based on a simultaneous distinction with—and mastery over—both “natural” and “supernatural” worlds, and modern man emerged as Man by disentangling himself (and I use this gendered pronoun purposefully) from both nature and supernature. (Fernando 2022: 569)

In this context, the underworld, understood as a negative space relative to capitalist dynamics, represents all that is concealed and suppressed by the status quo, represented in this case by the Celtic Tiger narrative. It serves as an uncanny space of doubling where non-human spaces and temporalities are channelled, starkly contrasting with the temporal flattening characteristic of the neoliberal regime (Fisher 2014). In some respects, the underground becomes a space for imagining a beyond, which is perpetually negated from a capitalist-realist perspective:

Like capitalism, both the Anthropocene and secularity (not as antireligion but as modernist reality) feel inevitable, impossible to dislodge or even imagine beyond. But if the secular age is premised on human mastery of a knowable universe, and if the Anthropocene is the direct result of that kind of thinking, would not a rethinking of human mastery that many believe necessary to a post-Anthropocene world necessarily entail a rethinking of its secularity as well? (Fernando 2022: 569)

At the same time, ghostly, and un-worldly entities are also a medium through which it becomes possible to explore past histories, especially relative to the Capitalocene, in the country. Therefore, the boundaries between past, present and future are blurred, and the

three dimensions mesh together defeating a neoliberal, linear teleological perspective. Consequently, the management of time within the novels is carried out through circular and reticular structures which systematically dismantle the normalised capitalist understanding of time on which our world is based (Cheah 2016).

Therefore, the novels use narrative techniques that go beyond linear realism, mirroring the intricate interaction between the visible infrastructure and the concealed underworld. These elements embody the concept of Uncanny Realism by portraying undead entities and an underworld that is both familiar and strange. This juxtaposition with the surface world creates a sense of being caught between the realms of the living and the dead, generating a feeling of in-betweenness that closely aligns with the end-of-the-world themes discussed in the first chapter. Moreover, both novels delve into both deep past and deep future, engendering an outscaling of both time and place which skews the narrative.

5.1 *The Devil I Know*: finance, hellish creatures, ghost estates and historical recurrences

The Devil I Know by Claire Kilroy was published in 2012 by Faber and Faber. This novel could be seen as a 'bridge' between the previous chapter and the present one, since it is equally concerned with both domestic spaces and their role within financially driven urbanization and real-estate speculation. Nonetheless, I decided to situate *The Devil I Know* within this chapter because of its central commitment to a critique of the construction frenzy during the Celtic Tiger, and its focus on both historical recurrence and the restructuring of the double internality through various phases of capitalist accumulation. The novel tells the story of Tristram Amory St Lawrence, the thirteenth Earl of Howth. Tristram, during his long absence from Dublin, was saved from a near death experience by a mysterious character called Mr. Deauville, who volunteers to be Tristram's sponsor at alcoholics anonymous to help him out of the spiral of alcohol and drugs into which Tristram has fallen. Mr. Deauville communicates only through phone line and never appears in person during the novel. In this respect, Tristram, who is a polyglot and interpreter, starts to work as a mediator for Mr. Deauville's murky financial businesses all over the world. Once back in Dublin, Tristram himself becomes involved in the suspicious financial endeavours of a former school mate of his, Desmond Hickey. Mr. Deauville then decides to join the business sensing a good potential for profit. From that point on, the novel follows the waves of the construction frenzy in Ireland registering its excesses and its ultimate majestic failure.

From a formal point of view, the novel fits the criteria of Uncanny Realism in the way it systematically defies the borders of literary realism. Consequently, the purported mimesis of the narrative is constantly called into question by way of its formal and thematical structure. Specifically, the novel plays with several time and space scales thus engendering in the reader that uncanny feeling of being out scaled which I discussed in the first chapter. Moreover, the novel depicts the exhaustion of cheap money which creates an uncanny, spectral relationship between the abstract means of financial speculation and the land. The latter in fact, is modelled, disrupted, and exploited through the financial lead real-estate speculation of the boom, which also signals a contiguity between a colonial management of the land and the current moment. In this respect, although the novel mostly describes striking images of cranes, diggers, concrete,

plumbing systems, and glass walls, it also gives space to images of overgrown bushes, trees, gorse, flowers, and ivy. The latter figures as a negative space of resistance where a connection with time and space scales, different from capitalist ones, is possible. As I will further explore, those images break through the narrative of forced urbanization by producing a space of both displacement and possibility.

From the point of view of its formal structure, Kilroy's novel merges a thick stratum of literary realism with tropes coming from several literary genres, especially the gothic novel, the big house novel, and satire, along with Faustian overtones. In this respect, to stress the significance of subverting literary realism in order to channel the novel's focus on financial speculation and debt culture, Flannery says:

The generic promiscuity evident in Kilroy's narrative, then, is consistent with McClanahan's assessment of why and how the conventions of linear realist narration are limited in or, even inadequate to, reckoning with the individual's experience of the recent global financial crises and the impacts of acute exposure to insuperable indebtedness. (2022: 142)

In this introductory section I'll unpack some of the formal features of the novel which act against linear literary realism. The novel's literary realism is disrupted through continuous intertextual references to other genres and forms to the extent that McGlynn says that in the novel "the uncanny becomes the intertextual" (2022:185). Starting from the novel's realist stratum, we could say that it puts in place a sort of fake realism, which firstly involves its space-time setting. In this respect, the main setting of the novel, Dublin and the Howth peninsula is an easily recognizable spatial reference. Nonetheless, as I will explore later, the novel dives into spatial visions which overcome national borders, especially emphasising the nexus between space and finance, where the second is seen as a way of modelling space through abstract patterns of buying and selling. Moreover, although the novel was published in 2012 it is actually set in 2016, four years after its publication, therefore performing a speculative dive into the future in order to project the events during the one-hundred-year anniversary of the Easter Rising. Consequently, if time setting and structure is pivotal within literary realism, Kilroy's decision to set the novel within four years after its publication produces a speculative twist which from the start defamiliarizes the reader in their identification with the events narrated. This is further enhanced by the circular temporality of the novel which starts with an epigraph taken from Joyce's *Finnegans' Wake* which is repeated in the final section. Scholars such

as Eóin Flannery (2022) and Mary McGlynn (2022) highlighted this aspect as a sign of the centrality of historical recurrence in the novel. It signals the recurrency and cyclicality of capitalist cycles, tightening the historical nexus between a former agent of capitalist accumulation, namely the Irish landed gentry, and the current cohort of financial speculators. This uncanny connection is repeated through the novel in many ways which I will explore further, as well as through the juxtaposition of Tristram's castle and Hickey's development project, and through the modality of conquer and control of the land. As Mary McGlynn aptly notices: "The accumulated intertexts work to resist the relentless pressure of the present, providing history and grounding in opposition to neoliberalism's present" (2022:185). Therefore, it is pivotal to stress how historical recurrence lies at the core of the narrative structure, thus creating a spiral vortex which appears seemingly unescapable. In this respect, the choice of setting the narrative in 2016 it's not a coincidence. In fact, by stressing the celebration of one hundred years from the revolutionary event which culminated with Ireland's War of Independence (1919-1921) and subsequent establishment of the Free State (1922), Kilroy posits questions on whether that gained freedom lasted over the years or, as she states in the novel: "We were more than ever a colonised nation" (Kilroy 2012: 232).

Moreover, the novel employs as its main narrative structure the court trial, during which Tristram is interrogated over the course of ten days by an old acquaintance named Ferguson. Each chapter corresponds to one "Day of evidence", and every subchapter corresponds to one question posited by Ferguson. Consequently, the court trial structure sets the rhythm to the text, by way of constantly projecting the narratorial expectations of the reader onto the next question that Ferguson will ask Tristram. Moreover, for the purpose of literary realism and reliability, the form of the court trial gives a strong base of trustworthiness to the text. In this respect, the court trial represents the juridical system, the State and therefore the site of centralized power. Nonetheless, the novel constantly disrupts this resemblance of reality. In fact, we learn that the interrogation is part of a dead-end trial which more than anything resembles a shallow fact checking rather than an actual judicial procedure which could lead to the conviction of the culprit. On top of that, it becomes clear that the same people who are interrogating Tristram are themselves involved in the events spotlighted, which addresses the same unreliability of the State and juridical system within a global neoliberal economy, where financial and state powers are strictly tied in a relationship of co-dependence (Moore 2020: 85-86). Consequently, the

narrative device of the court trial becomes a place of uncanny defamiliarization, which defies the possible narrative reliability of the novel, and more broadly of the system itself. As I will explore later, the court trial also addresses the centrality of affects such as guilt and shame which Eóin Flannery sees as the main affective consequences of the crash. Moreover, the trial's concern with past histories enhances historical recurrence, and signals the resurfacing of the past despite the desire to hide it from view. In this respect, Eoin Flannery says:

As with any trial, the narrative is haunted by events from the past, the narrative is, then, a reckoning with previous choices made and actions committed by Tristram St Lawrence. Furthermore, the trial gives Kilroy the opportunity to address directly, or to allude to, issues such as trust, truth, responsibility and naturally guilt. (2022: 143)

Furthermore, as noticed by both Flannery and Ferguson, the novel plays with the typographic use of blank spaces and short sentences, which contributes to further complicate time structure while at the same time giving to the author and to the reader a space wherein to explore “the unknown and metaphysical darkness of the characters’ subject position” (Ferguson 2016: 69).

In addition, the novel's realism is constantly breached through the use of Faustian and gothic tropes which enhance the novel's spectral character, in the way they constantly blur the line between life and death. As I will further explore later, the main question that runs through the entire novel is whether Tristram is dead or alive, and the same goes for its spectral, mysterious sponsor, Mr Deauville, whose uncanniness is further implemented by the fundamental uncertainty regarding his identity. In this context, the un-dead quality of the two characters is achieved through the device of a Faustian-like narrative which subtly waves within the text. In this respect, as noticed by Ferguson, the Faustian narrative of the text further complicates the time frame of the novel “by subverting the capitalist tautology 'time is money' through the concept of the Faustian bargain” (2016:61). Moreover, as I will further explore, the blurring of life-death border situates the novel in a liminal place of uncertainty which constantly necessitates a negotiation between mimesis and estrangement. Furthermore, the blurring of the life-death border further complicates the notion of time and space scales, out-scaling the present tense of neoliberal capitalism by projecting us onto the skewed time frame of the undead. The uncanniness of the novel is also enhanced by the gothic presence of Tristram's castle, which both

functions as derelict reliquiae of a long-gone power, namely the big-house, and a space of uncanny haunting especially due to the presence of ghosts within its walls (Tristam's old servant Larney is discovered to be a ghost by the end of the story). In addition, Kilroy breaks the surface of realism by also employing a sharp satiric style which especially peaks during the description of the character's masculinity. This goes hand in hand with the strong masculine character of the Tiger: "Kilroy undermines patriarchal hegemony within recession rhetoric by troubling the binary of masculinity/femininity, parodying hypermasculinity, and suggesting that certain forms of masculinity led to the development bubble and subsequent bust" (Ferguson 2016: 60).

In conclusion, at a formal level, all these elements contribute to challenge the purported realism of the novel, therefore subverting it and exposing the abstraction and foundational irreality that lies at the core of a capitalist-realist narrative which: "was sufficient as a cultural outrider of industrial capitalism" but now "we require modes of representation, including renovated forms of realism, in our efforts to mediate and comprehend the imprints and effects of 'the financialization of daily life'" (Flannery 2022: 143). In the next paragraph I will explore the nexus between the formal devices outlined and the thematic concerns of the novel. In my reading of the text through the lenses of Uncanny Realism I will explore the ways in which uncanniness plays both at a 'global' and 'planetary' scale, following both Clarke's and Chakrabarty's definitions. In this respect I will also stress out how those two levels enter in constant dialogue especially in the way in which what is already rendered as uncanny at a global level, is further estranged when read from a planetary perspective.

5.1.2 Historical recurrence: Tristam's landed gentry and the Celtic Tiger frenzy

The Devil I Know centres its narrative on the character of Tristam Amory St. Lawrence, the thirteenth Earl of Howth. Tristam is the last in a lineage of Anglo-Irish lords which have owned the castle since the early Norman invasions. The setting of the castle is based on the actual Howth Castle whose demesne extended as far as Ireland's Eye and encompassed a great deal of the Howth peninsula. In 2019 the Castle and surrounding estate was bought by the company Tetrarch. Within the novel Howth Castle catalyses, the atmosphere, semantics and feelings linked to Ireland's landed gentry's big

houses, and to the genre of the big house novel, which being “an end of the empire phenomenon” (Flannery 2023: 131) channelled the anxiety and siege-like attitude of the old ruling class about to be overthrown. The first part of the analysis of *The Devil I Know* closely benefits from the discourses tackled over the previous chapter, especially regarding the big house novel and the ghost estates. In this respect, the description of the Castle and of the life lead by Tristam’s Father (the only relative he has left), is pervaded by a decadent atmosphere. In the novel, the castle is depicted as a spectral entity, positioning the St. Lawrence lineage at a liminal junction between a displaced aristocratic past and their lingering, spectral influence on the land. This setting acts as a ghostly counterpart to the history of the Celtic Tiger. Consequently, the novel imbues its central historical motif with an ominous spectrality, symbolizing the vampiric and necrotic essence of the landed gentry's colonial capitalism. This, in turn, is projected onto the financial neoliberalism characteristic of the Celtic Tiger era. It is worth looking at the passage in which Tristam arrives at the castle after an absence of twelve years:

I gave it another twenty minutes before making my way to the ribbed stone columns of the castle entrance for the first time in twelve years. The streetlights ended at the public road and the avenue beyond lay in darkness. It was not how I had envisaged my return. (...) ‘Larney?’ I said in amazement. ‘You’re still alive?’ I had to keep from blurting, gauging that he must be over a hundred by now, for Larney had been an old man when I was a boy, and a young man when Father was a boy, having served our family since he himself was a boy. (...) The avenue was longer than I recalled, and steeper too. Graveyard ivy clotted the orchard walls in grotesque guises – cut-throats, hanged corpses, ghouls. I am a troubled man. I have a troubled mind. I see things in the dark. For a panicked moment I thought I had lost my phone and clapped a hand to my heart, but no, there it was in my pocket. Finally, the avenue opened out onto a familiar expanse of gravel. The pebbles formed a pale moonlit square at the foot of the castle steps. It was a long stretch to cross, a long and exposed stretch past all those looming windows. (Kilroy 2012: 28-30)

Tristam’s arrival to the castle closely resembles the gothic trope of the arrival at a haunted house, as we’ve already seen in the opening paragraph of *The End of the World is a Cul de Sac*. Nonetheless, in this instance, the uncanny sensation experienced by Tristam as he approaches his ancestral home is intensified by the profound sense of displacement, he feels upon approaching the castle’s gates. The last part of the passage resembles the grotesque, haunting and disturbing images of a phantasmagoria, which both catalyses the inherent spectrality of the castle and Tristam’s troubled mind’s projections. In this respect, Tristam’s imaginary visions point out his close connection with undead, otherworldly presences, which as I will further explore, make him a medium not only for financial transactions but also for communicating with invisible, dead, and otherworldly entities.

This is pivotal in the way it constantly questions the reality principle depicted in the novel, especially driven by the Celtic Tiger frenzy. In this respect, Tristram becomes a point of intersection between the financial, technological, and the otherworldly. This aspect of the text is further enhanced by Tristram's servant Larney, who, as the reader discovers at the end of the novel, has been dead for a long time. Tristram appears to be the only one who can communicate with him. At the same time, Tristram includes Larney in his court-trial interrogation therefore bringing undead, otherworldly characters into what are supposed to be real-life, factual events. Moreover, Larney's long, never ending life as a servant also posits questions surrounding the inheritance of wealth and the near impossibility for the lower classes to climb the social ladder. In essence, Larney lived his multiple lives as a servant, in stark contrast to Tristram, whose identity is compounded by the homonymity of his ancestors, metaphorically experiencing his multiple lives as an Earl. In this regard, Kilroy emphasizes the historical continuity of the interrelation between class, wealth, and ownership. Within this framework, Larney's limited opportunities beyond servitude confine him perpetually to the walls of Howth's Castle. Moreover, Tristram treats Larney as a non-human entity, enhancing that in his description of the servant's animalistic characteristics:

He inched forward in the undulating, weaving manner of a snake and came to a halt a few feet shy of me, his body crouched and averted from mine like a blackthorn growing on a cliff. Tears, snot and spittle were trickling down his face, and his eyes rolled from side to side in his head, looking up and down the avenue in search of an escape. (Kilroy 2012: 205)

Nonetheless, Larney is not depicted as a passive entity. Instead, his continual riddles embody a haunting presence for Tristram, particularly in how some of them come to foretell the protagonist's future. For example, towards the end of the novel Larney asks:

The more you have of it, the less you see,' came his voice, which was trembling with anticipation. 'What is it?' I didn't have to give it a second's thought. It was so obvious that I almost cheered up. I had a heart and a mind and a soul that was full of it. 'That's easy, Larney. Darkness.' (Kilroy 2012: 205)

In this case for example, Larney's cheeky attitude foretells the final descent into hell of the protagonists. In another, further scene, Larney also anticipates to Tristram the news of his father's death by asking: "Who's the corpse in the coffin?" (Kilroy 2012: 320). Consequently, upon entering the castle, Tristram finds his father's coffin:

The lid of the coffin was open. I could not see the corpse inside, not from my post by the door. I did not abandon my post. I looked at Mrs Reid. 'Who is the corpse in the coffin?' I demanded of her, as Larney had demanded of me. 'Pet,' said Mrs Reid. 'I am afraid I have some terrible news. Your father . . .' She blessed herself. 'Last night. God rest his soul.' (Kilroy 2012: 321)

A few pages later, Tristram also discovers the truth about Larney, namely that he has been dead for years. Therefore, the castle becomes the dwelling site of ghosts, undead people, and funerals, in this respect in Tristram's words: "For the Castle was dead. The Castle was in the coffin. Long live the Castle" (Kilroy 2012: 322). Subsequently, the castle is both a dead entity in the coffin, and also a coffin containing its deceased inhabitants: "a monument to death that represented an ambiguous moment, somewhere between life and death, or, rather, a shadow of the living dead" (Vidler 1992: 171).

Moreover, Howth's Castle is not the only propriety owned by Tristram. In fact, he personally owns the area known as Hilltop as an inheritance from his mother. In one scene during the novel *Tristram and Desmond Hickey*, drive to the place, which interests Hickey, who would like to buy it to start a new development in the area:

We proceeded up the driveway – he'd chosen the shorter one; there were two – and emerged from the trees to encounter the elevated prospect of the house. Hilltop was mounted on a plinth and divided into two wings to capitalise on the view, one of the finest on the hill, if not the city. Ships sailing across the glittering water, Bray Head a cresting whale in the distance. The harbour and islands on the other side. Forgive me if I sound like an estate agent. I have nothing left to sell. The lawn had reverted to a wildflower meadow, alive with butterflies and the hum of bees. (Kilroy 2012: 42)

Despite the idyllic description of the surrounding area of Hilltop, the inside of the mansion looks derelict, and the garden around it it's extremely overgrown. The vision of the decadent mansion is heightened by the apparition of a pony named Prince who was bought as a pet during Tristram's childhood. Tristram is disturbed by the vision of the animal, especially in the way in which it looks unkept, far from the well-groomed image he previously had of it. Therefore, Tristram (upon his departure from Hilltop) decides that it would be better for Prince to be put down. Therefore, at Ferguson's question "What happened to the pony?" (Kilroy 2012: 61), Tristram answers:

Stop. Poor Prince. The damage. At the time, I did not envisage that I would remain in the country for more than a day or two, so I did what I believed was best for him under the circumstances, seeking to remove a fraction of pain from the world, to relieve an iota of suffering. I went inside and rang the vet and arranged to have him destroyed the following morning. (Kilroy 2012: 63)

Tristram, despite his absence from the site for such a long time, still perceives Prince as his own property to the extent that he feels entitled to decide on the animal's death, even though it had survived for such a long time without the help or supervision of humans. Tristram identifies Prince's right to life as enclosed within the limits of the role that was assigned to him by humans: "Meanwhile around him the trees grew higher, the bushes grew denser, and his world grew smaller. The house became vacant, and the gates rusted up. Hilltop was sealed off with him trapped in the heart of it. The fruits of doing your best" (Kilroy 2012:49).

In this context, Tristram's relationship with the non-human other reflects his colonialist attitude towards the land, wherein the non-human other gains significance only under the laws of profit. This perspective mirrors the attitude of his familial lineage as landlords and aligns with his current involvement in financial land grabbing. Especially, Moore and Patel make the connection between feudal and colonial landlordism and its legacy within contemporary examples of land grabbing worldwide clear: "Landlords weren't simply grabbing land. They were transforming the way in which others could relate to nature. Placing customary lands under a system of competitive rents reduced the commons, the areas of land in which peasants had exercised some autonomy" (Moore and Patel 2012: 59). One passage at the start of the novel highlights this aspect:

The truck ascended past ponied meadows and heathered slopes until the road crested and Dublin Bay appeared below, broad and smooth and greyish blue, patrolled by the Baily lighthouse. The whitethorn was in full blossom and the ferns were pushing through. Better to have been born somewhere dismal, I sometimes think. Better to have grown up shielded from striking natural beauty, to have never caught that glimpse of Paradise in the first place only to find yourself sentenced to spending the rest of your life pining for it, a tenderised hole right in the heart of you, a hole so big that it seems at times you're no more than the flesh defining it. I rolled the window up to seal the beauty out. (Kilroy 2012: 16)

The passage which, as noticed by Eóin Flannery, opens with highly romantic overtones, at the same time underscores Tristram's attitude towards nature, which acquires meaning only when it's owned and controlled. In the context of Tristram's relationship with nature Flannery says:

His entrepreneurial partnership is centred on precisely the looting of the non-human physical resources of his locale, but all that is accomplished is the production of a version of the alltoo-familiar 'ghost estate' housing developments. The lyricism of the opening description is bleakly ironic given the orientation of Tristram's, and the country's, priorities. (2023: 131)

Contextually, the novel's historical recurrence between a colonialist past and the neoliberal present depicts the way in which "while money, credit, and financial speculation are often taken as 'economic' processes, the truth is that modern money flows because state institutions *secure exchanges and defend the underlying system of cheap nature against unruly humans and other natures*" (Moore & Patel 2020: 86, my emphasis). Also emphasising how "cycles of nature into money and then into capital have brought us to this moment of geological history" (Moore & Patel 2020: 63). Contextually, the Faustian bargain between Tristram and the mysterious Mr. Deauville further tightens the link between past and present histories especially in the way it condemns both to failure and damnation. The connection is made more obvious by the creation of the financial entity known as *Castle Holdings* set up by Mr. Deauville and of which Tristram was the director:

Yes, that is correct: Castle Holdings was a shell company. It bought nothing, sold nothing, manufactured nothing, did nothing, and yet, as your piece of paper states there, it returned a profit of €66 million that first year. Huge sums of untaxed money were channelled through it out to the shareholders of its parent companies, which is perfectly legal under Irish tax law, as you know. I did not make the laws. You made the laws. You are the lawmakers and must shoulder some blame. (Kilroy 2012: 73)

What we learn about the company is that it syphons international money through the Irish State in order to avail of the country's low tax rate. Moreover, Castle Holdings provides financial lending to companies or projects considered profitable. In this respect, and especially from the point of view of land acquisition and financial speculation, the very first endeavour that Castle Holdings embarks in, is to provide financial support for Hickey's new development project on a coastal area known as Claremont Beach. This area provides a new point of reflection on the phases of land ownership in Ireland. In fact, through Tristram's sentence "We don't own this land anymore" (Kilroy 2012: 94), we learn that Tristram's family used to own the land before selling it. The area now looks derelict to the extent that its description resembles the image of a post-industrial, post-apocalyptic landscape:

He drove in the direction of the castle but pulled in at the old cement factory, which was located a few hundred yards shy of my gateposts and on the other side of the road. Only in Ireland would the acreage flanking a white sand beach be zoned for industrial use. (...) The factory was derelict. So was the motor company. And the petrol station beyond it. (Kilroy 2012: 94)

The industrial dereliction depicted in the passage exposes a further link to the colonial approach to the land, which has persisted in Ireland since the 1950s (Bresnihan & Brodie 2024). Bresnihan and Brodie link this aspect with the semi-peripheral role of Ireland within the world system:

We thus argue that Ireland's position as a semi-periphery, and the forms this took since the 1950s, do not just carry social and economic implications but ecological ones – in how landscapes, resources and infrastructures, particularly in rural regions, have been viewed, (de)valued and differentially produced by the state through FDI. (2024: 94)

In this respect, the beach area used as industrial site could be also read through Bresnihan's and Brodie's definition of "sacrificial zones" which conceive rural, peripheral, and natural areas within the state as sacrificable under various waves of modernization. Moreover, the abandoned petrol station and the abandoned motor company also address simultaneous resource exhaustion. This specific case points out the energy dependency of Ireland within the progressive exhaustion of cheap energy (Moore 2018). In addition, the juxtaposition of the big-house imagery, the post-industrial landscape, and neoliberal finance, echoes what Deckard recognises as one of the main characteristics of Celtic Tiger literature's aesthetic:

(...) their aesthetics are shaped by temporalities that spiral or gyre, or characterized by generic ruptures and technological pessimism, these could be read as mediating the country's experience of imposed ecological regimes, first under British colonialism, and then as a semiperiphery within the neoliberal "capitalist world-ecology. (2022: 378)

Moreover, the derelict area also appears as a omen towards the new development site envisioned by Hickey, who, regardless of the specificity of the locale, is planning to build:

'There'll be an apartment block here,' we rolled along, 'an another here, and two over there. Eight blocks in total, ranging in height from three to eight storeys. We're looking at the guts of 400 residential units, with about 12,000 square metres of office a commercial space at ground level, to include a hotel.' (...) 'Ah see,' he said, 'you can and you can't. No investor will touch you unless you qualify for Section 23-type reliefs'. (Kilroy 2012: 94)

Contextually, the derelict landscape of the abandoned industrial site will be replaced by the construction of a vast ghost estate complex. This development further amplifies the already uncanny, specular relationship between Tristram's home and the ghost estate he is helping to build. According to Flannery: "The reference to boarded up properties is an explicit invocation of the blight of 'ghost estates' across Ireland, there is an uncanny resemblance between Tristram's crumbling home and the edificial legacy he has left with

his failed investment” (2023: 132). This appears akin to what Deckard identifies as “energy unconscious” (2022: 378), which catalyses “energy imaginaries of the colonized, the peripheralized, and the energy-dependent, rather than iterating the confidence of oil-founded hegemony, petrolic surplus, or resource monopoly found in capitalist cores” (2022: 378).

In this respect, Hickey’s development plan, together with Castle Holdings’ financial support, exposes the way Ireland’s current role within the capitalist world-ecology “has been characterized by peripheral dependency on foreign capital investment, the tendency towards financialization and housing speculation” (Deckard 2016: 156). In this respect, neoliberal financialization functions as a “reordering of the totality of nature-society relations” (Deckard 2016: 156), especially shaped through “its ‘impatience,’ expressed in the extreme rapidity of its ecological asset-stripping” (Deckard 2016: 156). Contextually, the area considered gets quickly redeveloped from a former industrial site to a high-density residential area. At this point, it is worth examining how Tristram describes Hickey’s attitude towards the area he is about to redevelop, particularly in the way Hickey assumes an almost divine role, poised to create a world imbued with its own internal, indisputable rules:

Displayed on a board like a wedding cake was the scale model of a modern urban residential and commercial development typical of and appropriate to, say, a downtown waterside location in an East Coast US city: eight towers of glass clustered in a crystalline formation. The tallest crystal was located at the most easterly point – the hotel, Hickey’s Pandora’s Box. (...) If you lifted off the top of Hickey’s head, you’d find it crammed with plastic models. They characterised his relationship with the world. He had reduced it in scale to a size that was manageable, malleable, an entity he could carve up and sell. (...) He grunted with relish at these images of the world he was on the cusp of bringing into being. Photoshopped women with ponytails and trim bodies toting tennis rackets. Men in shirtsleeves laughing into mobile phones. In one picture a BMW X5 deposited a smiling blonde toddler into the open arms of a smiling blonde childcare worker at the proposed crèche. A Maserati made its exit from the proposed underground car park with a surfboard strapped to its roof in the next. They all looked preposterous. Every last one of them was dressed for a Mediterranean summer. Sunglasses and shorts and sandals. This development promised another climate. Presiding over it all were these green glass towers, the sun glinting off their elevations in every shot. (Kilroy 2012: 119-120)

Hickey’s vision of the world appears as a highly normative one, based on a strong detachment from the non-human other, exemplified by his disregard towards the local climate, as well as a strong heteronormative construction of society which echoes the masculine characteristics of the Celtic Tiger. The same depiction of the ‘world’ as a small, malleable entity solely governed by capitalist rules, has been a common *fil rouge* through

the analysis of the novels selected. Contextually, Hickey's vision of the world closely resembles the microcosm depicted in the *Fjord of Killary* especially in his depiction of petromasculinity and what Preciado terms petrosexoracial regime. This is made evident in the depiction of mostly white characters, of sexualised women, businessmen and expensive cars. Moreover, the model depicts one member of the LGBTIQ+ community in an attempt of queer washing: "“With apartment developments in wealthy areas, our firm find it's advantageous to include a representation of at least one member of the gay community. It's a sector of the population with a high disposable income”" (Kilroy 2012: 120). Nonetheless, the foundational abstraction governing this depiction of the world is further accentuated in *The Devil I Know* through its central focus on financial speculation. This emphasis amplifies the surreal nature of Ireland's economy, particularly the way in which: "“a culture of accumulating indebtedness has altered the nature of contemporary reality and the real ties that bind society together”" (Kelly 2020: 196). The satirical tone of the passage engenders an uncanny ironic feel since it very closely resembles the development of many urban areas, especially in Dublin, where the use of glass towers acts as a symbol for modernity's transparency and the immateriality of finance. In this respect, Hickey's project, which resembles an East Coast US City, takes up significance if we consider Dublin as a "global city" in Sassen's terms. In this respect, Saskia Sassen lists the characteristics of the global city as:

(...) as highly concentrated command points in the organization of the world economy; second, as key locations for finance and for specialized service firms, which have replaced manufacturing as the leading economic sectors; third, as sites of production, including the production of innovations, in these leading industries; and fourth, as markets for the products and innovations produced. These changes in the functioning of cities have had a massive impact upon both international economic activity and urban form: cities concentrate control over vast resources, while finance and specialized service industries have restructured the urban social and economic order. Thus a new type of city has appeared. It is the global city. (Sassen 2001: 4)

The representation of Dublin as a global city, especially in the way it represents a place for channelling large international capital through its low-tax regime, it's further exposed in a central passage of the novel in which a group of extremely wealthy men gather to embark on what could be termed an international property buying binge. They sit in front of an enormous screen where various areas of the world are projected so that possible acquirable land can be spotlighted. The first one is a map of Leinster, from which Hickey and Tristram decide to buy a huge amount of farmland located on the north site of County Dublin, thinking that it could possibly be transformed into a profitable development area

once properly connected to the city. After Leinster, areas of London appear on the screen, which are purchased by the various member of the meeting, and afterwards an image of the Dubai World Archipelago (an artificial cohort of three hundred islands designed to resemble the world's planisphere when looked from space):

McGee zoomed in on one of the islands. 'Last month, we purchased the Ireland Island for €28 million and we're developing it into an Irish-themed resort, to include a large internal marina,' a computer-generated image of a marina on the screen, 'apartments and villas,' accompanying artwork, 'a gym, hotel and an Irish-themed pub. To distinguish it from the other islands, the Ireland Island will feature a recreation of the Giant's Causeway. And so, going forward.' He enlarged a grey blob in a navy ocean. 'What we're here to do today, gentlemen, is purchase Britain. (Kilroy 2012: 235)

The scene it's representative from various points of view. First of all, it further reinforces the idea of Dublin as a global city from which international financial transactions propagate, which aligns with Celtic Tiger narratives in which Ireland was imagined as 'liberated from geography' in the words of Crowley and Linehan:

Ireland is depicted floating in the South China Sea. In this image of the island liberated from geography, Ireland is shown connected to the global cities of Beijing, Seoul, Shanghai, Singapore and Tokyo. The fantastical map mirrors the notion of the space of flows that became the signature of power and spatial organisation under neo-liberal forms of globalisation. (2016: 7)

Secondly, it enhances the way in which money and finance "facilitate and compels action at a distance" (Moore 2020: 67). Thirdly it reinstates historical recurrency between past capitalist/colonial regimes and the present one. In this respect it's not a coincidence that Tristram introduces the passage by saying: "They spoke in a contorted nasal accent that hadn't existed in Dublin in my day. I didn't like this hard new elite. They made me feel that my day was over" (Kilroy 2012: 235). The new elite represented in the passage is the elite of Irish developers, which Angela Neagle defines as:

The small knot of developers who drove the frenzied property boom in Ireland would spend the early years of the new century rapidly ascending the annual 'rich lists' that emerged as one of the many cultural reflexes of adoration towards their kind. Figures such as Sean Quinn, Johnny Ronan and Sean Dunne would assume a certain star status, widely lionised as embodying the entrepreneurial spirit that had, at last, made the country great. It would soon become painfully apparent, however, that the small band of celebrity property developers endlessly venerated throughout the Celtic Tiger years were in fact the authors of Ireland's great undoing. (Neagle 2015: 7)

Moreover, the division of land between a small elite group resembles the way in which starting from the 16th century the world has been mapped and then conquered by

colonialist elites. In this respect, the map projected on the screen echoes the idea whereby “the modern map did not merely describe the world; it was a technology of conquest” (Moore 2020: 55). Contextually, the small elite of developers described in the passage acts as colonizers: “if anything was to be known about nature of the world, European men would author and authorize it” (Moore 2020: 61). In this respect, through their project of buying the island of Britain in the Dubai archipelago, they show their conviction in having turned the tables of history: a group of Irish developers colonizing Britain in the new post-modern representation of the world in Dubai is their shot at redemption. This aspect not only underscores the foundational motto of “forgetting the past” during the Celtic Tiger, and the subsequent aggressive economic approach envisioned by the period, but it also exposes the profound unawareness of the characters towards global, diachronic, and synchronic dynamics. Or maybe more aptly, it underscores their will to ignore those dynamics in order to become themselves the new ruling elite of the world. Nonetheless, as argued by McClanahan:

As each hegemon enters its final stage of financialization, it comes into crisis and is forced to cede control of the global economy to a new, rising hegemon: from the seventeenth to the mid-twentieth century, Italian rule gives way to Dutch, Dutch to British, and finally British to US. (2016: 14)

Therefore, despite the illusion of being at the centre of propagation of financial power, Ireland’s semi-peripheral position within the global economy was strongly reaffirmed during the Celtic Tiger. Against the delineated backdrop, the significance of the uncanny historical recurrences and reminders permeating the text becomes evident, as they conscientiously draw attention to the deleterious consequences intrinsic to the ascendancy of the Celtic Tiger, particularly by accentuating the interlacing of colonialist and capitalist dynamics across epochs, constituting an enduring ideological underpinning. Moreover, the text cogently juxtaposes the ostensible prosperity of the Celtic Tiger with the haunting spectres of its predecessors' downfall, thereby elucidating the precariousness of its foundation and the inevitability of its eventual demise. By illuminating the symbiotic relationship between wealth accumulation and exploitation, the narrative elucidates the systemic injustices perpetuated under the guise of progress, thereby inviting critical reflection on the ethical implications of unchecked economic growth. Thus, the denouement of the novel culminates in the anticipated capitulation of the Celtic Tiger, emblematic of its inherent fragility and unsustainable trajectory.

Tristram and Hickey ascertain the collapse of Lehman Brothers via a televised broadcast within a local bar. The demise of this New York-based banking institution triggers a global vanishing act of capital, effectively dismantling the foundation of international financial markets. The illusory wealth that underpinned the Celtic Tiger economy swiftly dissipates into the vortex of widespread financial speculation. Consequently, the construction project overseen by Hickey in Howth's coastal vicinity grinds to an abrupt halt:

(...) it was the money. It had stopped flowing and so had everything else. The site had ground to a halt. The money hadn't appeared in the men's accounts that morning, and it hadn't appeared the week before either, which was the first I'd heard. Deliveries were no longer arriving through the gate. Creditors were banging at the door. The men had walked off the site, taking with them as much equipment as they could carry in lieu of two weeks' wages. (...) Only one of the apartment blocks was complete. The other seven stood shelled with gaping window openings. It had fallen apart so quickly. As quickly as it had begun, I suppose, and with as little warning. Building site to bomb site overnight. We were witnessing the remnants of a dead civilisation, one that had left nothing but wreckage in its wake, the Vandals or the Goths. (Kilroy 2012: 311)

The passage elucidates the palpable aftermath of collapse, notably epitomized in Ireland by the conspicuous remnants of abandoned ghost estates. In parallel with earlier depictions of the locale as post-industrial desolation, it underscores how these spectral images of derelict industrial sites and sprawling residential complexes denote successive stages of accumulation and depletion, manifesting in layers of ruin that extend across both human and non-human spheres. Moreover, the portrayal of collapse as a harbinger of a terminal stage of civilization evokes an apocalyptic tableau. Through Tristram's refracted narration, the passage prompts contemplation of the contemporary global milieu and its precarious liminality. In this vein, echoing McClanahan's perspective (2016), the 2008 collapse emerges as an irrevocable rupture in the trajectory of capitalist expansion, giving rise to an enduring crisis that serves as a fertile terrain for envisioning alternative paradigms. Thus, the enduring crisis precipitated by the collapse engenders a generative interregnum—a liminal space where new possibilities and alternative futures can be imagined and forged. This narrative stance aligns with McClanahan's contention that the collapse represents a pivotal juncture, catalysing a transformative revaluation of prevailing socio-economic structures and fostering the emergence of alternative modes of existence and organization:

For our contemporary era of debt, crisis is an invaluable historical hermeneutic, compelling us to anticipate limits, to imagine alternatives, to welcome collapse, and thus to resist the “end of history” triumphalism characteristic of late capitalist ideology in boom times. (...) Crisis, you could say, allows us to glimpse the owl of Minerva in the autumnal afternoon instead of only at dusk. The historical glimpse made possible in a time of crisis has afforded us, finally, by cultural form. (2016: 15-16)

In the next section, I will explore how the same form of the novel produces a void which constantly signals the foundational hollowness on which the layer of realism in the narration and the capitalist-realist reality it conveys are based on. Especially, as I will argue, the world-building that takes place within the novel, is constantly doubled by the co-presence of the underworld, which uncannily disrupts the world epitomized by Hickey’s development model.

5.1.2 Tristram, the devil and the underworld

The narrative's crux lies in the intricate relationship between Tristram, and the mysterious figure known as Mr. Deauville. Their peculiar partnership shapes the unfolding events, which is particularly evident in how Tristram's decisions hinge on Deauville's demands. This interdependence complicates notions of personal agency within the novel. Moreover, their ambiguous relationship remains unresolved, imbuing the narrative with constant ambiguity and unanswered questions, as exemplified when Ferguson enquires about their connection:

‘Mr St Lawrence, what precisely is the nature of your relationship with the financier Mr Deauville?’

‘Ha! What a question!’

‘Just answer it, please, Mr St Lawrence’.

‘I’m not sure I can, Fergus. To try to do so, I’ll have to go back to the beginning (...)’.

Every sentence in the passage occupies a different page within the novel, isolating the single sentences within a blank page. This typographic choice underscores the role played by blank spaces within the printed book, which addresses everything that is left unsaid, hidden, and silenced. Moreover, the relationship between Tristram and Deauville is made more complex by the ambiguous identity and ontological status of the two. In this regard, both characters can be interpreted as liminal entities, existing in an ambiguous state

between life and death, whose roles undergo dynamic shifts throughout the narrative. Furthermore, their liminality contributes to an ongoing interplay between light and darkness, a concept previously examined in our analysis of *Notes from a Coma*. Specifically, darkness emerges as a critical space contrasting with the artificial brightness and transparency emblematic of the Celtic Tiger era. The liminal and vulnerable threshold between life and death, which characterizes both individuals personally and within the context of their relationship, is starkly evident during their initial encounter:

Hell, hell, hell. I couldn't stop saying that word. Still can't. The registrar informed me that my heart had stopped beating. The cardiac team had worked to get it going for a full half hour. Time of death was called by the duty surgeon at one minute past midnight. My body was growing cold in the harsh glare of the emergency room when the monitor detected a pulse. The instruments transmitted news of this development to the nurses' station and the team was recalled. *They had never seen anything like it before, the registrar said. Uncanny. That was the word he used.* I checked my chart when he left the room. Temps de mort: 00.01h. (...) 'Hello, Tristram.' The voice was a cultured one, grave and authoritative. 'My name is Monsieur Deauville,' the caller continued. 'I realise that you are dying for a drink, and I am ringing to inform you that if you pursue this course of action, you most certainly will die for it.' For a lurid moment, I saw my death certificate. Temps de mort, 00.01h. (Kilroy 2012: 83-85 my emphasis)

As we can gather from the passage and the following pages, Tristram, after having been declared dead is brought back to life by Mr Deauville, who not only becomes his alcoholic anonyms sponsor but also starts to use Tristram as a human conduit for his murky financial affairs. As we can read in the passage Tristram is defined as 'uncanny'. This definition and the phrase or formula "Uncanny. That was the word he used" is repeated numerous times to describe Tristram's persona. The idea of Tristram as uncanny is closely related to the idea of him being a 'conduit'. He is conduit for numerous languages "They said my gift was uncanny. That was the word my clients used in their various mother tongues. *Étrange, unheimlich*, uncanny. Sometimes I thought they intended it as a compliment, but other times I wasn't so sure" (Kilroy 2012: 6). He is also a conduit for financial transactions after having been nominated director of Castle Holdings "Money travelled through me as freely as languages. Uncanny. That is the word they used" (Kilroy 2012: 166). In this respect McGlynn notices: "The catachrestic interchangeability of the two systems of signs – money and language – indicates the imaginative, alchemical dimension of finance" (2022: 184). Moreover, Tristram is also uncanny for having apparently defeated death. Contextually, in the novel Tristram constantly receives questions about whether he is dead or alive. Many people ask him:

'You're Tristram St Lawrence,' he said as if outing a thief.
'I'm sorry, can I help you?' The man frowned. 'But you're dead?'
'That was another Tristram St Lawrence.' (Kilroy 2012: 13)

As inferred from the passage, Tristram's status as a living entity remains perpetually uncertain, thereby accentuating the ambiguity surrounding his narration and complicating his role within the unfolding events. Positioned as an uncanny and liminal figure, Tristram assumes the role of a conduit, blurring the boundaries between inner and outer realities. This characteristic is further heightened by his ability to traverse between our tangible world and the otherworld. Consequently, throughout the narrative, Tristram not only facilitates interaction between these realms but also serves as the symbolic rupture challenging our established worldview. On one hand, Tristram's familial heritage and historical lineage encapsulate various layers of the Capitalocene's history, embodying successive waves of capitalist development. On the other hand, he acts as a conduit through which the very rational and logic underpinning this socio-economic order are interrogated and destabilized. Therefore, Tristram emerges as a locus of rupture, a site where the unsettling phenomena of the uncanny un-worlding manifest: "Hence the uncanny as 'possible experience', taking place in space and time, even as it dislocates them, involving a sense of diffuse unease, along with more specific 'figures' which challenge the boundary and identity assumptions of modern culture" (Jervis 2008: 44). Tristram, depicted as a ghostly and spectral entity, embodies the convergence of historical spectres, including those of colonialism and imperialism, alongside the haunting spectre of a future marked by indebtedness and ecological devastation, as previously examined. However, Tristram finds himself ensnared in an ambiguous liminality, his agency rendered null by the dominating influence of Mr. Deauville. In this context, the character of Deauville, revealed to be the Devil, introduces the motif of the Faustian bargain within the narrative. The presence of the Devil also fits Szerszynski's understanding of non-secular Anthropocene as a time when demons, gods and spirits haunt the modern world. Especially: "Another figure which can appear when local diffusive circulations of value and meaning are disrupted by new reified forms of power such as writing, technology and money, and swept up into global advective flows, is the Devil" (2017: 266). Contextually, we can delineate two manifestations of Deauville's presence within the human sphere: firstly, through Tristram's persona, from whom he sucks away agency and life, and secondly, through the interconnected web of global finance. The latter underscores how

the Devil permeates the frenzied binge-buying indulged in by the characters, thereby exposing the surreal and uncanny nature of financial speculation. However, from an alternate perspective, the Devil can also be perceived as an eternal entity whose existence transcends our conventional notions of time and space. In this light, while Deauville actively interacts with and influences the events unfolding in the narrative, he also maintains a profound autonomy and detachment from them. The Devil's influence over humanity symbolizes how, during the Anthropocene, humanity's presumed invulnerability is questioned by the agency of the non-human, which Fernando asserts must be regarded as both natural and supernatural (2022). According to Fernando, the processes of secularization and modernization have created a distinction between humanity and the natural and supernatural realms. He argues that “to fully undo the nature/culture distinction... means attending to that third domain—the so-called supernatural—still banished from our epistemological and ontological horizons” (2022: 569). Consequently, Deauville represents a supernatural entity traditionally excluded from capitalist modernity, which uncannily re-emerges to both align with and disrupt the financial speculation of the Celtic Tiger era. The diverse interpretations of Deauville's character align with Keohane and Kuhling's notion of Ireland's Faustian bargain during the Celtic Tiger era, wherein the embrace of unchecked capitalism signifies a final acquiescence to the nature-culture divide within the country: “Ironically, the Faustian bargain that we made to extricate ourselves from the state of nature throws us back into that same state. The devil wins: we end up in Hell” (2004:170). Deauville defies inside-outside borders and escapes strict definitions: he is ubiquitous, he is a shapeshifter, he speaks all languages in the world, he lives in the underworld, and he is immortal. Szerszynsk, in his exploration of the gods, demons and deities of the Anthropocene, says of the Devil:

The Devil is a second-socius figure who nevertheless comes to express third-socius forms of global magic, a foundational infant fantasy of omnipotence, a denial of the aporetic metabolic relation between inside and outside, a being who has no life of his own so survives only by capturing life. From the late medieval period onwards the Devil is associated with the production of money from money and the conversion of the energies of life into dead commodities. (2018: 28)

Moreover, Deauville constantly operates in the dark. In fact, although he is the puppeteer of the entire plot, we never physically encounter him. He only communicates through phone line, which heightens the uncanny nature of his relationship with Tristram, as the

ear is often considered as the uncanniest organ (Royle 2003). In this respect, darkness plays an important role within the narrative. In fact, the presence of darkness becomes increasingly insistent in the novel, paralleling the crash of the Celtic Tiger and the final dismantling of the old, landed gentry's power embodied by Tristram and his castle. Darkness also plays a pivotal role in the scene where Tristram and Hickey visit the site that Hickey has purchased to develop another quarter of Dublin. Both characters, unaccustomed to the countryside, find themselves lost in the enveloping darkness and its noises:

It was woody old gorse, left to grow unchecked for so long that you could walk between the trunks propping up its prickly canopy. The closer we got, the higher the mound loomed, and then we saw the glowing eyes. And the glowing eyes saw us. They had been watching us all along. Neither of us said a word, just about-turned and legged it straight back to the truck. When we were both in, Hickey hit the central locking button and the accelerator pedal. He didn't stop to shut the rusty gate when we finally found our way out. 'But what if it escapes?' I said and immediately regretted voicing the question, because in referring to it I had confirmed that there was an *It*. Hickey didn't answer. (Kilroy 2012: 251)

It is in this setting that they imagine seeing the devil's eyes in a bush, highlighting how darkness and dark spaces serve as a litmus test for the ostensibly bright spaces of modernity. These bright spaces, with their supposed clarity and transparency, conceal truths that are revealed in dark spaces. As Vidler (1992) argues, darkness exposes what the light of modernity hides, serving as a space where the borders between inside and outside collapse. In the dark, these borders, typically designed to reflect light and to maintain separation, lose their significance. Minkowski, as quoted in Vidler (1992: 175), notes that "Dark space envelops me on all sides and penetrates me much deeper than light space; the distinction between inside and outside and consequently the sense organs as well, insofar as they are designed for external perception, here play only a totally modest role." The passage quoted above is representative of Royle's idea of the uncanny as what comes out of the dark, and furthermore of his scrutiny of the relationship between "silence, solitude and darkness" which make up "an eerily synesthetic figure, a mixing of seeing and hearing, of a voice that lightens the dark" (2003: 104). Contextually, the devil's eyes appear in the darkness of the countryside, therefore bringing to light what had been concealed from sight throughout the novel, and only revealed through the ear, which is the sound. Nonetheless, Tristram refers to the creature they see in the bush as an *It* echoing the use of deictics as uncanny parts of speech which open up to the embrace of the unknown and potentially the supernatural. Although Hayword, Wooffitt and Woods

(2015) refer to deictic *that*, I argue that the use of *it* in the passage conveys similar uncanny properties:

Our analysis focuses on how the use of *that* in reference to the ambiguous phenomena can inferentially constitute the referents as having non-ordinary properties or provenance while simultaneously inviting co-participants to align to that implied assessment. In short, *that* can be a resource by which the uncanny properties of the world can be made manifest and warrantable. (2015: 706)

In this respect, both characters silently agree upon the existence of a supernatural entity which is progressively assimilated with the devil through Hickey's insistent question "Do you believe in the devil?" (Kilroy 2012: 251). Hickey declares to have seen the devil: "I seen him. Down at the Steak one night. The lot of us were standing around a bonfire outside the cave when suddenly there was this face on the other side at the flames, standing right across from me and looking at me mate Shane" (Kilroy 2012: 252). The two excerpts underline the link between the natural world and supernatural presences, especially in the way in which the Devil is a subterranean entity.

Although the novel primarily focuses on the urbanization process driven by financial speculation, nature remains an omnipresent force. The bog, the countryside, and the overgrown vegetation persist as unavoidable presences that haunt the modernizing process. This persistent natural world challenges the narratives of modernization and reveals the underlying tensions between progress and the enduring, often repressed, elements of the natural and historical landscape. Contextually, Vidler says: "Indeed, space as threat, as harbinger of the unseen, operates as medical and psychical metaphor for all the possible erosions of bourgeois bodily and social wellbeing" (Vidler 1992: 167). This quote is extremely apt the strongest catalyser of un-worldly nature: the underground, which is metaphorically conceived in the text also as underworld. Against this background, the underground becomes a space of material fissure between a normalized conception of world and everything which is suppressed, hidden and silenced by it. According to Punter: "The underground, while frightening, is nevertheless populated – with spirits, with gods, with souls. It is alive and it teems – perhaps not with 'life as we know it', but nonetheless with life of a sort, life on the 'other side' of the Styx, the Lethe" (2008: 205). Nonetheless, in the novel, the entities pertaining to the underworld start to populate also the human world, therefore the confines between the two are extremely blurred, to the extent that the world Hickey and the Golden Circle are building appears

equally akin to the underground as to the human world. In the novel, this is narrativized through a constant pull towards the underground, which is also embodied by Mr Deauville, the underground creature *par excellence*. Moreover, the underworld also appears as far more similar to our world than what we could have imagined. Therefore, this constant pull towards the underground further stresses the in-betweenness of the world depicted, conceiving it not as a unified world endowed of meaning but as a skewed interworld. Thus, images of the underground haunt the novel, and the awareness of the brooding haunting presence of the underground haunts the world-building which is taking place on the surface. There is a passage in the novel which I find extremely representative of this. Tristram is approaching Hickey's development site on the coast, and he sees an enormous crater in the ground:

Mounds of soil and rubble were heaped along the perimeter wall, waiting to be dispatched by the fleet of trucks that was parked up for the night. I stumbled in the direction of the chugging. Despite being flat, the going was heavy. Clods of clay adhered to the soles of my shoes like a snowball rolled in snow, building up only to break off again. Towards the harbour end of the site I discerned a hole, a vast one, as if a meteorite had struck. The chugging, which was now a clatter, was emanating from this crater. I approached and peered over the lip. The earth crumbled away underfoot and I almost slithered in. It was a sharp drop. At the bottom of the pit was a whole civilisation. Machinery, lights, materials, tools. And men. There was a rake of them down there. Miniature men grubbing about in the dirt like the creatures exposed when you lifted a rock. (2012: 163)

The passage orchestrates a defamiliarizing blurring between ostensibly anthropic world-building activities—such as excavation, transportation of mineral matter, and construction—and their portrayal as natural, non-human phenomena. Describing the hole excavated by the builders as a "meteorite crater" and likening the workers to diminutive ants, the passage effectuates an outscaling of the scene, inducing a sense of displacement in both Tristram and the reader. Indeed, it feels as though Tristram is observing the scene from an alien vantage point, from a scale utterly detached from human dimensions, thereby engendering a profound sense of vertigo and 'falling', as articulated by Chakrabarty. Moreover, the depiction of the builders within the crater operates as a metaphor for their descent into geological strata and deep time, thereby contextualizing Ireland's modernization process within the broader history of the planet, the human species, and life on Earth. Human beings, in this passage, are portrayed as both agents of anthropic change and as elements of the broader ecosystem. This duality of the human condition is uncannily conveyed, echoing Chakrabarty's contention that abandoning a global perspective entails an unsettling sense of dislocation and estrangement: "The planet puts us in the same position as any other creature" (2021: 89). This encounter

between global and planetary forces is brought about by the relentless exploitation that human beings act on the planet earth (as we've also seen with the various historical recurrences in the novel). In this respect, still following Chakrabarty, "The harder we 'work' the earth in pursuit of the worldly flourishing of a great number of humans, the more we encounter the planet" (2021: 90). According to the historian then, the same relentless process of world-building in capitalist terms causes its own undoing:

The institutions humans have used so far to secure human life have reached a point of expansion and development whereby that very fundamental premise of human politics—securing human life—is undermined. Late capitalism, in this sense, destroys the human-political project the world over. (2021: 91)

Furthermore, the passage above echoes the insight given by David Ferrier whereby the construction of a city is simultaneously a matter of geology, deep time and anthropic activity. This is evident not only in the way human activities move around million-year-old materials, but also in the way global cities will last over millennia as fossil footprints of our times. In this respect, thinking of deep time is both a matter of thinking back into the past and far deep into the future: "Deep time is not an abstract, distant prospect, but a spectral presence in the everyday. The irony of the Anthropocene is that we are conjuring ourselves as ghosts that will haunt the very deep future" (Ferrier 2016: online). Therefore, the people working the foundation of Hickey's development project in the crater are simultaneously falling into past deep time and stretching themselves into an extremely far away future. This aspect also echoes the complex characterization of time within the novel, further questioning the relationship between present, past and future.

In *The Devil I Know*, we witness how the construction frenzy characteristic of the Celtic Tiger era, driven by abstract capitalist imperatives, results in the convergence of the human world with its uncannily similar counterpart, the underworld. While the neoliberal milieu of the Celtic Tiger adheres to a narrow time scale, fixated on the immediate present, the underworld transcends temporal constraints, encompassing both deep time and the mythical epochs of lore. This interplay between the human realm and the underworld not only draws parallels with Goethe's Faust but also resonates with the vast katabatic tradition³⁷. Towards the end of the novel while attempting to escape from Mr Deauville,

³⁷ Madelein Scherer in her volume *Memories of the Classical Underworld in Irish and Caribbean Literature* (2021), explores the theme of katabasis in Irish literature emphasizing how it infuses the Irish locale with transnational references: "The memory thematic so central to many schematic adaptations of katabasis in the twentieth century provides a framework in which issues of commemoration and loss can be explored.

Tristram hides in a dungeon below the castle, where centuries ago a catholic priest used to hide: “I took myself under the castle, along the winding subterranean passages to the priest hole. The last place anyone would look for a priest was in the bowels of a Protestant fortress” (Kilroy 2012: 341). This hollow symbolizes all that is hidden and marginalized by the structures of power represented by the Protestant castle. Moreover, it is a place where human and non-human realms meet, where the deep past and different time scales (such as the time required for decomposition) converge:

I lasted, they tell me, three days in the priest hole. This I find hard to believe. Harder to believe than the literally unbelievable things which I know to be true. As far as I was concerned, I was banged up in there a fortnight, licking the dripping wall for sustenance. I heard Deauville’s footsteps from time to time. Tocka tocka, tocka tocka. I can tell you a thing or two about mortal fear. My blood pounded so thickly it felt like muscle, a mass of muscle lodged in my neck pumping like a heart. Doom, doom, it went. I didn’t move an inch. There wasn’t an inch in which to move. The priest hole had no back door, no escape hatch. It was a very good place to do away with a priest. Maybe the crumbling matter on the floor was priest – another thought to slam the door on. (...) I woke one . . . I was going to say one morning, but there was no telling whether it was day or night in the priest hole. I thought my eyes would acclimatise, but there was nothing to acclimatise to. I couldn’t see my own hand. It is terrifying to wake in true darkness. (Kilroy 2012: 345)

The passage further encapsulates the profound fear of being buried alive, which Freud identifies as the epitome of the uncanny. By concealing himself underground, Tristram confronts both the depths of the crater he observed earlier and the abhorrent consequences of his lineage’s dominion over the land and its inhabitants, epitomized by the priest’s remains. Simultaneously, within the hole, Tristram loses control over his spatial localization, time, and ultimately his body. In this respect, Tristram’s location in the hole further enhances his liminal position between life and death, thereby spatially positioning him between the world of the dead and that of the living. In this context, as Royle explores, the idea of premature burial is extremely uncanny because of “the idea of being buried because *seemingly dead*” (2003: 153), which is a recurrent theme surrounding Tristram’s status throughout the novel.

After spending three days underground, Tristram resurfaces and, rather than being arrested for his complacency in Hickey’s development projects, he is unexpectedly

The underworld has become a particularly appropriate narrative template for a country such as Ireland, coping with the loss of traditions and cultural memory, for poets re-defining their relationship to the classical canon, and for individuals mourning the deaths of their loved ones. At the same time, local and/or private poetic preoccupations are given an unmistakably global significance through the inclusion of de-contextualised myths from classical antiquity, itself an easily recognisable set of travelling memories”.

released by the police. Nonetheless, the castle's furniture is confiscated, leaving the place in a state of dereliction. Towards the end, Tristram returns to the castle where he encounters a local historian and engages in a disturbingly unsettling conversation. The novel's epilogue heightens the uncanny sensation of temporal displacement, as the time planes of the present, future, and past juxtapose, culminating in the historian's prediction of Tristram's death by suicide. In this context McGlynn notices: "Although foretold, this suicide is not within the novel – the future events themselves have speculative outcomes in the even further future" (2022: 186). In the passage we read:

'Continuous succession to the Barony of Howth remained in the direct male line from 1177. But the final son was a bit . . .' The local historian spun his finger by the side of his head to indicate a churning brain. 'A bit funny. You know yourself.'
I did.
'A tragedy, really. He died recently.'
'Did he?'
'Yes. Overdosed in an airport hotel.'
'When?'
'Soon. Tonight.' The historian checked his watch. 'It is happening as we speak.'
It took me an age to absorb this information. An age, an age. I am still grappling with it. I am floundering to this day. (Kilroy 2012: 358)

The passage is followed by Tristram's final katabasis during which Deauville finally comes to collect his debt:

Deauville had come to collect. A debt must be settled. That is the nature of a debt. The Devil linked my arm and we began the descent. I closed my eyes but my eyes would not close. They would not close. I tried and tried. I'll keep trying. I must keep trying. I can only keep trying. I am afraid of what I will see. (2012: 361)

This final passage introduces a shadow of uncertainty that complicates the novel's temporality. Did Tristram recount the events from the perspective of being already in hell? Where did the trial actually occur? Consequently, the entire narrative is retrospectively situated within a suspended temporality that facilitates the comprehension of the intricate web of events. If we assume that the events were narrated posthumously, we gain the privileged perspective of a character "capable of perceiving the whole" (Deckard as cited in McGlynn 2022: 137). Therefore, the concluding remarks by Tristram leave us pondering what he will encounter once in hell. However, if we speculate that he was narrating from the confines of hell, then the narration assumes the form of an endless cycle of punishment, reminiscent of Dantean "contrapasso," where Tristram is compelled to

repeatedly reenact and reflect upon the futility of his actions. This interpretation aligns with the numerous references to temporal circularity examined throughout the text, thereby intensifying the uncanniness of the narrative.

5.2 Making and un-making the world: ghostly entities in *Solar Bones* (2016) by Mike McCormack

Solar Bones, authored by Mike McCormack and published by Tramp Press in 2016, is placed in the concluding section of this thesis for several reasons. Firstly, it establishes a continuity with McCormack's earlier work, *Notes from a Coma*, the initial novel analysed in this study. This connection underscores the recurring motifs and stylistic elements characteristic of McCormack's literary corpus. *Solar Bones* is structured in a manner opposite to *Notes from a Coma*: it features one narrator, one perspective, and is composed of one long, unbroken sentence. Despite this structural divergence, the novel still embraces the key elements characteristic of McCormack's writing. These elements include County Mayo as a setting where modernity intersects with tradition, the central role of family and community, and the broader global context in which these elements are situated. Secondly, *Solar Bones* encapsulates many themes addressed throughout this thesis, particularly those concerning rural spaces and domesticity. It explores these themes through a distinctive spectral narrative mode, offering a further narrative locus for the exploration of the modalities of Uncanny Realism delineated in the first chapter. Relatedly, Altuna says that:

The novel presents paragraph breaks, repetitions, lists, enjambments, unconventional punctuation, irregular sentence construction and the disadjustment of narrative time, but no dividing chapters. These combine with McCormack's use of traditional tropes in Irish fiction, such as family, heritage, work and political ethics and community over individuality. (Altuna 2021: 84)

Moreover, *Solar Bones* operates a profound blurring of binary assumptions, such as materiality and immateriality, life and death, human and non-human. The novel displays a strong focus and concern over the dynamics which constitute and guide our world. In fact, Marcus, the novel's protagonist, is an engineer particularly preoccupied with the composition of everything that makes up our worldly surroundings, from the mechanisms of a small object to political systems, to planetary and cosmic phenomena. Against this background, the analytical framework of Uncanny Realism proves useful for examining the complex interplay between the material logics that underpin the creation of the capitalist Technosphere and their disintegration. Moreover, as emphasized by Mianowski (2019), the novel facilitates the conceptualization of alternative futures, thereby enriching the thematic depth of this analysis. By placing *Solar Bones* in the final chapter, this thesis

underscores the novel's pivotal role in synthesizing and expanding upon the key themes discussed.

From the point of view of the plot, *Solar Bones* tells the story of Marcus Conway, a middle-aged engineer from Louisburgh in county Mayo. The story is posthumously told by the protagonist himself who comes back to haunt his own house on the 2nd of November 2008 at noon. In fact, Marcus had died of heart attack in his car seven months before, on the 21st of March. Although during the narration Marcus gives away some hints regarding his death status, the reader discovers that the protagonist is deceased only in the last few pages. In this context, this newly gained awareness casts an uncanny retrospective feeling on the entire novel.

5.2.1 A ghostly uninterrupted monologue

The narrative of *Solar Bones* is constructed as a 265-page fragment of a sentence devoid of conventional punctuation. This absence of punctuation throughout the text, particularly at its beginning and end, implies that the monologic sentence-fragment of the novel is embedded within a larger, continuous narrative. This suggests that Marcus' monologue represents an intermediary segment of an extended discourse. Formally and thematically, this narrative technique reflects the novel's exploration of disrupted binaries and the dissolution of the inside-outside dichotomy, as noted by Mianowski (2019). The novel commences with a half-page blank space, followed by the fragmented, hesitant initiation of the sentence, creating a sense of disjointed continuity. This deliberate structural choice reinforces the thematic concerns of the novel, which I will explore in greater detail subsequently. The novel opens as such:

the bell
the bell as
hearing the bell as
hearing the bell as standing here
the bell being heard standing here
hearing it ring out through the grey light of this
morning, noon or night
god knows
this grey day standing here and
listening to this bell in the middle of the day, the middle of the day bell,
the Angelus bell in the middle of the day, ringing out through the grey light
to
here
standing in the kitchen

hearing this bell
snag my heart and
draw the whole world into
being here (2017: 1)

The blank space that opens *Solar Bones* serves as a typographical embodiment of the unseen, symbolizing the transition from the world of the dead to the world of the living. It also contributes to a thematic interplay between light and darkness, imparting an uncanny atmosphere to the entire narrative. If the uncanny is understood as what emerges into light (Royle 2003), then Marcus' monologue, surfacing from typographical darkness, assumes an inherently uncanny and estranging nature from the outset. This blank space functions as a threshold that Marcus crosses at noon on All Saints' Day, guided by the sound of the Angelus bell. Therefore, from the very outset, Marcus locates in an in-between space, an interworld which does not entirely belong to the living nor to the dead: "The beginning of *Solar Bones* introduces Marcus's spectre coming to a liminal post-space and time, very much like purgatory, from where he recalls his past life in Celtic Tiger Ireland" (Altuna 2021: 86). Relatedly, at the core of the novel's formal structure and its space-time chronotope lies the concept of thresholds and border dissolution, embodied by the ghostly character of Marcus, who inhabits the liminal space between the living and the dead. This thematic element is particularly emphasized by the choice to set the narration on All Saints' Day—a time in both Catholic and Celtic traditions when the dead are believed to visit the living, with offerings of milk and biscuits left out to welcome them after their journey from the underworld: "looking at it now a sandwich on a side plate, covered with a napkin and a glass of milk beside it, the whole thing standing there so complete in its own detailed neatness" (McCormack 2017: 34). Marcus's return from the dead, however, is not portrayed as inherently frightening. Instead, his perspective, which transcends naturalized binaries, provides a means for reflection upon and questioning of the structures of our world. In this respect, Marcus's liminal and revelatory position parallels concepts associated with the Celtic festival of Samhain. Traditionally considered New Year's Eve in Celtic culture, Samhain marks the beginning of the darker half of the year. As Trevarthen (2010) notes, Celtic tradition does not view darkness as inherently evil or frightening; it can represent both fertile and chaotic darkness, which are closely related. Additionally, Samhain is considered an opportune time for divination, given the belief that the veil between this world and the Otherworld is thin, making it a period ripe for foresight and revelation. During the novel Marcus says about Samhain:

these grey days after Samhain when the souls of the dead are bailed from purgatory for a while by the prayers of the faithful so that they can return to their homes and the light is awash with ghouls and ghosts and the mearing between this world and the next is so blurred we might easily find ourselves standing shoulder to shoulder with the dead, the world fuller than at any other time of the year, as if some sort of spiritual sediment had been stirred up and things set adrift which properly lie at rest, the light swarming with those unquiet souls whose tormented drift through these sunlit hours we might sense out of the corner of our eye or on the margins of our consciousness where you need to have faith in these things, a willingness to believe and elaborate on them (2017: 92)

Therefore, the uncanny nature of the narrative should be understood as revelatory. This aligns, as also noticed by Altuna, with Derrida's concept of hauntology, in which spectres come back to visit us "as elements of enquiry in times 'out of joint'" (Altuna 2021: 84). Contextually, Marcus' return fosters reflection on both the Celtic Tiger and the structures of the capitalist world-system at large.

Moreover, the uncanny quality of the first sentence is further heightened by its creation of a soundscape rather than a visual landscape (Mianowski 2019), engaging the ear—the most uncanny organ (Royle 2003)—instead of the eye. Notably, the initial lines of this mapping are also guided by the sense of hearing, as they trace the resonances of the Angelus bell throughout the town and countryside. The disorienting initial lines, where the narrator and the reader navigate through darkness guided by the Angelus bell, ultimately lead to a familiar yet strange setting: Marcus's kitchen in the town of Louisburgh. The repetition of the word 'here' in these opening lines eventually maps out the specific 'here' of Louisburgh, in County Mayo, and its surroundings, anchoring the narrative in a precise, though initially disorienting, geographical and emotional landscape:

here
standing in the kitchen
hearing this bell
snag my heart and
draw the whole world into
being here
pale and breathless after coming a long way to stand in this kitchen
confused
no doubt about that
but hearing the bell from the village church a mile away as the crow
flies, across the street from the garda station, beneath the giant sycamore
trees which tower over it and in which a colony of rooks have made their
nests, so many and so noisy that sometimes in spring when they are nesting
their clamour fills the church and (...) (2017: 3)

As observed by Mianowski (2019), the character of Marcus is both evanescent and profoundly rooted in space, embodying a way of thinking that is simultaneously pragmatic and metaphysical. This duality reflects his complex relationship with his surroundings, characterized by both profound rootedness and deep estrangement. Marcus's narrative journey, signalled by the Angelus bell, weaves through the auditory landscape, embedding him within the physical and cultural geography of Louisburgh while also highlighting his spectral presence. In addition, the time-scape of the novel is further complicated by the numerous references to the Angelus bell which persist through the first half of the novel. This element creates a contraction of time which contrasts with the narrative time of Marcus' narration which stretches through his entire life, creating two interconnected narrative layers which constantly out-scale one another. Mary McGlynn identifies the temporal structure of the novel as uncanny, since it is rooted in the repetition of Marcus' life events:

Marcus circles back to reexamine episodes in his life, a patten that buttresses the novel's dense interconnections. At the same time, the repetitions, never quite the same, reinforce uncanny sensation, amplifying feelings of déjà vu and attenuating the reassuring familiarity of linear temporality. (2022: 137)

If Marcus reappeared on the first All Saint's Day following his death, he may continue to return annually on that specific day. This concept suggests a perpetual cycle of recurrence, wherein Marcus's presence intersects with the realm of the living on one particular day each year. This cyclical return emphasizes the temporally bound yet enduring connection between the deceased and the living. Moreover, as underlined by Altuna (2021), the same temporality of the ghost initiates by coming back, which proves to be a particularly fruitful temporal perspective from where "to open a site of commentary on the strain between the coherence of Marcus's professional life and the economic and ideological wrongdoings that contributed to the collapse of Celtic Tiger Ireland" (Altuna 2021: 89).

Moreover, Marcus' perception and interaction with his environment merge the tangible and intangible, encapsulating a sense of belonging that is coupled with a profound sense of otherness. This duality underscores the novel's thematic exploration of thresholds, both literal and metaphorical, and the fluid boundaries between life and death, the familiar and the strange:

why this sudden need to rehearse these self-evident truths should press

so heavily upon me today, why this feeling that there are
thresholds to cross
things to be settled
checks to be run
as if I had stepped into a narrow circumstance bordered around by
oblivion while
looking for my keys now
frisking my pockets and glancing around, only to see that (...) (2017: 8)

The uncertainty of spatial and temporal situatedness underscores the broader dynamics of crises and collapse that permeate the novel's various scalar levels (Mianowski 2019). Certainly, the world Marcus left behind on March 21, 2008, does not appear the same upon his spectral return. This dissonance resonates on a personal, national, global, and planetary level, which the novel addresses in an interconnected manner. The subsequent pervasive sense of uncertainty and uncanniness is deeply rooted in the corporeal and ontological undead status of its protagonist. Given that *Solar Bones* presents a fragment of a longer, ongoing monologue, readers experience the ghostly essence of the text through the corporeality of the undead. The novel aligns itself with the rhythm of Marcus's breath and heartbeat, creating an intimate connection between the reader and a corporeality that is both alien and abject. The corporeal focus of Marcus's ghostly existence—marked by the rhythms of breath and heartbeat—engages the reader in a visceral experience of the narrative. This embodiment of the undead challenges traditional binaries of life and death, presence and absence, creating an uncanny narrative that is both revealing and unsettling:

there's no mistaking the fuller depth and resonance of the sound carried
towards me across the length and breadth of this day and which, even at this
distance reverberates in my chest
a systolic thump from the other side of this parish, which lies on the
edge of this known world with Sheeffry and Mweelrea to the south and the
open expanse of Clew Bay to the north
the Angelus bell. (2017: 2)

The passage echoes Kilroy's idea of the 'conduit,' characterizing Marcus's body as spectral, invisible, and immaterial, yet fully present. In the passage, the West of Ireland is described as "the edge of this known world", which could be interpreted at a personal level (the world of Marcus), as a geographical delimitation (Europe's West edge), and as the edge between the world of the dead and of the living, or of the world as we know it now and how it could become. Harrison, in this context, states: "its focus [is] between intersecting temporal currents, mapping how daily systolic rhythms interact with and

reflect upon large-scale structures of political and ecological collapse” (Harrison 2022: 8). In this respect, Marcus's return to a world transformed in his absence is a microcosm of the novel's exploration of broader systemic and existential crises. His disorienting re-encounter with his surroundings reflects the disruptions and uncertainties experienced on multiple levels. This interplay of personal and collective dislocation is central to the novel's thematic concerns, emphasizing the interconnectedness of individual and global transformations.

Marcus returns from the dead after the height of the economic collapse, which deeply transformed the Irish economic, political and cultural landscape. This aligns with Linehan and Crowley's description of the shared feeling of displacement which fell upon the Irish population after the crash:

(...) the recognition forced upon Irish citizens by the crash is the realisation that during the Celtic Tiger period 'we were not who we thought we were'. Not only that but 'the map was not the territory' either. Land, that entity at the core of the Irish psyche, became our downfall. These recognitions are immensely de-stabilising. (2016: 3)

The protagonist comes back to a world which is both familiar and strange and where the irreality of opulence has given space to the spectrality of austerity. Marcus becomes aware of the economic collapse of the Celtic Tiger, which is explained on the first page of the newspaper Marcus finds in the kitchen:

a long article with an illustrative graph and quotes outlining the causes and consequences of our recent economic collapse, a brief résumé of events that culminated on the night of September 29th, feast of the archangel Michael – the night the whole banking system almost collapsed, and the country came within a hair's breadth of waking the following morning to empty bank accounts and (...) (2017: 8)

The passage refers to the consequences of the global economic collapse started by Lehman Brothers bankruptcy. In Ireland as Coulter writes:

In the dead of night on 30 September 2008, with most of his cabinet colleagues safely tucked up in their beds, Lenihan issued a guarantee that the Irish government would honour all of the deposits in six large banks over the next two years. The sum covered by the scheme amounted to €440 billion, ²³ more than twice the entire value of the Irish economy. In a stroke, the Minister of Finance had socialised the vast debts of private financial institutions and in effect 'put up the entire State as collateral'. (2015: 7)

Similarly to the other novels written after the Celtic Tiger collapse, the crash represented a watershed which not only cast light on the unsustainability of the Irish neoliberal economy but also exposed the global and planetary intricacies of the singular yet multiple crisis of today (Klein 2014). Therefore, during the novel, these various scales propagate from the perspective of Marcus, systematically questioning the mechanisms which sustain our worldview. In this respect, the strangely familiar reality that Marcus comes back to is epitomised by his description of his own kitchen as estranging:

something different about moving through the house today a feeling of dislocation as if some imp had got in during the night and shifted things around just enough to disorientate me, tables, chairs and other stuff just marginally out of place by a centimetre or two, enough to throw me so that now, trying to make a cup of tea for myself, the last two minutes spent searching for the tea bags because the green canister in which they are usually kept is not where it normally sits on the worktop, tucked into the corner beside the boxes of herbal teas Mairead uses for her infusions (2017: 33)

The idea of familiarly strange is perfectly summarized by the phrase ‘marginally out of place by a centimetre or two’ (2017: 33). Marcus, as a threshold, ghostly entity appears as the perfect narrator for a story which is impinged on the narrative of collapse. By being a living ghost still rooted in an everyday materiality, Marcus embodies the collapse between the living and the dead, human and non-human, political and personal. The novel presents the reader with recurrent images of collapse, which are presented in multiple ways either indirectly, through the dismantling of material daily objects, or more directly through actual visions of collapse which bring into the narrative a feeling akin to the idea of falling, or Anthropocene disorder. It could be stated that the novel’s final goal is to make the world collapse into the material-immaterial fissure represented by Marcus’ return into our world. In this context, it is intriguing that a narrative so heavily centred on objects and machinery is conveyed through a corporeal medium, exemplified by Marcus’ life-and-death monologue. This narrative approach suggests that the story functions as a final breath, encapsulating all the objects and perceptions accumulated over a lifetime. In this respect his own monologue appears as an inventory of objects, mechanisms, systems, relationships, cosmologic visions, which, through their deep interconnection, produce a sense of scalar collision and collapse which necessarily gives shape to the same narrative style and formal logic. In this respect, the same one sentence without punctuation structure allows for smooth movement between the personal and the collective, the material and the immaterial, the past, present and future. In this way the narrative structure itself does not allow for binarism or borders, everything is not just linked, is ‘enmeshed’

to borrow a sentence from Timothy Morton. Consequently, similarly to how JJ in *Notes from a Coma* had a thinking structure akin to Morton's ecological thought, we find this aspect again in Marcus' monologue. Nonetheless, the enmeshed nature of the structures that Marcus describes is further enhanced by his non-longer human nature, which puts him in a liminal, threshold place. The link between the formal structure of the novel and the narrative of collapse is well outlined by the idea of 'post-mortem modernism' theorised by Harrison (2022):

The narratological possibility contained in the post-mortem Marcus performs on his Mayo environment, alongside the post-mortem McCormack performs on modernist modes of mentation and temporality, animates the narrative rhythms and its depictions of local and global precarity, as the novel casts its gaze over the faulty foundations and subsequent collapse of the Celtic Tiger's political logic. (2022: 22)

In the next section, I will explore some of the several images of collapse which permeate the novels, and which profoundly intersect with the narrative style of the novel.

5.2.2 Can a ghost undo the world?

One of the primary concerns of *Solar Bones* is the concept of 'world'. In a certain sense, *Solar Bones* operates through what can be visually described as the knitting and unknitting of an image of the world. As I have already described, the economic crash created a domino effect in the realization that the financial downturn was part of a bigger grid of crisis. Just after having read the article about the economic collapse Marcus says:

the indices and magnitudes of a new cosmology, the forces and velocities of some barren, inverse world – a negative realm that, over time, will suck the life out of us, that collapse which happened without offering any forewarning of itself, none that any of our prophets picked up on anyway as they were (2017: 8)

The idea of a 'new cosmology' and 'inverse world' is telling. In this respect, the economic collapse is understood as the fault line into which the entire world will disappear. After a few pages, we read:

the collapse of a small bank in an island economy becoming the fault line through which the whole universe drains, the whole thing ridiculously improbable, so unlikely in scale and consequence it's as if something that never was has finally collapsed or revealed itself to be constructed of air before eventually falling to ruin in that specific way which proved it never existed even if all around us now there is that feeling of something massive and

consequential having come asunder, as when certain pressures exceeded critical thresholds to admit that smidgen of chaos which brings the whole thing down around itself so that even if we believe this collapse is essentially in some adjacent realm there is no denying the gravitational pull we feel in everything around us now, the instability which thrills everywhere like a fever, so tangible you have to wonder how come we never noticed those tensions building were we so blind to the world teetering on the edge that we never straightened up from what we were doing to consider things more clearly or have we lost completely that brute instinct for catastrophe (2017: 15-16)

Marcus is intensely focused on the details that compose our world—the cogs and grids of technological objects, the networks of the global economy, and energy regimes—to the extent of “often performing a kind of narrative autopsy through his granular level of scrutiny” (Harrison 2022: 8). These surgical descriptions are frequently paralleled by a persistent questioning of those mechanisms. Consequently, while Marcus describes an apparently coherent world, he simultaneously questions its sturdiness. The very picture of the world that Marcus meticulously details is undermined by his own existence as a ghost, which challenges many of the binaries upon which that world is founded. Marcus himself is uncanny because he no longer fits within traditional binarisms: he, who once was a white man, father of a traditional family, and an engineer, now defies any binary definition. This notion evokes Dipesh Chakrabarty's idea that the Anthropocene challenges the very concept of *anthorpos* as a cultural-historical entity. Similarly, Marcus as a ghost represents a process of post-humanization, understood in Braidottian terms, where the idea of human collapses on itself, leaving, in the case of Marcus, a perturbing and revelatory spectre. This duality gives rise to numerous uncanny visions, wherein Marcus feels out of place, skewed, and displaced. This knitting and unknitting of the world's structures is epitomized by the analysis and dismantling of smaller object systems, such as a tractor. Marcus's scrutiny of the tractor exemplifies his approach to deconstructing and examining the components of the world, both to understand and to question their interconnectedness and reliability.

The tractor is the first image of dismantling that we encounter. The scene comes from Marcus childhood memories, and he describes it as:

this may have been my first moment of anxious worry about the world (...) the sight of that engine spread over the floor would stand to me forever as proof of a world which was a lot less stable and unified than my childish imagination had held it to be, the world now a rickety thing of chance components bolted together in the dark, the whole construct humming closer to collapse than I had ever suspected (2017: 22-23)

The tractor in question, a Massey Ferguson 35, was bought by Marcus' father at an agricultural show. Marcus remembers his father as a man who had a sense of the world as an ordered, coherent place but who, during the last few years of his life lost that sense of world unity:

my father's voice with its neat way of invoking the world as a properly ordered and coherent place in which a man could find his way or take his bearings from certain signs and markers if he only did not allow his vision to become cluttered up with nonsense or things to assume outsize importance in his life (2017: 99)

Consequently, the man's preoccupation with the mechanisms of the tractor represents an early instance of his disconnection from a unified and coherent worldview. This episode mirrors the evolving relationship between humans and machines, wherein successive waves of capitalism are accompanied by technological innovations. The dismantling of an obsolete machine and the creation of a new one signify a rupture and a subsequent reconfiguration of the man-machine relationship, entailing both biological and cognitive repercussions. This dynamic is exemplified by the advent of contemporary technologies, such as Skype, which further complicate and redefine human interactions and identities in the digital era. This concept will be explored in greater detail. The scene of the dismantling of the tractor is described by Marcus as follows:

the day I came home from school and walked into the hayshed to find him standing over the engine completely broken down and laid out on the concrete floor that was dusted with hayseed, piece by piece along its length
cylinder head, pistons, crankshaft
to where I stood in the doorway in my school trousers and jumper, terrified at the sight because to one side lay the body of the 35, gutted of its most essential parts and forlorn now, its components ordered across the floor in such a way as to make clear not only the sequence of its dismantlement but also the reverse order in which it would be restored to the full working harmonic of itself and my father standing over the whole thing, sighting through a narrow length of fuel line, blowing through it till he was satisfied that it was clean through its length before he laid it on the floor, giving it its proper place in the sequence and explaining to me, saying simply
it was burning oil
as if this were some viral malfunction likely to spread from the machine itself and infect the world's wider mechanism, throwing the universe itself out of kilter to bring it crashing down through the heavens (2017: 21)

The tractor's mechanisms serve as a microcosmic metaphor for the dynamics of the world we live in, which I have identified in the first chapter as the capitalist world-ecology. This aspect is encapsulated by the statement, "it was burning oil." This realization strikes Marcus's father, paralleling the current awareness of oil's ubiquitous character which has

been precipitated by today's singular yet multiple crises. It underscores that our world is not only constructed and powered by oil, as Farrier (2020) asserts, but that oil and fossil fuels are systematically eroding the very foundations upon which we have long depended. According to Mauro Van Acken the word 'oil' is a metonymic one which conveys the entire picture of our world (2022). In this context, oil itself becomes a dismantling force, simultaneously creating and deconstructing the modern world (Van Acken 2022). According to Deckard: "References to burning diesel repeat throughout the novel as a motif of entropic decay and gendered petro-angst, charting a masculinity founded in fossil-fuelled productivity and mastery of machines, and registering anxieties about excessive oil consumption" (2022: 391). Nonetheless, the use of the verb in the past tense, "was," not only brings about a feeling of energy exhaustion but it also conveys a sense of culmination, suggesting a potential shift towards a future in which the world is no longer dependent on fossil fuels. At the same time, Marcus' and his dad's mental and material tendency towards dismantling and analysing works against the obsolescent naturalization of the networks which sustain the modern world and contrast with a tendency towards: "A denial of perception and reflection, which diminishes the significance of the dynamics in which we are immersed and the recurring subjects within them"³⁸ (Van Aken 2022: 27).

It is telling that the next thought association which comes to Marcus' mind is another memory from his childhood about a day he saw a dismantled wind turbine being transported through the main street of Louisburgh by a trailer. Marcus recalls the episode in this way:

the flatbed behind carried something that was dismantled in sections and tied down on both sides with ratchet straps and chains, something that at first sight appeared to be the luminous bones of some massive, extinct creature, now disinterred, with its ribs gathered into a neat bundle around the thick stump of a massive spinal column which time and the elements had polished to such a cool ceramic gloss that if I were to leave my hand on it I would have been surprised if it felt like anything other than glass, and it was only when the whole thing had passed by completely and I saw the back of the trailer hung with caution tape and hazard decals that I recognised the load as a wind turbine which had been completely broken down with the vanes and conical tower separated from the nacelle and stacked lengthwise along the trailer but with enough corrosion around the flanges on the base sections to indicate that this turbine had recently been taken apart as a working project, faulty or redundant or obsolete in some way or other, possibly
burning oil (2017: XXX)

³⁸ The original text says: Un diniego del vedere e del pensare, che rende insignificanti le dinamiche in cui siamo avvolti e i soggetti che si ripresentano (Van Aken 2022: 27).

The wind turbine stands as a memento for the necessary passage to a new energy regime. Nonetheless, the passage brings with it a sense of failure which addresses the shortcomings of a green economy still deeply rooted in socio-ecological exploitation and led by a colonialist mentality towards the land (Bresnihan & Brodie 2024). Moreover, as the sentence ‘possibly burning oil’ suggests: “while wind-energy development is often proclaimed green and sustainable, it is still heavily dependent on fossil fuels in its production, requiring mining and processing facilities to refine materials and construct transportation and electrical infrastructure networks” (Deckard 2020: 392). Furthermore, Ireland, both during and subsequent to the Celtic Tiger period, has emerged as a focal point for new energy frontier expansion, facilitated by policies of low taxation and environmental deregulation that attracted foreign investors, including Shell, which is examined in detail in the introduction to chapter three. The Shell to Sea protest campaign is explicitly referenced in the novel, notably through the depiction of Maura Harrington, a prominent spokesperson for the campaign who undertook an 11-day hunger strike.

an environmental campaigner who has begun a hunger strike against the energy consortium planning to run a pressurised gas pipeline through her particular part of North Mayo and which has already commenced work on the seabed of Broadhaven Bay, the articles in both papers illustrated with the same picture of a haggard-looking woman in her late fifties wrapped in a blanket and staring bug-eyed from the back of a car as her hunger strike now enters its second week (2017: 10)

However, as Deckard says: “The Irish licensing system for oil and gas exploration is marked by an extraordinary pro-corporate bias and subservience to foreign capital, with the result that the proportion of the government’s take of oil revenues is one of the West in the world, well below thirty percent” (2016: 165). Moreover, the progressive exhaustion of energy frontiers has led to even more aggressive forms of energy extraction (Deckard 2016). Ireland has become a site of cheap energy resources, defying that “dream of itself” which could project it onto a de-carbonized future.

Against this background, the wind turbine, much like the tractor, constitutes a component of the Technosphere, which gives information about the restructuring of the capitalist world-ecology. Their potential dismantling compels us to confront a world where capitalism faces an imminent energy crisis of unprecedented magnitude. Moreover, describing the turbine as a "prehistoric animal" introduces a temporal shift that spans both

deep past and future. On one hand, it draws a connection to the lengthy process through which fossil fuels were formed and are now being consumed and transformed into CO₂ by our oil-dependent economy. On the other hand, it projects us into a distant future where elements of the Technosphere, including excessive CO₂ emissions, may persist as future fossils. The objects comprising the Technosphere, when viewed through temporal and spatial scales divergent from the current capitalist-neoliberal framework, take on a strangely familiar quality. They appear removed from the grid of references that typically imbues them with coherent and unified meaning. According to Van Aken they appear as uncanny, spectral objects: “These ghosts disrupt the emotional dimensions of place, challenging the sense of order and coherence within our environments, and threatening our sense of security—not only in far-off oceans but also in the more familiar and local dimensions of our lives” (2020: 18)³⁹.

Another object I want to focus on is the factory described by Marcus at the very start of the novel: a dismissed industrial facility which functioned in the past as a textile industry utilizing toxic materials which cause deep and long-lasting environmental disruption:

a large, abandoned industrial facility in the north of the county is being assessed as a possible site for an asbestos conversion plant which will form part of a massive toxic dump to process industrial and medical waste from the rest of the province in a state-of-the-art incineration process which, if economic studies and environmental assessments prove favourable, could come online in a few years’ time with the promise of jobs and subsidiary investment across the county and
something out of the past
a psychic link which dates back to my childhood when my father worked on its construction
he fucking did
worked on it at a time when, with a similar promise of prosperity, it was spoken of as if it were a cathedral or a temple that was being built on that raised site above the small town of Killala (...) this massive facility into existence which, when fully operational, would employ three hundred and fifty men and women in the manufacture of acrylic yarn and fibre, an end purpose which initially disappointed me as it seemed such a puny thing considering all the hope and effort invested in it, unworthy in every way, until I learned that the manufacturing process would utilise a highly toxic compound called acrylonitrile, a chemical that would have to be transported overland in the middle of the night under security escort, shipped in double-hulled, crash-proof containers, a vivid circumstance suffused with enough danger to recast the whole project in a more credible apocalyptic glow so that it now appeared (2017: 12-13)

³⁹ The original text says: Questi fantasmi scompigliano le dimensioni emotive dello stare nei luoghi, del senso di ordine e coerenza degli ambienti in cui viviamo e del senso di protezione minacciato non solo negli oceani lontani ma anche nelle dimensioni più familiari e locali. (Van Aken 2020: 18)

The passage refers to the Japanese industrial textile facility of Ashai in the town area of Killala; here is a picture taken from UCD digital archive:



The factory evokes the imagery previously seen in *The Devil I Know*, where various regimes of accumulation succeed one another in the images of a dismissed industrial facility, and a petrol station and of the ghost estate. In this context, the relocation of textile industries to different parts of the global south underscores historical, material, political, and environmental continuities that must not be overlooked. The Ashai industrial site, which closed in 1997, was part of the global fabric-fashion industry which represents one of the main causes of global pollution and environmental disruption (Filho et al. 2022). Marcus continues describing the site as:

the last of the dirty industries in this part of the world, the whole enterprise succumbing to a convergence of adverse factors – oil rising through fifty dollars a barrel and the world's turn to natural fabrics principal among them – till the day came when it stood empty and dilapidated on a shallow plateau above the town of Killala – the last shipment of yarn gone through the gates, the workers paid off and the lights turned out – a monumental example of industrial gothic corroding in the winds which blew in from the Atlantic, an empty facility fully serviced with state-of-the-art utilities – road, rail, water and electricity – but which no one would touch because the whole thing was sheathed in asbestos, walls, roofs and ceilings, acres of it and with a projected cost of dismantling it in accordance with EU environmental code calculated to run close to ten million euro, it was decided that its owners, the county council, would leave it there to fuck and not disturb it in any way lest it shed its lung-corroding fibre over the whole of North Mayo. (2017: 14)

The passage primarily addresses the extensive utilization of nature as both sink and tap, leading to pervasive pollution, as exemplified by the factory's asbestos particles and the chemicals employed therein. Furthermore, the factory can be viewed as a "future fossil",

following David Farrier's perspective, not only due to its metal structure but also because of the particles dispersed into the air. Moreover, the utilization of nature as sink is further enhanced by the redevelopment of the Killala site as a waste treatment plant. Moreover, the installation of Ashai and its redevelopment into a waste treatment plant, are both accompanied by a messianic narrative which heralds widespread wealth while instead bringing forward exploitation and damage both at the level of environmental pollution and labour exploitation. The same messianic and salvational attitude is also conveyed in another passage of the novel which describes the quasi-religious relationship between a woman and wind turbine:

she was living under a hill planted with several of these turbines and whatever about their environmental impact or their worth as a source of clean energy she herself had developed something of a spiritual regard for them as she had only to stand at her back door and look up towards them for a few minutes every day and she could easily believe there was something sacred about them because, grouped and silhouetted against the horizon, their blades stark against the sky, were they not vividly evocative of Christ's end on Calvary (2017: 26)

The passage also underscores the necessity of conceiving the process of de-carbonization outside a capitalist paradigm, which would instead continue a messianic idea of progress impinged on the exploitation of both human and non-human nature (Van Aken 2020). In this respect, the messianic attitude was a pervasive aspect of the Celtic Tiger era, during which Ireland, despite the hidden economic, social, and environmental costs of the boom, felt as though it had finally transcended into the realm of First World countries (Deckard 2016). As Kuhling also highlighted, Ireland traded its religious beliefs for a profound trust in economic, commercial, and infrastructural progress. Nonetheless as Sen notices: "The infrastructure that keeps the nation buoyant is also crumbling, so that toxicity, in its economic and biological forms, extends from the financial sector to water taps in individual homes" (2019: 27). Most notably, everything that Marcus describes, from the turbine to the tractor, to the industrial facility, is on the brink of collapse. In this respect Harrison says:

The description of the dissembled tractor is one of many scenes that depicts technology in a way which produces a jolting sense of alienation, a sudden feeling of smallness, alongside a tender sense of interconnectedness with these material objects, which, like the posthumous Marcus, are 'humming close to collapse'. (Harrison 2022: 7)

Most of the images that Marcus describes are threshold, uncanny objects which are about to be dismantled, merge with other entities or die. In this respect, the world that Marcus presents us with is a liminal in-between, unsteady world, where all its components are undergoing some sort of transformation. It is no coincidence then that he calls his visions of crisis and catastrophe “apocalyptic deliriums”:

and I watched the screen cloud to a fizzy interference as it shut down,
leaving the room to dark silence and a burnt feeling behind my eyes as if
the light from the monitor had scalded them to the core, the kind of feeling
you imagine you would have just before the world goes up in flames, some
refined corrosion eating away at the rods and cones, collapsing their
internal structure before they slope out of their sockets and run down your
cheekbones, leaving you standing hollow-eyed in the middle of some
desolation with the wind whistling through your skull, just before the world
collapses
mountains, rivers and lakes
acres, roads and perches
into oblivion, drawn down into that fissure in creation where everything
is consumed in the raging tides and swells of non-being, the physical world
gone down in flames
mountains, rivers and lakes (2022: 85)

More than a paradisiac beyond, the world described appears as spectral, more akin to hell than to heaven.

Probably the episode that most vividly reflects the collapse of boundaries between the human and the non-human, the personal and the political, and the biological and the infrastructural is the outbreak of the cryptosporidium epidemic. Cryptosporidium is a parasite that develops in human faeces and is contracted through the intake of contaminated water. This episode is based on an actual event that occurred in and around Galway city in 2007, when hundreds of people were infected by the parasite, and the entire population was forced to boil water before any use. Cryptosporidium infection mainly causes fever and diarrhoea for several days. By integrating a real-life health crisis into the narrative, McCormack not only grounds the speculative elements of the story in reality but also prompts readers to reflect on the fragility of the systems that sustain everyday life. The first mention of the contagion is in the same collapse-apocalyptic terms which characterise both Marcus apocalyptic deliriums and the images of dismantling of the tractor, the turbine and the factory. He says:

that story started drifting towards us in mid-March, coming out of the middle distance with its unlikely news of viral infection and contamination, a whole city puking its guts up, the stuff of a B-movie apocalypse seventy miles up the road with

GP clinics and hospital wards across the city reporting a sudden spike in the number of people presenting with stomach ailments, complaining of cramps and vomiting with severe diarrhoea, a rise in numbers so wholly out of proportion with what might be expected for the time of year that initially an outbreak of food poisoning was suspected, an outbreak spread through the city from some large public event or gathering, but when an immediate investigation showed that the cases were evenly spread and did not appear to cluster in any geographic or demographic area it was clear that the source of the illness had to lie in something that was present without discrimination in all parts of the city, a conclusion which prompted an immediate analysis of the city's water supply and which quickly revealed that it was severely contaminated with the coliform *Cryptosporidium*, a viral parasite which originates in human faecal matter (2017: 29)

McCormack's decision to use the cryptosporidium contagion as a central narrative point successfully intersects the various scalar and thematic levels we have discussed so far. Let us first consider cryptosporidium. *Cryptosporidium* is a viral parasite produced inside human faeces, rendering it a non-human entity that is both abject and intimately familiar to us. Thus, cryptosporidium emerges as a disturbing agent, returning to human beings in a transformed manner after being expelled (Van Aken 2020). Furthermore, it is noteworthy that McCormack refers to cryptosporidium not as a parasite, but as a virus. This terminology enhances the perception of contagion and the ubiquity of cryptosporidium's presence. The familiarity of the contagion is further intensified by the notion that its spread was precipitated by a failure of human infrastructure, specifically due to prolonged neglect of maintenance rooted in engineering and political shortcomings. In this respect, McGlynn says: "Such outbreaks represent a symbolic inversion of the promise of public works, from a connective, protective social thing into an embodiment of menace" (2022: 132). This underscores the interconnectedness of biogeochemical cycles and sociopolitical systems, illustrating how infrastructural inadequacies can directly impact public health. In this context Mianowski says:

In drawing a direct link between the excrements that pollute the water and politics, the narrator highlights the material, organic connections between bodies and politics. In drawing attention to the organic and "ontopolitical" dimension of the cryptosporidiosis contamination (...) the narrator does more than present Mairead's sick body as an extension of his political and engineering visions. More crucially, he raises the question of responsibility. (2019: 9)

This also links with Van Aken's understanding of uncanny objects, particularly in how everything once trusted in daily life now appears threatening and untrustworthy: clothes full of dangerous chemicals, water systems spreading infectious diseases, energy sources contaminating and polluting the air and our lungs. Everything appears to be a threat, uncanny, familiar yet almost unrecognizable. The uncanny nature of the cryptosporidium's contagion is poignantly explained by Agnes, Marcus' daughter:

a virus derived from human waste which lodged in the digestive tract, so that, she continued, it was now the case that the citizens were consuming their own shit, the source of their own illness and there was something fatally concentric and self-generating about this, as if the virus had circled back to its source to find its proper home where it settled in for its evolutionary span, rising through degrees of refinement every time it went round the U-bend, gradually gaining on some perfection – hardiness and resistance and so on – with god-knows-what results, probably reaching such a degree of refinement that it would become totally resistant to every antidote and we would be host to this new life form (2017: 125)

All these levels converge within the personal sphere of Marcus and his family, as his wife Mairead is the sole individual to become infected. Mairead's contagion not only epitomizes the confluence of various scalar and thematic dimensions but also embodies characteristics deeply intertwined with gender roles. Notably, it is Marcus who must care for his wife, reversing the customary dynamic that had always prevailed. Furthermore, the fact that Mairead, a woman, is the only one in the family to be infected and that her illness is treated so closely, also shines a spotlight on how environmental disasters affect different social actors differently, with more severe and lasting effects on the most vulnerable. This observation underscores the gendered dimensions of environmental crises, revealing how women often bear the brunt of environmental and health-related challenges:

I walked down the hall towards whatever bedroom she was lying in I sometimes experienced those few steps as a long journey southwards which crossed borders and time zones, traversed deserts and mountain ranges to where I would eventually find her, my quarry, stricken under a pitiless sun, gasping and parched in some benighted jurisdiction which suffered a rapid turnover of governments, spiralling inflation rates and despicable human rights records – only such radical change of topography and circumstance could account for that gaping sense of distance she inhabited during the first couple of days

Friday, Saturday and Sunday

with their patient, attritional wasting which seemed to consume her down at the very smallest grains of her being, drifting from herself on clouds of her own breath, each laboured exhalation peeling away another layer of her into the ether, this illness which had settled into the most sheltered niches of her organism from where it could achieve the most finical, attentive wasting so that (2017: 122)

This passage is particularly telling in terms of gendered roles and unequal distribution of the consequences of ecological, political and economic crises, Mairead is identified with images of an exploited land, more specifically a “quarry”, which breathes and suffers from “despicable human rights rates”. This excerpt then underlies the continuity and links of patriarchal and colonial attitudes which persisted in Ireland after the foundation of the Republic, and which assimilated the figure of the woman with the land as two realms which would be both the ‘tap’ of production –in terms of reproductive work, and ‘sink’ –

as that part of the population which endured the most from oppressive political and religious measures, and who is still affected the most in times of economic and ecological crises (Federici 2004; Mies 2014; Bracken 2022; Deckard & Houlden 2024). It is therefore also worth noting that the description of Mairead's sickness is conveyed in distinctive gothic tropes, which also allows various historical layers to surface, as for example images reminiscent of the Irish Great Famine:

this illness was draining the flesh from her face, drawing out the bone structure beneath, her jaw and cheekbones jutting sharply while the radial pattern of her fingers began to show through the backs of her hands resting on the duvet cover, her extended fingers fanned out from knuckles to wrist which peaked over the plane of her narrow forearm, all her bones now poking through her flesh (2017: 123)

Therefore, Mairead assumes a spectral, almost ghostly persona that resonates deeply with the historical experience of the Famine. During those years, people were compelled to exist in close proximity to the deceased, blurring the boundary between the realms of the living and the dead (McLean 2004). In this context, employing spectral themes to depict the cryptosporidium epidemic underscores the enduring continuity across various capitalist epochs, particularly in how they engender crises imbued with vampiric characteristics.

However, the spectral motifs that permeate the entire narrative are subversively employed towards the end of the novel by Agnes, the daughter of Mairead and Marcus. Agnes, a young artist deeply engaged with contemporary societal concerns, stages her first exhibition in the first half of the novel. Here, she transcribes excerpts from county newspapers using her own blood. This reflects other forms of bodily abjection, as described by Kristeva, which recur in the texts. In *Solar Bones*, the depiction of human bodily excretions is widely depicted. The aesthetic representation of abjection appears as profoundly gendered inasmuch as Agnes' blood could be also seen as a metaphor for menstrual blood which in Kokoli's words: "is singled out as particularly dangerous since it represents 'the danger issuing from within' and, furthermore, it both complicates the relationship between the sexes and confronts them with (a procreatively defined, binary) sexual difference" (2016: 52). During the latter part of the novel, Agnes organizes a protest performance aimed at holding the political authorities accountable for the spread of the cryptosporidium. Therefore, one night, the entire city, led by Agnes:

this city of pageants and festivals
its patience gone and its voice hoarse
politically at its wits' end
raided its wardrobe and fancy-dress box to gather up its masks and face-paint so that it might
deck itself out in its most ghastly colours and come staggering through the cobbled streets as
a company of zombies, moving with more purpose than you would imagine while trailing
their winding cloths through the narrow lanes of the Latin quarter where they met up with a
stilted Bo Peep – ten feet tall and with six days' growth of beard under a platinum fright wig
– shepherding a small flock of sheep away from flying spiders that menaced them from
overhead, their pitiful bleating causing them to herd in a circle, bumping and tripping over
each other just as a company of golden samba queens spilled out of a nearby pub and two by
two, to the tune of 'The Girl from Ipanema' they herded the sheep up the main pedestrian
street (2017: 234)

Agnes organizes a protest-performance which involves the entire community in a carnivalesque *dance macabre* around the city. Agnes' protest stands against the quiet acceptance of the cryptosporidium spread, which resulted in: “no blame or responsibility gathering anywhere the story hung through the city's ambience as a kind of rolling fog which, with each passing day, thickened to a whitewash over the whole crisis in which it became clear that no one would be blamed nor held responsible” (McCormack 2017: 233). The carnivalesque aspect of the protest acts against the political realism displayed by the institutions. In this respect, Gaia Benzi (2019) says:

In its own way, with its anomalous explosion of colours and the breaking of imposed roles, with its charge of intoxication and uncontrolled joy capable of fuelling images and utopias, carnival serves as a true antidote to the mantra of the absence of alternatives – an antidote to capitalist realism. (Jacobin online)⁴⁰

Moreover, the grotesque masks worn by the protestors echo the tradition of Samhain, where the dead invade the streets and subvert the logic and paradigms of the accepted world structure. These masks of ghosts, ghouls, monsters, and zombies represent entities systematically cast away by capitalist modernity, now returning to disrupt it. Additionally, carnivalesque parades and performances open creative avenues for rethinking the world, materially demonstrating that alternative paradigms are possible. In this respect, Hammond (2020), distinguishes between what he calls “communal carnival” and “intentional carnival”. The former is akin to Bakhtin's original conceptualization, whereby carnival was a public folk festivity in which people were allowed to iconoclastically subvert widely accepted laws and authority. The latter, instead, refers to contemporary protests which use carnivalesque modalities to express a specific political

⁴⁰ The original text says: A suo modo, con l'esplosione anomala di colori e la rottura dei ruoli imposti, con la sua carica d'ebbrezza e di gioia incontrollata capace di alimentare immagini e utopie, il carnevale è un vero e proprio antidoto al mantra dell'assenza di alternative – un antidoto al realismo capitalista.

view. The first protest to use this method has been the well-known Carnival against Capital which took place in London in 1999. According to Hutton:

(...) intentional carnival grows out of communal carnival. Protesters deliberately inject the carnivalesque spirit into their own practice, and then deploy it to appeal to a larger public (...) Protest performances, in contrast, have an explicitly political purpose—to convey a specific message of opposition to the prevailing order. They are consciously planned, organized, and carried out by a politically organized group. While those who plan and choreograph protest events may seek to capture the spontaneity of carnival and attempt to erase the distinction between performers and audience, there are footlights, at least metaphorical ones, separating them. (2020: 270).

In this respect, Agnes' protest appears akin to the idea of intentional carnival. This becomes even clearer in its culmination, when all the protestors gather in front of the civic building, which had been covered by a huge white sheet. Standing completely naked on top of this sheet, Agnes waits to jump off, embodying the ultimate act of defiance and subversion.

the naked girl standing on the edge of the sunken mausoleum as if she were a statue carved to that purpose with the glare from beneath lighting up the juncture between her hips, as she stepped forward in full possession of the moment, upheld in the gaze of the assembled ghouls, everyone teetering on the edge of some climactic gesture that would clinch the whole spectacle into a coherent act of political protest, something which, if not equal to the city's confusion would be at least dramatic and striking enough to illustrate how it had the collective wit to gather itself for this moment in which she would either fall or take flight, the only options when you have walked this close to the edge (McCormack 2017: 237)

In this context, Agnes' naked body represents a further form of carnivalesque subversion, in which the female body is used outside the patriarchal paradigms of either shame or sexualization or as a medium of reproduction. Agnes' body carries a specific political meaning in the regaining of agency and authority over one's body in the face of political indifference towards the widespread cryptosporidium epidemic. This gains even further importance if we take into account the uneven consequences of the economic crash in Ireland, which disproportionately affected women. In this respect, Agnes decides to performatively use her body as a critical site against what Preciado calls the petro-sexo-racial regime by occupying a public space within the city, representing the centre of localized power. Contextually, Agnes' protest seems also to surface from a profound understanding of the networks and intricacies of our times, which she showed when talking to Marcus about the political, biological, local and global implications of the cryptosporidium crisis. Agnes shows the revelatory patterns of the 'ecological thought', which here is followed by political action. Against this background, Agnes' protest

heralds new possible ways of creatively rethinking the rules that govern our world. By giving space to intentional communitarian actions, her protest aims to expose the hidden exploitation and violence of the capitalist world-ecology while simultaneously reoccupying spaces traditionally reserved for exercising and reproducing the status quo. Agnes protest aligns with Jack Halberstam's understanding of the march as "an aesthetic event in which people inhabit architecture differently" (2023 min: 21.5). Especially, Halberstam describes mass strikes and marches as ways of collectively, performatively undoing the world. Agnes' protest constitutes the first substantive act of resistance encountered in the novels, marking a pivotal moment of material opposition aimed at undoing the world. This protest directly challenges the binary structures of the capitalist world-ecology by foregrounding elements that are typically concealed, unspoken, or suppressed: entities that defy heteronormative standards, transcend the conventional boundaries between life and death, and thus challenge the temporal and spatial coordinates dictated by capitalist frameworks. Additionally, the protest reclaims the female body, positioning it outside the normative constraints imposed by the petrosexual and racialized regime.

In conclusion, this chapter examined the portrayal of infrastructure development through the lens of undead or otherworldly characters, who expose the illusory and vampiric nature of the Celtic Tiger and embody the spectral qualities of its aftermath. The framework of Uncanny Realism has been pivotal in analysing these texts. First, it has enabled a deeper exploration of how the undead characters disrupt conventional boundaries between life and death, past, present, and future, as well as spatial divides between here and there. This disruption challenges the foundations of literary realism, particularly its reliance on linear conceptions of time and space.

Additionally, both novels demonstrate a pronounced narrative unreliability by undermining initially authoritative narratives. This is especially evident in *The Devil I Know*, where the use of a court trial destabilizes the reliability of the narration. Kilroy's novel further defies linear realism by blending multiple narrative genres and utilizing a circular temporal structure. Similarly, *Solar Bones* subverts linear realism through its continuous monologic sentence, in which the temporal planes of past, present, and future are intricately intertwined.

Both texts also present vivid images of scalar upheaval. In *The Devil I Know*, this is particularly evident in two key scenes: one in which Tristram observes the excavation

process for Hickey's construction project, and another at the novel's conclusion, where Tristram finds refuge in a cave beneath his home. In *Solar Bones*, the construction and deconstruction of everyday objects and public infrastructure evoke not only a powerful sense of scalar disruption but also a profound feeling of "unworlding." The novel further explores these themes through the spread of cryptosporidium, which blurs the boundaries between human and non-human, highlighting the vulnerability of living beings in the face of environmental crises.

Conclusion

In conclusion, my doctoral thesis sought to engage with a specific corpus of narratives written during and especially after the Celtic Tiger in Ireland, and which attempt to capture the elusive, indecipherable, and constantly shifting nature of our contemporary moment. To this end, the paradigm of the uncanny proved particularly apt, as it is uniquely suited to articulating that liminal space in which the familiar becomes estranged, simultaneously recognizable and unrecognizable. In the present, the capitalist worldview, long regarded as normative, is increasingly destabilized by the very crises it engenders, including environmental degradation and social upheaval. This collapse undermines binary oppositions—such as inside-outside, human-non-human, nature-culture, living-dead, and man-woman—that have historically structured our understanding of the world. The framework of Uncanny Realism, which I have employed throughout this research, has been instrumental in tracing how these narratives reflect the disintegration of established categories, and produce texts that transcend traditional literary realism and venture into the realm of the distorted, the strangely familiar, and the uncanny. In this context, works emerging in the aftermath of the collapse of the Celtic Tiger in Ireland have served as a particularly compelling case study.

The first section of this thesis set up the methodological and analytical framework for the rest of the discussion. The works of Jason Moore, Timothy Morton, Dipesh Chakrabarty, The Warwick Collective, Timothy Clark and Amitav Ghosh represent the foundational basis of my theoretical framework. In this section two concepts emerge as pivotal for the rest of the discussion, namely: the concept of ‘uncanny unworlding’ and the related analytic framework called ‘uncanny realism’. The first aims to conceptualize the dismantling of the global, normalized, and normalizing vision of the capitalist world-ecology. This worldview, imposed since the era of colonialism and persisting through late capitalism, is now gradually disintegrating under the weight of its own internal contradictions and the climate and social crises it has engendered. In this context, the crisis of the ‘four cheaps,’ as articulated by Jason W. Moore, alongside Timothy Morton’s notion of hyperobjects and Dipesh Chakrabarty’s exploration of the tension between global and planetary scales, collectively expose the inherent unreality of the coordinates that underpin the capitalist world-ecology. These coordinates, rooted in the assumptions of boundless resources and the static nature of the natural world, are now proving untenable in the face of contemporary environmental and social challenges. As a result,

the world presents itself to us in a liminal and uncanny state, where one dominant worldview is in the process of disintegration yet has not been fully replaced by an alternative. This transitional phase is marked by a profound sense of disorientation, as the collapse of long-established frameworks leaves us in a space of ambiguity and instability, where the old order is no longer viable, but a new paradigm has yet to emerge.

Subsequently, I developed the analytical framework of Uncanny Realism with the aim of capturing the ways in which literary texts catalyse and narrativize this liminal state. To this end, I engaged with the theoretical contributions of the Warwick Collective, particularly their conceptualization of world-literature as Capitalocene literature, and their notion of irrealism as a means of registering the uneven development of the capitalist system, especially in semi-peripheral contexts. Additionally, I incorporated Timothy Clark's theory of scalar reading, which facilitates an analysis that integrates the local, global, and planetary scales, thereby enabling a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of the present moment. Lastly, I drew on Amitav Ghosh's argument that the uncanny serves as a particularly effective narrative modality for documenting our current reality and countering the pervasive denialism surrounding environmental and social crises. Based on these theoretical foundations, I developed the analytical framework of Uncanny Realism, focusing on several cross-cutting features evident in the texts under study. First, I examined the hybridism of genre and form, wherein texts blend multiple literary genres to construct narratives that actively resist and disrupt traditional literary realism. Second, I analysed narrative unreliability, through which readers are continually prompted to question the veracity of the narrative, creating a pervasive sense of uncertainty. The concept of scalar reading further enabled an exploration of how these texts engage with the interconnectedness of the multiple crises of the present, challenging the normalized binary relationships between the global and planetary, nature and culture, and the inside and outside. Within this section, I also introduced the concept of 'clusters of the uncanny', where the uncanny becomes more pronounced in contexts of resource depletion, thereby revealing the irreality of the presumed infinite availability of cheap resources that underpins capitalist world-ecology. Additionally, I explored the significance of the return of the historically repressed, which resurfaces to highlight the diachronic and systemic nature of Capitalocene disruptions. This return problematizes any notion of repair or resolution within the system itself. I also analysed what I termed 'uncanny objects,' which transcend the binary distinctions of human-nonhuman, present-past, future, and here-there, further destabilizing established boundaries. Finally, I

examined the disruption of the boundary between life and death, focusing on characters who exist in a liminal space between the living and the dead. These characters, trapped in a state of suspension, symbolize the liminal condition of the present and profoundly challenge the spatiotemporal coordinates of capitalist world-ecology.

I chose to apply this framework to a selection of texts produced in the aftermath of the Celtic Tiger crash in Ireland. The economic collapse opened a fissure through which the interconnected crises of the present could be more clearly visualized. As a result, the second chapter of the thesis focused on providing both a literary and historical overview of the Celtic Tiger and its subsequent collapse. However, I also positioned Ireland within the broader history of the Capitalocene, emphasizing its semi-peripheral status. This historical context proved particularly valuable in highlighting recurring themes in the selected novels, especially those related to the period of the Great Irish Famine.

In the second section of the thesis, I turned to a detailed literary analysis of the texts. To do so, I integrated the theoretical framework of Uncanny Realism with the history of Ireland's semi-peripheralization. I selected seven works (five novels and one short story) and divided them into three groups according to their geographical settings, adding further specificity to the analysis. The methodology developed in the first two chapters proved instrumental in examining the multilayered aspects of the novels, both thematically and formally, allowing for a nuanced reading of the texts in light of Ireland's historical and ecological position within the Capitalocene. I divided the texts in three groups. Firstly, narratives set in rural areas: *Notes from a Coma* (2004), *Is Stacey Pregnant? Notes from the Irish Dystopia* (2014) by Tomás Mac Síomóin and *The Fjord of Killary* (2010) by Kevin Barry. Narratives set in domestic spaces: *Nothing on Earth* (2016) by Conor O'Callaghan, and *The End of the World is a Cul de Sac* by Louise Kennedy (2022). Narratives set in urban or urbanizing spaces: *Solar Bones* (2016) by Mike McCormack, *The Devil I Know* (2012) by Claire Kilroy.

The third chapter analyses two novels and a short story that challenge conventional perceptions of the West of Ireland and the bog areas of the midlands as traditional or backward regions. Instead, these works emphasize the semi-peripheral trajectory of the West which is influenced by the Irish nation and the broader historical forces of the Capitalocene. The framework of Uncanny Realism proves valuable for examining the thematic and narrative features of these texts, which exhibit significant textual hybridity by blending realist elements with gothic, science-fiction, and apocalyptic tones. This

blend creates a balance between mimesis and estrangement. The texts also introduce uncanny objects that destabilize binary oppositions, such as human vs. non-human and nature vs. culture, while integrating local, global, and planetary scales to provoke historical reflection. Notable examples include JJ's brain in *Notes from a Coma*, the Water's Edge pub in *The Fjord of Killary*, and the bog in *Is Stacey Pregnant?* Additionally, these works disrupt conventional notions of time and space through fragmented and disorienting narrative structures. In *Notes from a Coma*, this is demonstrated through the Event Horizon and multiple narrative voices, while *Is Stacey Pregnant?* employs the uncanny chronotope to merge human and non-human temporalities. Recurring historical events, such as the Great Irish Famine, further enhance the uncanny nature of these narratives, reminding readers of the ongoing crises of the Capitalocene.

The fourth chapter focused on a novel and a short story set in domestic spaces, particularly ghost estates, which serve as fertile ground for the emergence of the uncanny. Traditionally seen as bastions of bourgeois life, houses in these texts become permeable and susceptible to outside influences. Ghost estates highlight the aftermath of the Celtic Tiger's economic collapse, environmental crises, and gender discourses, transforming homes into inhospitable spaces. The framework of Uncanny Realism effectively reveals how these domestic environments become estranging and unwelcoming. The ghost estates reflect historical echoes, including the Irish Big House and the Great Famine, while the portrayal of women underscores the often-invisible nature of reproductive labour within capitalist world-ecology. In *Nothing on Earth*, character disappearances symbolize this erasure, invoking memories of Ireland's patriarchal institutions. This chapter also emphasizes the interconnectedness of these domestic spaces within a larger planetary network, which is evident in the scarcity of resources like water and food, which disrupts the illusion of limitless availability. This creates 'clusters of the uncanny,' fostering a sense of defamiliarization. Furthermore, uncanny objects like dust and heat blur the boundaries between inside and outside, as character disappearances challenge traditional notions of time and space. The high degree of narrative hybridity, particularly through gothic tropes and the blending of folk belief systems, adds further complexity to these works.

The fifth chapter explored how infrastructure development is portrayed through undead or otherworldly characters, revealing the illusory and vampiric nature of the Celtic Tiger while embodying the spectral qualities of its aftermath. The framework of Uncanny Realism is crucial for this analysis, allowing for a deeper examination of how these characters disrupt traditional boundaries between life and death, past and present, and spatial divides. This disruption challenges the foundations of literary realism, particularly its linear conceptions of time and space. Both novels also exhibit significant narrative unreliability. In *The Devil I Know*, this is evident through the destabilization of the reliability of the court trial and through the blending of multiple genres and circular temporal structure. Similarly, *Solar Bones* subverts linearity with its continuous monologic sentence, intertwining past, present, and future. The texts present vivid images of scalar upheaval, particularly in *The Devil I Know*, where Tristram observes the excavation for a construction project and later finds refuge in a cave beneath his home. In *Solar Bones*, the construction and deconstruction of everyday objects evoke a powerful sense of scalar disruption and ‘unworlding.’ The novel also examines environmental crises through the spread of cryptosporidium, which blurs the boundaries between human and non-human.

Ultimately, the analytical framework of Uncanny Realism has demonstrated its effectiveness in elucidating the complex and interconnected issues arising from the current crisis. Moving forward, I plan to broaden the scope of my research by expanding this analytical framework and including cultural productions from diverse geographical regions and across various media.

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