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Imagining Alternative Northern Ireland: Spatial Dynamics in Stewart Parker's *Pentecost*

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I. Northern Irish Drama and the Space of Impasse: The Troubles and the Troubles Play

Early Troubles plays since 1971 have been dominated by the sectarian violence of the Troubles.[1] Undoubtedly the most celebrated modern playwright in Northern Ireland, Brian Friel's politically engaged drama *The Freedom of the*

1) The Troubles (1968 – 1998) is a political and religious conflict that erupted in Northern Ireland between the Unionist/Protestant and the Nationalist/ Catholic. It began from the civil rights movement in Londonderry on 5 October 1968 and officially ended by the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement on 10 April 1998. Northern Irish citizens share the same ethnicity in same geographical territory, yet they cannot merge into one whole community depending on which community identity they belong to; the Loyalist and the Republican, the Unionist and the Nationalist, and Protestant and Catholic. As a matter of course, the violent Northern Irish conflict has been what encapsulates Northern Irish drama.

City (1973) is inspired by a political event of Bloody Sunday in Derry (Londonderry)[2] when British soldiers shot thirteen civil rights marchers. Martin Lynch's play *Dockers* (1981) exposes the tensions among Belfast's dockworkers in the early 1960s and portrays the culture of sectarianism that separates Protestant and Catholic unions competing for higher working conditions. Graham Reid's play, *The Hidden Curriculum* (1982), centers on the confrontation of a middle-class teacher and working-class Protestant pupils who are driven into paramilitary violence. Christina Reid's *Tea in a China Cup* (1983) provides the memory and experiences of three generations of working-class Protestant women in Belfast, exposing the hardship and identity problems that the families have endured from the First World War to the Troubles. These Troubles plays are exclusively set in specific historical moments in Northern Ireland dramatizing how everyday life is permeated by the terrifying effect of the sectarianism of the Troubles.

In early Troubles plays, the Troubles is represented with fairly apparent certainties and topicality as it manifests in the form of realism. "The pleasures of the classic Troubles play," Christopher Morash writes, "are those of Aristotelian tragedy, where the visible world of the stage provides the frame for an offstage presence of some force too vast or amorphous to be seen" (246). In other words, Troubles play is a representation of a tragic sense of life in Northern Ireland. The city in early Troubles play is a field of political, cultural, and religious conflicts. The staging proceeds to describe a negotiation between

2) The name was changed from Derry to Londonderry in 1613 during the Plantation of Ulster to reflect the establishment of the city by the London guilds. Though the official name of the city is Londonderry, it creates tension because the nationalist republican still prefer to call the place as Derry for the Irish tradition.

two kinds of identity; the Loyalist-Unionist-Protestant and the Republican-Nationalist-Catholic. Everything that is needed to know about characters could be extrapolated from their name, the school they go to, and the street they live on, and most importantly, whether the person is one of "us" or one of "them." The audiences in front of heavily political scenes thereby identify with certain ideologies within which they have to exist.

However, if the claustrophobic realism of the Troubles play promises the unity of time and space, and gives tragic catharsis, a feeling of purgation, is the tragic vision of life the main effect that the Troubles play can have? As Elin Diamond observes, "realism surreptitiously reinforces (even if it argues with) the arrangements of that world" (4-5), that is, realism is fundamentally "mimetic" and thereby stands firmly on the belief in the stability of the real world. In a way, the theatrical illusion of realism that the early Troubles plays have manifested allows the audiences a considerable comfort of recognizable life, whether for or against, by fueling the dichotomous sectarian debate of the Troubles and consistently reproduces Northern Irish drama only in the context of the Troubles.

Stewart Parker is willing to take responsibility for this moral dilemma of the conventional Troubles play. Realism is superior to other forms of drama in the Troubles plays as these plays represent the bloodshed and violence of the Northern Ireland conflict. Parker, however, experiments with a variety of theatrical styles. He is convinced that drama should bridge the petrifying political divisions and liberate Northern Ireland from its cultural stagnation. As a way of ending the collusion between the tragic history of Northern Irish Troubles and the Troubles plays, Parker's drama suggests multiple angles from which it can decontextualize already established Northern Irishness and reimagine spheres of heterogeneous identities that should be reevaluated. *Pentecost* (1987) integrates the whirling moments of modernization, overlying

vicissitudes of life, and the categories of the Troubles into a single comprehensive space, enabling the understanding and analysis of the alternative Northern Irish spaces at different levels. The representations of Northern Ireland in *Pentecost* prove that Northern Ireland's social and historical diversity cannot be reduced to polarized sectarian landscapes.

The aim of this paper is twofold. First, it examines the history of Northern Irish history through and beyond Parker's drama. Second, it attempts to analyze alternative spatial imagination in Stewart Parker's *Pentecost* in relation to the idea of Michel Foucault's "Heterotopia." This twofold analysis is not to identify that social and historical places are projected and represented in literary texts and theater spaces, but to argue that every event/plot in theater spaces and drama text can themselves be conceived as "spatial" as theater produces heterogeneous spaces.

II. Re-imagining Belfast: Stewart Parker's Heterotopias

In his essay "Questions on Geography," Foucault argues that time represents "richness, fecundity, life, dialectic" (70) in modern constructions of knowledge whereas the spatial thinking has been routinely devalued and treated as "the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile" (70). Foucault's remarks succinctly identify central assumptions about space that have been undermined by the spatial turn in critical social theory. Within the context of what is called a "spatial turn," Foucault's concept of heterotopia has provoked and produced much discussion in the space studies. Utopia, according to Foucault, is a site with no real place: "Utopias are emplacements having no real place. They are emplacements that maintain a general relation of direct or inverse analog with the real space of society. They are society perfected or the reverse of society,

but in any case, these utopias are spaces that are fundamentally and essentially unreal" ("Different Spaces" 178). Utopia does not exist physically in society. It is perceived as a space corresponding to a utopia, or it exists only as a space contrary to a utopia. Heterotopia, on the other hand, is a space that actually exists: "There are also [. . .] real places, actual places, places that are designed into the very institution of society, [. . .] sorts of places that are outside of all places, although they are actually localizable. Because they are utterly different from all the emplacements that they reflect or refer to, I shall call these places 'heterotopias,' as opposed to utopias" (178).

The idea of Foucauldian heterotopia helps to understand Stewart Parker's dramatic re-imagining of Belfast, Northern Ireland during the Troubles. Parker confesses that he has had a private internal war with the place[3] from the very moment of his birth. Born in 1941, he grew up in a Protestant, Unionist family in industrial east Belfast. Parker did regard himself as an Irish, but his British background might be the source of his acute reflection on the state of constant dislocation of mind:

> The ancestral wraiths at my own elbow are (amongst other things) Scots-Irish, Northern English, immigrant Huguenot . . . in short the usual Belfast mongrel crew, who have contrived between them to entangle me in the whole Irish-British cat's cradle and thus to bequeath to me a subject or drama which is comprised of multiplying dualities: two islands (the 'British Isles'), two Irelands, two Ulsters, two men fighting over a field. (Parker, *Plays: 2* xiii)

3) In an Interview with *Irish Times*, Parker, recalling in 1977, says, "I had to return and come to terms with the place. I had been conducting a private war with it ever since I was born, yet in another way, I had a strong atavistic kind of attachment to it and that had to be resolved" (Walsh, *The Irish Times*, 13 Aug. 1977).

In a sense, the war with the place that Parker confesses to having had was a public one because people in Belfast shared horror on a daily basis during the Troubles. Parker spent almost one-third of his adulthood living and working outside of his native city. Yet hearing of the outbreak of civil strife in 1969, Parker, who was in America to teach summer school at Cornell University, decided to go back home and remained in Belfast until 1978. His direct experience with the most troubled time and place of Northern Ireland enabled him to offer an intensely personal yet comprehensive account of the Troubles. If Northern Irish dramatic milieu has been dreary and bleak with so many visceral spectacles of sectarian violence on stage, Parker's drama is not limited to the dystopian reality of the Troubles. It provides alternative images of Belfast in lieu of the space of violence. Parker's theatrical space expands from the representation of Nationalist/Unionist, Republican/Loyalist, or Catholic/Protestant binary paradigm to another dimension.

A sense of place is inscribed in Northern Ireland with so much experience and memory of the Troubles. Northern Irish sense of place, in other words, is always presupposed, preordained, or sanctioned by sectarian division and conflict. Commemoration and history-telling through many art forms and media have been a primary vehicle for the production and reproduction of this particular sense of place in Northern Ireland. In Keith Basso's terms, a site of the remembered past is vivified as the needs of the present demand:

> Place-making is a way of constructing history itself, of inventing it, of fashioning novel versions of "what happened here." For every developed place-world manifests itself as a possible state of affairs, and whenever these constructions are accepted by other people as credible and convincing – or plausible and provocative or arresting and intriguing – they enrich the common stock on which everyone can draw to muse on past events, interpret their significance, and

imagine them anew. (6)

Place in Northern Ireland is, thus, a physical reminder of what has happened in Northern Ireland, a kind of historical monument. In Belfast, spaces are historically used to interpret an individual's religious/political/national identities. Occupying a place means following the norms of that place. Northern Irish people learn to "read space" even from a very young age, assessing their situation as dangerous or safe, as normal or abnormal. This practice of reading space is a life-and-death discipline permeated in everyday lives.

When the Troubles flared in the city, the borders between two different political/cultural communities became more pronounced and hardened. The border areas are common in west Belfast, where a large Peace Wall (or Peace Line) was first erected in 1969 following Northern Irish Riots to try to keep the community from the sectarian violence. Local people called it "interface areas" – up the road is the Loyalist area, across and down the road is the Nationalist area – where working-class communities abut onto each other. Even today, the roads running vertically across Shankill Road and Falls Road are being gated through electronic steeled corridors to control vehicles and pedestrians. These gates remain open during the day but are closed at night to prevent both communities from crossing. The porous borders between the gates are the zones of transition as local people called them "no man's land." The two areas with two political and cultural entities are not completely and hermetically sealed in, but a sense of self-containment lingers on through their entire lives. On either side of the Peace Line, the symbols and national colors are different. The visual references are not only of the military (the masked men with the gun) but also of signs, flags, murals, and symbols of differences; one with the bilingual signs of Irish language and the images of lilies, the

other with images and symbols of Great Britain. Local residents demand that the metal wall and the wire mesh be stacked upon the already existed Peace Wall for making their space safe. This demand for the demarcation about the two areas was undoubtedly more severe during the Troubles in the 1970s but it still affects the people in west Belfast even in post-ceasefire today.[4)]

Consolidated as a center, Belfast has always played a crucial role in Northern Irish literature. Its centrality has been a prime catalyst for the Northern Irish imagination and in the Troubles plays in particular. Earlier Troubles plays in the nineteen seventies and eighties initially portrayed Belfast as a home of alienation, confusion, and violence. In the preface to *Stewart Parker: A Life*, Marilynn Richtarik mentions, "Belfast in the mid-1970s ranked among the least auspicious places imaginable for a playwright to attempt to launch a career" (vii). Nevertheless, at the heart of Parker's work lies the troubled city of Belfast, and as Richtarik astutely observes in her biography of Parker:

> The Troubles really made Parker into a 'Belfast' playwright [. . .] by giving new urgency to his private project of imagining alternatives to Northern Ireland's stalemate. Throughout his career, however, he rejected pressure to take sides or to make the violence itself the subject of his plays. Instead, his interest lay in getting behind the symptoms of cultural division and finding new and unexpected angles from which to examine it. [. . .] Whatever his formal strategy, Parker's writing reflects his individualism, liberal humanism, and the socialist perspective that helped him evade sectarian pitfalls. (viii)

The urban space in the troubled time and place in Belfast city makes Parker an

4) See Hayes, Bernadette C., and Ian McAllister's *Conflict to Peace: Politics and society in Northern Ireland over half a century* (2015) to see more information specific to sectarian geography of Belfast.

eclectic playwright. In Parker's plays, multiple spaces allude to Belfast's physical space (the peace lines, the interface zones, the checkpoints), psychological space (no-go area, enemy territory, the space that ideologically belongs to 'the other'), and social space (geopolitical manipulation or socio-spatial practices that reinforces separatism). Parker's Belfast, in which most of his plays are set, generates heterotopic spaces where the society or culture is simultaneously represented, contested, and altered.

In Parker's plays, differences in the multiple spaces are conflated. His first major play *Spokesong* (1975) expresses his desire for alternative Northern Irish spaces through a discontinuity between time and space. Set in 1970s Belfast, the play features Trick Cyclist, a narrator on a unicycle, expanding the temporality of the stage ranging from the early 1900s to the 1970s as he tells the whole story in a number of flashbacks. While the Trick Cyclist continually weaves past, present, and future, the play centers on main character's bike shop that is under paramilitary pressures to take it over as the urban redevelopment plan for the Belfast Urban Motorway (BUM) is in progress. *Spokesong* vacillates between the space of hope where there is a romantic visionary who still believes that the people of Belfast roam freely through the stiffened city on their bicycle and the space of sectarian violence where a paramilitary racketeer aspiring to make the shop into a new headquarter. The setting of *Catchpenny Twist* (1977), which was made into Parker's first televised work, geographically leaves Belfast behind as two characters flee from the death-threat. Though the scenes constantly shift from Belfast, Dublin, and London to Luxembourg, the Troubles of Belfast, the "old necropolis" (Parker, *Catchpenny Twist* 103) devours every space to which they are destined.

Pentecost is the most "climactic piece" (Parker, *Plays: 2* xiv), as he says, in his trilogy[5] (or "triptych" as he prefers to call it). The play was first

performed at the Guildhall, Derry, by the Field Day Theatre Company[6] in 1987. Seamus Deane, a director of the Derry-based Field Day, says, "The Guildhall was deliberately chosen as 'the venue for the symbolic power of the building,' rather than its effectiveness as a place for drama. It was the centre from which the gerrymandering system had been run and it was the centre of exclusion and of unionist power. It was deliberately chosen as a repudiation of that and a replacement of it" (McGuigan, *The Irish News*, 2 Oct. 2015). Seamus Heaney who was also on the Field Day's board of directors put, "We believed we could *create a space* in which we would try to redefine what being Irish meant in the context of what had happened in the north" (qtd in Murray, "A Kind of Trilogy" 108; emphasis added).

Believing he could "create a space," Parker illuminates that Northern Irish political culture is not a parochial dead-end limbo through the last piece of Parker's dramatic oeuvre, *Pentecos*t. Instead, Belfast is dramatized as porous entities that can negotiate and exchange shared memories. Set during 1974 Ulster Workers' Council (UWC) strike (15 May 1974 – 28 May 1974), the play seems to further emphasize its religious, or almost theological and political meanings, the subject that is always attached to the Field Day project. Four main characters gather in a working-class parlor house. The house is located on Belfast's

5) Saying that "trilogy" is a too strong word, Parker prefers to refer to his three history plays, *Northern Star, Heavenly Bodies* and *Pentecost*, as a "triptych."

6) Brian Friel founded the Field Day Theatre Company with the actor Stephen Rea in 1980. It was a cultural and artistic endeavor the same as W. B. Yeats' Abbey Theatre. The majority of cultural activities were centered in Dublin, and also the Field Day was to create a Northern Irish version of the literary/cultural revival. Differing from Yeats, however, the Company's intention was to form a "fifth province," (Ireland consists of four provinces) that transcends the binary oppositions in Irish politics.

sectarian dividing line during the strike. Just as the bike shop in Parker's *Spokesong* is under double attack from sectarianism and modern re-development process, the house in *Pentecost* is also "[b]esieged between Protestant and Catholic ghettos" as well as under "assault from modernity itself, located as it is in the middle of a redevelopment zone" (Richtarik 310). In a sense, the play intensifies the claustrophobic fear (inside the house) of the political contest (outside the house) similar to the conventional Troubles play. However, by confining warring groups to the home space, Parker's *Pentecost* makes audiences concentrate on previously ignored points on the private level of conflicts of the Northern Ireland sectarianism. The house of the play, therefore, speaks for something beyond the religio-political conflicts of the Northern Ireland sectarianism. Neither a realistic portrayal of Belfast (dystopia) nor an imaginary spatial representation (utopia), Parker's drama envisions the "real" space, though impossible to reach, a heterotopic space of great opportunity.

III. Through and Beyond the Troubles: Spatial Dynamics in *Pentecost*

Morash provides an insight into how the houses have long held an almost formulaic power in Troubles plays. He sums up the classic formula of Troubles drama as "one family, one day, one death" (Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre* 245). Taking John Boyd's *The Flats* (1971), the first Northern Irish play to deal with the post-1969 violence, as the start of the classic Troubles play, Morash goes on to argue that Troubles drama is typically set in an interior, domestic space (often a family kitchen). A typical Troubles play revolves around the tragedy of family as a result of sectarian violence, presenting the

family as apolitical innocents and portraying sectarian violence as "mindless and unmotivated" (245).

Parker's *Pentecost*, in contrast, transcends the formulaic Troubles play. The play does not feature "one family" because none of the four main characters in the play can guarantee the whole unity of the family. It also transcends the narrative that takes place in "one day," as the play begins at one of the fifteen days of UWC strike and reaches Pentecost Sunday. Moreover, as both Friel's *The Freedom of the City* and Parker's *Pentecost* have famously been considered as the revenant drama,[7] *Pentecost* does not feature "one death," because the play features the ghost of recently deceased Lily Mathews, who was born in 1900 but still present onstage. The play goes beyond the limitation of the realism of the Troubles plays that have been devoted to the representation and reproduction of the tragic fate of the Troubles. It de-historicizes the space of the Troubles and replaces it with hitherto unacknowledged quotidian manifestations that have no place within the meta-narrative of Northern Ireland Troubles. Therefore, the space in *Pentecost* is not given and fixed in history, but constantly reproduced and transformed.

The house in *Pentecost* is a space of irony. Melissa Sihra noted, "'home' in Irish drama has remained a precarious space, denoting a lack of security and

7) Parker said, "Plays and ghosts have a lot in common. The energy which flows from some intense moment of conflict in a particular time and place seems to activate them both" (Parker, *Plays: 1* xiii). The revenant drama features the spectral figures that appear in the form of ghosts and revenants. Since the revenant drama is a combination of the living and the dead, the possibilities of the past remain present. Not only Stewart Parker and Brian Friel but also many other playwrights such as Frank McGuinness, Sebastian Barry, Marina Carr, and Conor McPherson have shared a commitment to issues of spectrality in their plays.

prone to invasion and penetration" (3). Sihra further argues "[p]otent threshold spaces such as windows and doorways emphasize issues of containment and transformation in performance, reinforcing the place of the body within history and culture" (3). The window frame is a device employed evocatively in Parker's *Pentecost*. The setting of the play vividly shows the house and the deep-seated conflict around it:

> *The time is 1974. The place is Belfast. The play takes in the downstairs back part of a respectable working-class 'parlour' house, built in the early years of this century.* [. . .] *The large kitchen window looks out on the back yard, which is very narrow, with high, whitewashed walls topped by lines of broken glass. The yard door is heavily bolted, even though its worn ribs are showing through.* (171)

Through the large kitchen window, the symbol of openness, acceptance, and diversity, we see the space of the Troubles. Walls topped by broken glass and heavily bolted doors are the last-ditch fortification that is meant to protect the private space from the outside. The house in the play operates as a transformative space that holds both a promise of security and fear for the sectarian violence as *the yard door* that has already lost its proper function due to its ribs fallen out symbolically represents.

Furthermore, Parker features the house as a space full of life-threatening dissonance of the living and the dead. The original occupant of the house was Lily Matthews, and her ghost now haunts the space disapproving of the new occupants, Marian, Lenny, Ruth, and Peter. Lenny and Marian are already in the process of divorce; Ruth, a friend of Marian runs from her truncheon-wielding policeman husband (not for the first time); Lily, though she has died as a respectable and honorable woman as she argues, has an

illegitimate baby whom she abandoned outside the church.

The house in the play, thus, serves as a kind of refuge for all four characters who are displaced and dispossessed, but no one can feel that they have returned "home," the place to which they strongly sense that they belong. Marian and "the three spineless parasites" (225) as Marian says, Lenny, Ruth, and Peter are all dislocated. Marian's antique shop has been taken over by the Protestant gallery owner and her flat that has been in the middle of the whirlpool of political strife is now being sold. Marian's friend Ruth reminisces, "Remember your flat. Magdala Street. Calling round. Always big fire. Out would come the bottle" (187). With her shop and flat taken over, Marian is now halfway through parting from her friends and husband Lenny. One of her friends who joined the Republican movement is gone dead while the other is imprisoned in Long Kesh[8] as a paramilitary prisoner. Besides the two friends, Marian does not mention any other family members except Lenny and her dead son Christopher. Even that last familial relationship with Lenny is on the verge of divorce because she claims Lenny's willed house in return for it. The sense of dislocation and dispossession becomes all the more extreme when the ghost of Lily appears and tells Marian to move out of the house. The first word Lilly says to Marian is "I don't want you in my house," and goes to scream at her in anger: "I don't want you in here, breathing strong drink and profanity, and your husband deserted [. . .] I want no truck with any of yous, stay you with

8) Long Kesh, a place that is articulated through Marian once and never again, is now called as Her Majesty's Prison Maze in Northern Ireland. This place is also euphemistically called "an IRA cell" and Bobby Sands' deathbed in it has become a place of pilgrimage for republicans. Based on the story of his grandfather, one of Northern Ireland's most celebrated playwrights Martin Lynch dramatizes the experiences of Republican and Loyalist prisoners held at this prison in his play, *Chronicles of Long Kesh* (2009).

your own and let me rest easy with mine" (181).

Ruth, a friend of Marian's from their days on Northern Ireland's swimming team, flees to this house wounded by her truncheon-wielding husband, who is a member of Northern Ireland police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). Lenny, a middle-class Catholic, also comes back to the place after his house got burgled. An interesting but undervalued character because of his drifting characteristics, Peter, the architect and a Protestant friend of Lenny's University, an "exilephilia[c]" (218) as he describes, has just returned from his self-imposed exile in Birmingham. Ironically returning to his homeland for a trip, he disparages the place calling it "Lilliput" (200):

> PETER. It sounds to me like the big picture. The '74 Uprising. The Great Loyalist Insurrection. Historic Days in Lilliput.
> LENNY. Sure, every bloody day in the week's historic, in this place.
> PETER. What, this teeny weeny wee province of ours and its little people, all the angry munchkins, with their midget brains, this festering pimple on the vast white flabby bum of western Europe, what would you call it?
> LENNY. I call it home. (200)

He cannot understand why he feels to be "missing" something by living outside Northern Ireland: "I don't, I don't know why it matters, why I care, I don't know, what the fuck I have to come back here for, what I expect, what it is I think I'll find here, whatever it is I think I'm missing . . ." (234). Though Peter finds fault with his home place, the house is still "a place to stay" (206) for him.

Above all, Parker's heterotopic imagination is mostly evoked through the presence of ghosts in his plays – The Phantom Bride in *Northern Star* (1984), the Phantom Fiddler in *Heavenly Bodies* (1986), and Lily Mathews in *Pentecost*. Richard Russell argues that this flitting ghost in Parker's drama

represents a "pervasive sense of dislocation among Northern Irish Protestants, who feel neither fully British nor Irish and fear abandonment by Britain" (44). He further points out that the ultimate aim of Parker's drama is to "exorcize" the ghosts of conflict in Northern Ireland by recognizing and resolving their claims through "a process of reconciliation" (43). In contrast to the interpretation of the ghost as ongoing turbulence of Northern Ireland that has to be exorcized, Parker's *Pentecost* weaves the memories through active presence and participation of the ghost.

In addition to the four occupants, the ghost of Lily keeps coming alive as the fifth presence to Marian. Since *Pentecost* begins with Lily's funeral, the house seems to be a space in which death and stagnation are key experiences and in which the dead are ever present. In *Pentecost*, the ghost of Lily is present onstage, Marian's dead infant Christopher and Ruth's three unborn children that were miscarried by the abusing husband still haunt their minds. Lilly, Marian, and Ruth are all childless and they suffer from the memory of their dead children. Particularly, the play painfully references childlessness through Lilly's abandoning an illegitimate baby. When Marian discovers the padlocked diary of Lily, it brings the ghost of Lily the memory when she was thirty-three, and the innermost secret is thrown into the public sphere. The diary reveals Lily's love affair with the English airman who lodged in her house:

> MARIAN. You abandoned him.
> LILY. I entrusted him to the care of the Lord!
> MARIAN. You left him lying in the porch of a Baptist church!
> LILY. A well-off congregation, it was for the best . . . moneyed people . . . some pair of them would take him in, adopt him as their own, what did you want me to do, he had a better chance there then the orphanage or the hospital . . . (230)

The space of Kitchen scullery where the ghost of Lily always partakes shows space not as a container to keep and lock the memories, but a space that waits to be opened and recognized. The kitchen space designed by Parker "*particularly is cluttered, almost suffocated, with the furnishings and bric-a-brac of the first half of the century, all the original fixtures and fittings still being in place*." At the same time, however, "*in spite of now being shabby, musty, threadbare, it has all clearly been the object of a desperate, lifelong struggle for cleanliness, tidiness, orderliness – godliness*" (171). The death and the temporality of the past dominate the kitchen space in *Pentecost*, yet Parker carefully illuminates the minute details of the space by tracing Lily's enduring struggle for and commitment to her own space.

The presence of the ghost of Lily, thus, means neither a return to the past nor redemption or transfiguration for Lily. Unlike the dead who are resurrected only to move on to eternity and rest in peace, Lily remains alive but still not free to alter the past or choose a future. Lily tickles a memory of the past, which emerges not as a chronology of events in time but a series of terrible separation from the world. Her presence does not really point to the future but looks back. *Pentecost* provides the contrasting perspectives to linear and cyclical histories as the temporal/spatial nexus is raveled through the presence of a ghost. The idea that the Northern Irish problem is not limited to history but related to the heterogenous spatial and temporal multiplicity of the city is indeed a fundamental aspect of Parker's idea as a Northern Irish playwright. The space haunted by the ghost, thus, suggests the inevitable tensions between a one-dimensional linear perception of history and a commitment to a future.

Highlighting the tensions between heterogeneous issues within one single parlor house, *Pentecost* is, in itself, a heterotopic space. The house is deployed rather to destabilize the dominant historical discourse on the Troubles that has

been spanning a century. The phrase “this house” is repeated throughout the play, yet with different associations in different contexts: The house is a transitory space that exists *in between* the private and public as the play is set in the parlor room of the house which is in the middle of urban re-development zone as well as the sectarian divide line. Furthermore, the house is a property for trading, selling, and buying for Marian, a possible historic place preserved by the National Trust property, the inheritance for Lenny, a refuge for Ruth, a temporary place to stay for Peter, a whole life for now dead occupant Lily, and finally a space for congregation of prayers, atonement, inspiration, and renewal like the Biblical feast evoked in the title *Pentecost*. The domestic space in *Pentecost* consists of the dead and the living, homesickness, and exilephilia, secrecy and revelation, loyalty and betrayal, painful memory and restoration, sinfulness and forgiveness. Instead of the clichéd figures of the Troubles, Parker examines the layers of psyche closely looking at how individual characters respond to the chaotic world around them. The house is closed down by destructive forces emanating from the politics of the Troubles, but Parker somehow anticipates both private and public spaces that are away from or even transcend the sectarian violence. Through an emphasis on the impermanence of such spaces and through recurring contrasts between and coexistence with the heterogeneous spaces, Parker reconsiders the very concept of home and what it means to belong.

IV. Pentecostal Vision: Parker’s “Theatre of Hope”

The conclusion of the play is problematic as is clear from Fintan O’Toole’s *Sunday Tribune* review:

> But this very authenticity carries its own problems for a play like this. Having convinced us of the reality of these people and of the time and place in which they live, Parker then has to try to leap beyond realism into some kind of metaphor of transcendence. That leap has to be credible on the level of the real political world which he has delineated so sharply. And it isn't. [. . .] The problem is that this Pentecostal image works only on the level of words. Change is evoked verbally, it doesn't happen on stage. (61-62)

Rather than revolving around problem-solving, fixing, explaining, and taking sides with religions and politics, the play ends with Lenny's version of the gospel standard, accompanied by Peter on banjo. Ruth reaches out and opens the window so that the light and air can come inside the room. Parker's resolution to *Pentecost*, which O'Toole regarded so negatively saying "nothing happens," may lack the moment of impact. However, as Shaun Richards points out, the conclusion of the play suggests not one of the "concrete utopias" but the "step towards a harmony" (362). The very act of opening the window at least shows Parker's aspirations for "a possibility of hope," which had not fully been realized, yet was (and is) still potent and valid.

Parker's drama has been labeled as "the theatre of hope" (Murray, *Twentieth-century* 194), "a quirky yet compelling blend of the comic and the intellectual" (Wallace, "Postscript" 119). Stephen Rea has claimed Parker to be "the first Northern writer to produce such a vision of a harmonious possibility on the other side of violence" ("Introduction" xii). A manifesto of Parker's playful yet polemical dramatic vision is also found in his lecture at Queen's University Belfast in 1986, later published under the title *Dramatis Personae*. In the course of his talk, Parker argues that twentieth-century drama basically ranges between two distinct poles: one in the red corner is represented by the revolutionary didacticism of the "Marxist missionary" Bertolt Brecht; the other

in the blue corner by the mordant and morose absurdism of "an agnostic monk" Samuel Beckett, whose "work displays not the slightest inclination to teach or instruct anybody about anything" (*Dramatis Personae* 21).

These "twin totems," as Keith Hopper calls them, forge a specific milieu of Parker's drama that attempts to create a synthesis between solemnity and fun and "social dialectic and existential slapstick" (164). Playwrights, above all, Parker asserts, should be "neither didactic nor absurdist", and would "aim to *inspire* rather than to *instruct*" and "to assert the *primacy* of the play-impulse over the *deathwish*" (*Dramatis Personae* 26-27; emphasis added). He further emphasizes that drama can contain "[a]lternative versions of the historical myths sacred to each of the communities," "all in a single image," "which unites our two communities in their compact of mutual impotence and sterility" (26). Parker's essay "State of Play" may explain his aesthetic departure from a coherent and teleological dramatic form that would have continued to be dominant in Northern Irish drama. In the essay, we find quite an illuminating passage on his belief or even manifesto as a Northern Irish playwright: "[T]he Irish playwright today – or certainly the Northern Irish playwright – has to invent the theatre all over again, and conjure out of thin air (or rather out of thick and acrid air) a place within it for himself" (*Dramatis Personae* 94).

The spatial world of Parker's *Pentecost* generates heterotopic sites of hope in the face of catastrophic circumstances. It is true that there seems to be a consensus that Parker's drama contributes to the kind of "utopian" project of Northern Ireland. It is also true, however, *Pentecost*, which becomes the epitome of dramatization of reconciliation and forgiveness, does not guarantee what precisely these characters might do for their future further on. The dramatic vision of Parker as a Northern Irish playwright is not divided into a dichotomy of utopia or dystopia. Rather, the numerous spaces of Belfast

imagined through Parker's drama provide a heterotopic experience. Rather than engaging seriously with the political situation in the troubled times in Northern Ireland, his plays are never resolved to a unified and homogeneous moment of harmony. In other words, the city of Belfast in Parker's drama is not just a space of representation but, more importantly, one of imagination, "a vision of a harmonious possibility on the other side of violence" (Rea xii) "to hint at a vision of the future" (*Dramatis Personae* 19) as Parker puts it.

As the major speech delivered at John Malone Memorial Lecture, "A playwright should aim to be a truth-teller, a sceptic in a credulous world" (*Dramatis Personae* 24) indicates, Parker's contribution as a Northern Irish playwright lies in his powerful proffering of alternative images and visions of Belfast. Parker's envisioning of heterotopic spaces through his drama deconstructs the confined relationship between the conceived space and lived space, and gesticulates toward a perceived space with more possibilities of hope. Above all, Parker's drama is "a working model of wholeness," offering what Claudia W. Harris argues to be "a pulling together of all the many competing views of Ireland, a presentation that would both respect and delight in diversity, a future that would allow for cooperation rather than insist on extinction, a movement from pastness to wholeness" (233). In addition to the "deconstructive energy" (140) that Ondrej Pilny defines as the characteristic of irony, Clare Wallace also emphasizes that the combination of this deconstructive energy and "a ludic momentum" ("A Sceptic in a Credulous World" 164) is the greatest feature of Parker's depictions of Northern Ireland and its characters. Through these heterotopic experiences, Northern Ireland in *Pentecost* ceases to be a troubled place and becomes a heterotopia.

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Imagining Alternative Northern Ireland: Spatial Dynamics in Stewart Parker's *Pentecost*

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This paper aims to explore the works of Northern Irish playwright, Stewart Parker (1941-1988) by focusing on alternative images of Northern Irish spaces found in *Pentecost* (1987). As Belfast in the 1970s was heavily under both urban planning and sectarian violence called "Troubles," most of the Northern Irish Troubles plays invariably dramatize sectarian violence and its devastating effects on people. In stark contrast to fixed and claustrophobic time/space dominant in the Troubles plays, however, Parker constructs his theater space in ways that accord with Michel Foucault's concept of "heterotopia" with its multiple heterogeneous temporality and spatiality. The purpose of spatial analysis of Parker's drama is to actively negotiate the spatiality in drama in different ways; how they generate their own forms of spatial expressions to make sense of, manage, expose, critique or contest Northern Irish spaces. My intention is to argue that the spatial orientation of Parker's drama is "centrifugal,"—which Christopher Morash and Shaun Richards describe as one of the two major forces (centripetal and centrifugal) of the theater—as the interplay between the theatrical space and the theatrical experience of the spectators can impact on social space in reverse order. The fact that Parker's drama has played an important part in reshaping the socio-political arena of Northern Ireland further attests to theater's powerful role in the shaping of cultural/political identities instead of relegating its role to the mimetic representation of the Northern Irish Trouble.

Key Words Northern Irish drama, Troubles play, Heterotopia, Stewart Parker, *Pentecost*

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