

Spatializing the Everyday in
Post-Troubles Northern Ireland:
Owen McCafferty's *Scenes from the Big Picture**

Lee, Hyungseob
Hanyang University

I

“The world is a violent place. We know that better than anybody,” says Ray, a UDA hard man in Gary Mitchell’s 1997 play *In a Little World of Our Own* (3). This little violent world is Northern Ireland, and Mitchell has been one of the most powerful dramatic voices writing on the Northern Ireland conflict known as the Troubles. The play is a tightly organized thriller in which over the course of one day, a family of three loyalist brothers gets torn apart by the conflict between the sectarian loyalty and the familial attachment.

* This work was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2021S1A5A2A01066198).

Chris Morash's pithy formulation of the Troubles play in terms of "one family, one day, one death" (245) obtains a potent example in *In a Little World of Our Own*.

For many Northern Irish playwrights, the Troubles defines their artistic contours. As Mark Phelan writes, "There has been an expectation that playwrights from the North of Ireland are *required* to address the political conflict here" (Introduction ix). A profound sense of political and cultural division has led them to search for "a dramatic metaphor which will both contain and distance the immediacy and the intransigence of present events" (Maxwell 2). An equally powerful sense of artistic isolation and inadequacy has forced many playwrights to adopt tragic form, attempting to endow the appalling reality of violence and bloodshed with a modicum of artistic dignity and cultural continuity.

Despite valuable contributions from such writers as Martin Lynch, Anne Devlin, Christina Reid, Graham Reid, and Gary Mitchell, however, Northern Irish drama has inadvertently colluded in the reproduction of the overarching image of Northern Ireland as "a violent place." Instead of being part of the everyday space, violence has become the singularly visible signifier that traverses and binds all walks of life there. This has had a corrosive effect on the self-perception of the Northern Irish people. Cultural representations of Northern Ireland and the self-eviscerating identity construction of its people are locked into each other, perpetuating the myth of Northern Ireland as cultural and political wasteland, the purgatorial space of atavistic violence.

With the advent of the post-agreement era, the problem of the legacy of the Troubles has come to the fore in the public and private spheres of Northern Ireland. Finally, the Troubles play's creative energy as well as its thematic viability seems exhausted. However, the ghosts from the past die hard, and as

the prominent Belfast playwright Stewart Parker writes, “Life [in Northern Ireland] is largely lived, not in the present tense, but in the continuous past tense” (qtd. in Richtarik 71). The fallouts of the Troubles continue to occupy post-Troubles theatre. Thus, for example, Peter Crawley starts his *Irish Times* review of Jimmy McAleavey’s post-Troubles play *Monsters, Dinosaurs, Ghosts* at the Abbey in 2015 with “They haven’t gone away, you know.” Commenting on the formal feature of the play as “positioned between a psychodrama and a dark satire,” he observes wryly that the psycho-dramatic satire in which the traumatized subject is caught in a grotesquely violent action may be “the default mode of post-Troubles theatre” (Crawley). For Crawley as well as others, post-Troubles theatre is essentially a continuation of Troubles theatre.

Crawley’s position may reflect a larger cultural and political perception of the less discriminating public in the South that tends to see the North as the cultural wasteland and political no man’s land of post-imperial Britain. However, theatrical projects that push Belfast beyond its unenviable position as the predominant spatial imaginary of the Northern Ireland conflict have been made by more recent playwrights. In this paper, I want to look at the work of Belfast playwright Owen McCafferty and in particular his seminal play *Scenes from the Big Picture* (2003). Particular attention is paid to the play’s relationship to and position in post-Troubles theatre, its thematic and experiential prioritization of everyday life, and its formal and linguistic features that enable the dramatization of the everyday life in Belfast.

Scenes charts the urban space of Belfast from “a prismatic perspective of an entire city in a single day as a collage of short scenes flit, flux, and fade to produce the eponymous ‘big picture’ of contemporary life in a modern city” (Phelan, “From Troubles” 382). The play resolutely stays in the physical and emotional terrain of everyday life. It takes an epic form, encompassing a

multitudinous array of ordinary lives in numerous fragmented scenes without feigning to be didactic. Changes are there, but greater stress is placed on the osmotic obduracy of the quotidian world which is alive in repetition. Everyday life emerges as spatial category, and it is the primary locus of the dialectic of resistance and negotiation. McCafferty's Belfast is bigger than the Troubles and its continuing fallouts. The "fabric of life" into which the Northern Irish conflict is woven is too ambiguous and multivalent to be colonized by the ideologically constructed and mediatized discourse. Switching between the emic and etic perspectives, that is, between the participant's view and the observer's view, McCafferty creates an imaginary space of Belfast and offers the audience-reader a transfigurative walk on the city streets.

II

Born in Belfast in 1961. McCafferty spent the first ten years of his life in London as his family moved to the city right after his birth. The city of Belfast he came back to in 1971 had become the hotbed of sectarian violence. High levels of religious-ethnic segregation and social regimentation were maintained through the ordinary individual's "self-imposed restriction on movement within a city" (Looney). The McCafferty family lived in the Ormaeau Road area that was heavily segregated on sectarian lines, with the lower stretch of the road occupied by the Catholic nationalist community and the upper part populated by the Protestant loyalist one. In his interview with Stephen Looney, McCafferty talks about the lasting impression his childhood has left on him: "you are still *there* and you cannot get rid of *those* types of things connected to *that* era" (Looney). McCafferty's artistic trajectory, then, is plotted to

connect past memories and present concerns without one being overwhelmed by and reduced to the other. His works aim at constructing a larger view of Northern Irish society that preserves the memories of the Troubles without being engulfed by them.

Scenes was first performed in 2003 at the National Theatre in London, garnering him the John Whiting Award, the Evening Standard's Charles Wintour Award for New Playwriting, and the Meyer-Whitworth Award, a feat no other playwright has achieved. Therefore, it is surprising to find a dearth of critical study on McCafferty. Patrick Lonergan notes that McCafferty is one of "Ireland's most under-rated dramatist[s]," who "deserves to be more widely known in the Republic" (Lonergan). Calling the play "one of the finest plays written by an Irish playwright in the past twenty years" ("From Troubles" 382), Phelan explains the critical neglect of the play in these terms: "the Troubles still remains the dominant meta-narrative mis-shaping discourse about theatre and politics in the North" and McCafferty "who opt[s] to deal obliquely with the conflict, end[s] up being overlooked and ignored" ("From Troubles" 373).

Apart from its tangential relationship with the canonical tradition of Troubles plays that Phelan notices, *Scenes* seems lacking in dramatic cohesion: the play apparently is diffuse and meanders, lacking a controlling device that holds together the actions and characters that are shredded and fragmented. It is a big play, featuring 21 characters and 41 scenes (grouped in 13, 14, 14 into three acts) and lasting longer than two and half hours. Its magnitude is too staggering to be held in memory in its wholeness. Often called Joycean (mainly because it portrays a day in the lives of ordinary people in the city of Belfast), *Scenes* is perhaps more akin to *Dubliners* with its loosely connected stories than *Ulysses*, where the ordinary and the mythic presuppose and feed each other to achieve a miraculous totality and transcendence of everyday life.

Showing little sign of fertile immanence that bridges the oppressive reality and the utopian impulse, McCafferty's play stays resolutely on the phenomenological level.

The tight Aristotelian temporal structure of *Scenes* is undercut by a series of fragmented scenes, which move from glimpses into the characters' homes to social interactions in the shop, pub, office, and street. *Scenes* in its formal and thematic traits exhibits a superficial resemblance to Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* (1938). However, a more illuminating comparison can be made to Jim Cartwright's *Road* (1986). Cartwright's play premiered at the Royal Court Theatre as part of a trilogy about the North, focusing on a Lancashire town in the 1980s hit by economic change and Thatcherite policies. It brings the anxiety and frustration of the British working class of the 80s into sharp focus as *Scenes* does with the Northern Irish working class in the post-conflict era. Cartwright's play combines the even more tightly organized temporal scheme, "tonight," with scenic glimpses into various lives in various places. Unlike *Scenes*, however, *Road* is overtly metatheatrical and cleverly performative: it opens with the "Pre-Show" "[i]n the street in front of the theatre" (5) during which the audience follow the actors into the auditorium; characters on the stage address the audience directly with highly theatricalized language and the temporal scheme is often suspended by extended monologues and storytelling. In addition, the play holds together bits and pieces with an important metatheatrical device: a narrator. "A cross between a lord of misrule, a Brechtian narrator and the stage manager of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*" (Pankratz 65), Scullery introduces the play to the audience, comments on the scene, and interacts with characters. Scullery's privileged position as insider and outsider and his triple role as participant-observer-commentator infuse the play with communicative theatricality.

Scenes is not anchored in the narrator that straddles the inside and outside of the dramatic action. There are several reasons for McCafferty's dramaturgical decision to dispense with the narrator. First, the absence of the narrator reflects his desire to show the everyday life of Belfast as it is. As Henri Lefebvre points out, "the inventory of everyday life implies the negation of everyday life through dreams, images and symbols even if such negation presupposes a certain amount of irony towards symbol and imagery" (3). McCafferty is especially keen on holding down the process of the negation of everyday life, keeping the actions and characters as pedestrian and prosaic as possible. Dreams, images, and symbols emerge and submerge, but we see little of poetic space in which these proliferate, forming their own network of signification that "negates" and changes the everyday world. Important issues surge momentarily, such as the continuing legacy of history, the pain of hidden memory and broken promises, dashed hopes and social impasse. But they quickly melt into air or vanish into the night sky like "a sonar bleep" (*Scenes* 362).

Secondly, McCafferty aims to liberate the city from the representational agoraphobia with which so many of the Troubles plays are shrouded. He does so by devising a character, a taciturn city walker whose daily itinerary shapes the inner and outer boundaries of the quotidian space of *Scenes* instead of inserting a self-reflexive narrator into the dramatic artifice. The play opens up the space: beginning and ending in the street, it features a kaleidoscopic swirl of urban spaces such as home, office and workplace, pub, and shop as well as an open park and a bank of the river. Not even in Belfast do ordinary people get shot on the street every day, tortured in the backroom of a pub, or kneecapped for drug-dealing. Kids meet and chat on the street, people buy chocolates and lighters at the shop, they drink and talk at the pub, they swim or take a stroll along the river and enjoy the sunny day on a park bench. They

don't shudder at home in fear of impending judgment and execution.

Finally, the absence of the narrative hold in *Scenes* stems from McCafferty's painful awareness that no commonly shared perspective, or what Parker called "a whole culture" (25), is available in this deeply divided place. Objective assessment and impartial judgment are all part of the ideological vocabulary with which the state and political leaders blandish people into accepting their chicanery. Because she or he could never be an objective arbitrator and universal adjudicator, the narrator's assumption of the controlling role would disturb the fragile equanimity of the lived space. The narrator would also falsify the audience perception of the drama with pretension to impartial representation.

III

McCafferty believes the everyday life of ordinary people to be a vital source for post-Troubles theatre. Northern Irish theatre has too long inhabited the political space in which power struggle for sectarian hegemony is negotiated, contested, and relived. Neither Gerry Adams, Ian Paisley, Bobby Sands, nor even George Best belong to the everyday life where ordinary people struggle to maintain their social existence by subjecting themselves to the dominant systems of signification. However, in the everyday space we find ordinary people's novel ways of engaging themselves with the dominant systems. They reappropriate the spaces laid out before them by manipulating them, misusing them, or eliding them. They gain human agency through spatial practices that Michel de Certeau calls "tactical." De Certeau's study of the practice of everyday life is founded on the important distinction between

strategy and tactic (xviii-xxii). The distinction in turn aims at finding forces and modes of life in non-hegemonic spheres.

A strategy refers to those spatial practices that construct political, economic, and scientific rationality. A strategic place is “proper” (De Certeau xix), that is, it is constitutive of the producer’s hegemonic power in all socially accepted fields of knowledge. On the other hand, a tactic is employed from the standpoint of the consumer who cannot afford a proper social space warranted by hegemonic strategy. Thus, in their tactical practice, the consumer turns into a user, “poaching” on the other’s space: “A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place” (De Certeau xix). For de Certeau, walking, talking, reading, and cooking all become significant areas of tactical, creative movement that lift ordinary people out of the strategic nexus of the producer-consumer. He observes how people “produce through their signifying practices . . . ‘indirect’ or ‘errant’ trajectories obeying their own logic,” thereby becoming “unrecognized producers, poets of their own acts, silent discoverers of their own paths in the jungle of functionalist rationality” (xviii). Stories are themselves “spatial trajectories” that “traverse and organize places” and “select and link them together” (De Certeau 115). De Certeau also reminds us that “the act of speaking is not reducible to a knowledge of the language” because enunciative choice “effects an appropriation, or reappropriation, of language by its speaker” (xiii). The dominant system of representation is not impervious to ordinary people’s misappropriation:

The presence and circulation of a representation (taught by preachers, educators, and popularizers as the key to socioeconomic development) tells us nothing about what it is for its users. We must first analyze its manipulation by users who are not its makers. Only then can we gauge the difference or similarity between the

production of the image and the secondary production hidden in the process of its utilization. (De Certeau xiii)

By establishing a linkage between spatial practices and linguistic practices, de Certeau enables us to see the act of resignification as the act of occupation. However limited and non-hegemonic it may still be, the tactical use of ordinary people in their spatial practices goes some way toward explaining the resiliency of everyday life. Ultimately, de Certeau challenges the “given-ness” of quotidian space, the idea that the everyday space precedes our interactions with and within it. The everyday space is constituted by ordinary people who gain their agency by tactically maneuvering through the strategically determined hegemonic system. Belfast’s urban space has always already been “given” as a site of collective trauma experienced under the all-encompassing regime of sectarian violence called the Troubles. McCafferty prioritizes the ordinary over the traumatic. His dramatic project consists in re-spatializing the quotidian space in which ordinary citizens of Belfast tactically endeavor to constitute their own spaces.

In *Scenes*, none of the 21 characters are identified in terms of the hegemonic system of sectarian language and signification: political and religious nomenclature (such as Catholic and Protestant, Nationalist and Unionist, and Republican and Loyalist) is completely dispensed with; all of the play text’s dialogues are uncapitalized, with its vernacular phoneticized: for example, joe hynes tells his wife maeve, “a just said a won’t” (*Scenes* 229). McCafferty has been called “a Northern Irish nano-realist” (Billington), and the nano-realism of everyday life in *Scenes* is powerfully aided by the localized rhythm of vernacular speech: its quotidian inarticulacy of the Belfast working class people is as distinct as the poetry of Synge’s wild westerners and O’Casey’s Dublin

ghetto-dwellers. It is also the sole indication of the identity of play's urban geography: Belfast is never mentioned in the play. More importantly, the vernacular speech is a cultural marker of Belfast that is not punctuated by the sectarian divide. In the end, these dramatic conceits are used to confound and subvert the process of self-identification imposed by the hegemonic binarism and to enable these ordinary characters to repurpose the strategically spatialized places carefully designed to maximize functional rationality, whether they be marketplaces, disciplinary institutions or a grid of streets.

McCafferty suggests that the quotidian world is so obdurate yet osmotic that it absorbs the violence of the Troubles into the "fabric of life." In the 2005 interview published in *The Evening Standard*, he says:

It seems odd to say that you can have explosions and killings and bombings and not take any notice of them. But when something like that happens day in day out, it becomes part of the fabric of life. That's how it is. You stop seeing it as abnormal. (Maddocks)

It is not that people "become inured to violence" as Phelan suggests ("Owen McCafferty" 208). Near the end of *Scenes*, we observe three crushing moments of violence. In Act 3 Scene 5, Robbie the drug dealer gets "kneecapped" by two unidentified paramilitaries with executional precision. It's not just the violence but the inescapable economy of the ritual violence that appals the audience. The familiar never stops shocking. In Act 3 Scene 8, Dave Black calls his wife Theresa and tells her the body of their missing son has been finally found after 15 years of search. Theresa tries to keep her composure, saying "i'm alright — how did the find him — where was he — did the use a digger — it didn't hit him or anything did it" (*Scenes* 346). Staying "motionless," she utters "my baby," with the stage directions reading: "Her

scream is silent then she howls with grief" (347). In Act 3 Scene 10, Betty the co-owner of the grocery shop is so shattered by the teen-aged Bop's childish escapade with a finger gun (literally poaching on the shop) that after he leaves with an apology, she "*takes the club from under the counter and starts smashing the place up*" (352). Violence in different sociological guises — the ongoing urban criminal violence, the fallouts of past violence haunting the present, and the juvenile mimicry of mediatized violence— is powerfully present in the play. Violence shakes and shatters people's lives. The point though is that violence does not extirpate them.

It is those spaces in which these violent actions take place that are of great significance: the drug dealer's flat, the office at the meat-processing factory, and the grocery shop. These are the spaces in which goods (drugs, chocolate, and human labor) are bought and sold in monetary terms. These are the spaces of commodification in which economic rationality reigns supreme and where work and social interactions are subject to the single, abstract law of exchange value. These commodified spaces of production, reproduction, and exchange lose their "platiality," failing to obtain "the signifying power and political potential of specific places" (Chaudhuri 5). However, as de Certeau observes, ordinary individuals are not just automaton inserted and functioning in accordance to the pre-given set of rules. They gain their agency by poaching, a creative reappropriation of socially organized spaces.

In McCafferty's play, ordinary places like an apartment, an office, and a shop are "simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted." The phrase quoted here comes from Michel Foucault's article, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," which was originally published in French in 1967. In it, Foucault writes:

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias. (24)

In our everyday space, we find those “counter-sites” that are capable of not only representing our ordinary lived places but also unsettling the normative meanings and perceptions of those places. Foucault calls them “heterotopias.” In mirroring real sites these heterotopias, which are real concrete sites themselves, reveal that which are unseen and unrepresented in them. According to Kim Solga, “Heterotopias are thus a means to lay bare what Lefebvre calls space’s seemingly transparent qualities—the very thing that prevents us from understanding how space functions as an agent of social and political power in our world” (74). The regime of sectarian violence operates through ordinary lived places in Belfast. However, the same places become heterotopic sites when they are misused and misappropriated by ordinary individuals. Foucault’s list of heterotopic sites includes prisons, ships, cemeteries, museums, and the theatre. These heterotopias are “capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (Foucault 25). The theatre is an obvious example in that it “brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another” (25).

What is absent in Foucault’s notion of heterotopia is human agency: spaces

are found and juxtaposed, and they mirror other spaces. However, Foucault's ideas can be linked to and supplemented by de Certeau's concept of tactical human agency, thereby offering a understanding of the everyday space in terms of a dynamic interplay between structure and agency. *Scenes* is a particularly powerful instance of the theatre as heterotopia because it spatializes many ordinary lived places which, though incompatible with one another, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted by ordinary people's poaching, a tactical misappropriation of these places. It is no coincidence that Theresa receives the news of the discovery of her son's body at her workplace instead of her home. The physical and emotional bifurcation of life into the public and private spheres underpins the idea of home as a primary space, a space particularized by deeply shared experiences and memories. When that primary space is irrevocably damaged by the absence of her son and by her husband who has given up on maintaining the semblance of normal life in his single-minded search of their boy's body, Theresa cannot poach on her home, incapable of reorganizing it in accordance with her new tactical needs of comfort and peace. Theresa is able to regain her agency only when an emergency situation at the workplace (a meat-packing factory where she works as middle manager) inadvertently puts her in the middle of a labor-management dispute. Caught in between the two irreconcilable demands, Theresa becomes tactical in her unwitting assumption of the decision-maker instead of being a messenger: as de Certeau says, "A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place" (xix). The essentialized view of home is directly challenged and contradicted when Joe the shop steward admits to his extramarital affair. Calling his wife Maeve "selfish fucking bitch" for her obsessive desire for a child, he says:

i'm not pretendin — pretendin that our life together ins't a sham -

pretendin to be interested in the crap ya talk about our future together — pretendin what a do everyday is worth all this — pretendin a like comin home when a want to be somewhere else — and the big one — pretending yer in some way fuckin normal and that I still love you. (*Scenes* 354)

Home for Joe is where you pretend to be somebody else. The ensuing battle of sexes reminds one of Edward Albee's piercing indictment of home as the site of mendacious companionship. Both workplace and home, then, are subject to the same power dynamic catalyzed by capital and state, the ideological backbone of spatial practice determined by functional rationality. Ironically, however, it is the domestic space of home that is the more rationalized of the two, and the dysfunctional rationality of the home translates into an irreparably broken space.

The dynamic of strategies and tactics resonates throughout *Scenes*: lost at home and in school, the teen-agers' idle chitchat on the street becomes genuinely communicative, leading to an unlikely alliance and friendship (Maggie and Bop); the middle-manager of the abattoir (Theresa) disingenuously has the shop steward persuade the workers to work without pay; the public mourning of a deceased worker becomes an occasion for unlimited free beer for the coworkers in the pub while a father looks for a chance for a talk to get his son hired there. The strategic layout of urban spaces is tactically misused and misappropriated by various individuals who reveal the unseen heterotopic aspect of these spaces.

Among various spaces that occupy the play, the pub emerges as the centre of emotional affiliation and of the lived space of ordinary people's dreams, desires, and memories. Divested of its communal value, the pub has been emplaced at the centre of the conflict in Troubles plays. By subjecting its

heterogeneous roles to the single logic of the abstract space of conflict and violence, the Troubles plays have exploited the pub as the distressing metaphor of Northern Ireland as an immobile, self-insulated place in which social flows are blocked and communal interaction is indefinitely suspended. In *Scenes*, the pub is retrieved and resuscitated as the space in which the spatial perception of its dwellers accords with their lived experiences. It is true that the abstract law of exchange value governs the pub with equal force. However, the process of buying and selling gets more complicated when a third party is involved in the consumer-producer relationship: it brings an ethical dimension to the otherwise purely utilitarian relationship. The idea of indebtedness complicates the process of commodity exchange: paying the debt of gratitude (to those who have come to one's father's funeral) cannot be calculated in terms of exchange value: how many beers are worth attending a funeral? The Fogarty brothers are indebted in the double sense: they owe money for the beer to Helen and they owe the guests gratitude. The co-existence of economic and ethical laws, without one subject and assimilated to the other, gives the pub a renewed sense of its traditional hybrid nature: the oxymoronic public house.

The tactical practices of the ordinary characters are finally gathered together in the pub, turning this commercial place into a multifunctional space. The pub in *Scenes* is a heterotopic space marked by a jocund modern-day wake, a not very romantic rendezvous of lovers at its backyard, and a paternal concern for a futureless son. It is a space where an unexpected practice in democratic decision-making is conducted (about who of the two brothers, Harry and Paul, will take the articles of the deceased father) that leads to a reconciliation of the two alienated brothers—a creative momentary usurpation of the debilitated political forum in Northern Ireland. The pub also offers a temporary refuge for Sharon Lawther, a middle-aged woman with an empty bag. A disillusioned

woman with no one to depend on, Sharon emerges as a more earth-bound and less self-deluded version of Blanche DuBois in Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*: she flirts and leaves with her second choice, Shanks O'Neill, a Mitch-like middle-aged bachelor who lives with his mother: "he's an obnoxious little bollocks but better than nothing" (*Scenes* 339). Finally, in the corner of the pub we find an old man gently admonishing the love-sick bartender (Helen) with a cold shower of reality.

IV

That old man is Frank Coin. He is the character who comes closest to embodying the contour of everyday life in Belfast as his daily itinerary configures the city's quotidian space. Indeed, the German production of the play has the title that translates into *A Day in the Life of Frank Coin* (Phelan, Introduction vii). Frank is a taciturn city walker in his "mid-seventies" (*Scenes* 223), which makes him the oldest character in the play. According to Walter Benjamin,

The flâneur is someone abandoned in the crowd. He is thus in the same situation as the commodity. He is unaware of this special situation, but this does not diminish its effect on him; it permeates him blissfully, like a narcotic that can compensate him for many humiliations. The intoxication to which the flâneur surrenders is the intoxication of the commodity immersed in a surging stream of customers. (31)

Benjamin's concept of the city walker is firmly embedded in the cultural and

economic life of Paris of the Second Empire. He expands his idea of the flâneur by linking it to modern Europe via his analysis of Charles Baudelaire's visionary poetics. There is perhaps not much of "the intoxication of the commodity" in Belfast that Frank can surrender himself to. However, Benjamin's flâneur is not a man under an aura of grandeur and energy: he appears at one moment and vanishes at the other, leaving only traces of his walk in the city. Divested of the aura of dramatic entrance, Frank is a city walker who leaves his traces quietly and is traced by the audience's intermittent gaze.

In the morning of the day (Act 1 Scene 5), we meet him in his house trying to tie his shoe laces. From the radio, we hear:

And the political talks continue although all parties involved have agreed they have reached an impasse — and finally — on the business front the Euro has again dropped against the pound and the dollar. (*Scenes* 240)

The news on the development of post-Agreement talks is only heard at its tail end. It is significant that the report ends with the word "impasse" before moving on to the next segment. The political world with its big issues is not a space ordinary people can project themselves onto or recognize themselves in. Peace and reconciliation are all part of the strategic language that does not allow any room for tactical poaching. Turning the radio off, Frank goes out for a walk. The next time we see him is in the middle of the day (Act 2 Scene 3) in which he is spotted "*some distance away sitting on a park bench*" (*Scenes* 285). Finally, we find him in the pub at the end of the day drinking and talking to Helen, the bartender. On Frank's "long day's journey into night," the urban space of Belfast opens itself up to and is scrutinized by the gaze of the

flaneur.

Frank's daily routine exemplifies how the everyday practice of walking forms "real systems whose existence in fact makes up the city" by spatializing and actualizing the city as a lived space while simultaneously resisting the panoptical discipline (De Certeau 97-110). According to de Certeau, the concept of the city is regulated by the panoptic administration and disciplinary procedures (96). Resonant of Foucault's idea of discipline and power, de Certeau elaborates on how institutionalization, classification, "hierarchizing" and management all contribute to the strategies that are deployed by those in power. On the other hand, the spatial practices and tactics used by the inhabitants of the city resist such structures imposed on them. These tactics depend on the procedures of everyday creativity—ordinary consumers take advantage of opportunities, trickery, and wit, defying the rules set by authorities (De Certeau 34-42). In the 2003 London production of *Scenes*, the communal nature of the tactical movement was highlighted even further. As one reviewer notes,

The show presents a community, and the production brilliantly reinforces this by its own communal procedures. When not themselves acting, the members of the cast sit and watch on a row of chairs at the front of the stalls, leaping up to effect the scene-changes — from pub to corner shop to meat plant — on Alison Chitty's striking blue set. These changes are, in themselves, little dramas of urban choreography, played out to the sounds (alarms, pneumatic drills) of street life. (Taylor "Scenes")

The actors watch one another, blurring the line between audience and character, and move together to construct their own scenes. Frank's observer-participant point of view is gradually shared by the actors and the audiences, creating a

sense of community: the theatre becomes a lived space for all.

The urban landscape delineated by Frank's daily journey is not limited to the streets, buildings and houses, and the play's immense stretch of dramatic space reaches out to the earth and the sky. On the same day "Big Dan" is buried underground, another body is dug out after a 15-year search. Digging and burial, two central tropes in Seamus Heaney's poetry, are most effectively used by McCafferty in Act 3 Scene 9 which immediately follows the scene where the body of the Blacks' son has been found. The Fogarty brothers visit their father's allotment to plant flowers in memory of their father, an act of "burial with growth" (*Scenes* 329). As they dig up the weeds, they find guns buried. They are absolutely horrified by the realization that they do not know who their father really was or how to remember him anymore. No flowers are planted, and the guns are buried again. It has taken 15 years to find the body of the victim of violence. How long will it take to find who the perpetrator is? Will it ever be found? Neither the growth of life nor the disclosure of truth is a possibility in McCafferty's Belfast.

However, people in *The Scenes* remain stubbornly resilient. Echoing the famous line from Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan* — "We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars" (64)— the last two scenes have a young girl (Maggie) and an old man (Frank) look up at the sky in the same street. As Maggie tells Bop that she will teach him how to swim — "teach you to be a fish" (*Scenes* 362)— Frank walks past them. He stops and looks up at the sky as the cacophonous noise of the city lands on him, the same noise that began at the beginning of the play: "*A baby crying. A busy road. Loud music. Church bells ringing. Heavy machinery. Police sirens. Gun shots. People arguing. Screaming*" (*Scenes* 362). Frank's day ends with the final line, "i miss you elsie" (*Scenes* 362). Another journey will begin tomorrow.

V

Near the end of *Scenes*, Bop says, “i hate this place” (362). And yet, nobody leaves Belfast or wants to. The ubiquitous Irish themes of exile, immigration and diaspora are absent in the play. This omission indicates the parochial state of mind as well as the hopeless sense of self-entrapment that the characters are afflicted with. As Robert the Polish immigrant pub manager in McCafferty’s next play *Quietly* (2012) gibes, “this place doesn’t know the rest of the world exists” (14). Upon Robert’s suggestion to get out of Belfast and experience the outside world, Jimmy retorts, “fuck travel” (*Quietly* 18). McCafferty may also have wanted to avoid the pitfalls of cultural stereotyping or dramatic generalization. An acute sense that the Irish are exiles at home and that they are displaced in their own place, permeates the thematic territory of Irish drama. However, in order to (re)present the “big picture,” the near-impossibility of life under constant siege that has been topicalized by (Northern) Irish drama needs to be counterbalanced by the stubborn resilience of everyday life. As *Scenes* shows, the everyday is so tenacious and obdurate that it can override moral concerns and defy economic rationality. At a more practical level, the inclusion of border-crossing movement would seriously weaken the dramatic structure of the play that deals with the already daunting parameters of everyday life.

Scenes gives equal weight to the loneliness of ordinary people and the connectedness of their lives. The subtle affiliations emerging in the course of the play are not so much artificially forced to give order to a chaotic world (a modernist aspiration) as embedded in the everyday lives of the characters. Phelan refers to McCafferty’s constructive process—the way in which “the play unspools the stories of more than a score of characters whose lives intricately

coincide and converge”—as “Altman-like” (“Owen McCafferty” 204). Robert Altman’s film *Short Cuts* (1993), which is based on Raymond Carver’s short story collection of the same title, encompasses all walks of American life whereas McCafferty focuses on the working class of Belfast. The exclusiveness of the working-class community that lives out everyday life in *Scenes* is counterbalanced by his most recent play *Fire Below* (2017), where two middle-aged middle-class couples (one Catholic, the other Protestant) in a “war of words” pontificate from above on diverse matters including their places in Belfast. For McCafferty, what divides Belfast is not so much sectarian allegiance as the sociology of class. As Tom the Protestant asks Gerry the Catholic, “what is the distance between our two houses,” the latter says “none” (*Fire Below* 17). Both their houses are, however, located way above the working-class residential areas. The eleventh night bonfire, as the title of the play indicates, never reaches up. The horizontal space of *Scenes* is placed in a stark contrast to the vertical spatiality of *Fire Below*. The blurb on the back cover of *Quietly* tells us that the play is a companion piece to *Scenes*. From the perspective of everyday space, however, it is *Fire Below* that completes the big picture of *Scenes*.

When Virginia Woolf talked of “the cotton wool of daily life” (72), she had in mind the amorphous, inarticulate yet malleable nature of the quotidian life of modern society. The everyday of Belfast is perhaps made of a fabric tougher and rougher than the cotton wool. Nonetheless, it is as nebulous and pliant as that of any other modern city. McCafferty presents a “big” picture of Belfast that is bigger than the Troubles. The everyday life of Belfast in *Scenes from the Big Picture* is obdurate yet resolutely resilient, and McCafferty reimagines post-conflict Northern Ireland by staging those ordinary individuals whose lives are deeply affected but not determined by the ongoing legacy of

sectarian violence.

Works Cited

- Benjamin, Walter. *Selected Writings 1938-1940*. Vol. 4. Ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. Trans. Edmund Jephcott et. al. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2003. Print.
- Cartwright, Jim. "Road." *Plays: One*. London: Methuen, 1996. 1-85. Print.
- Chaudhuri, Una. *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama*. Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan P, 1997. Print.
- Crawley, Peter. "Life after the Troubles in *Monsters, Dinosaurs, Ghosts*." *The Irish Times*. 15 June 2015. Web. 01 Nov. 2020.
<<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/stage/life-after-the-troubles-in-monsters-dinosaurs-ghosts-theatre-review-1.2250034>>.
- De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven F. Rendall. Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1984. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias." *Diacritics* 16.1 (1986): 22-27. Print.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *Everyday Life in the Modern World*. Trans. Sacha Rabinovitch. London: Bloomsbury, 2016. Print.
- Loneragan, Patrick. "Ireland's Most Under-Rated Dramatist?" *Scenes from the Bigger Picture*. 02 Feb. 2014. Web. 15 June 2017.
<<https://patrickloneragan.wordpress.com/2014/02/02/irelands-most-under-rated-dramatist/>>.
- Looney, Stephen. "Talk Like That: Owen McCafferty." Interview with Owen McCafferty. *Northern Visions NTVV Belfast*. 29 Mar. 2016. Web. 27

Mar. 2017.

<<https://www.nvtv.co.uk/shows/talk-like-that-owen-mccafferty/>>.

Maddocks, Fiona. "It's the Way He Tells Them." *The Evening Standard*. 04 Feb. 2005. Web. 17 July 2018.

<<https://www.questia.com/newspaper/1G1-128113718/it-s-the-way-he-tells-them-forget-docudrama-theatre>>.

Maxwell, D. E. S. "Northern Ireland's Political Drama." *Modern Drama* 33.1 (1990): 1-14. Print.

McCafferty, Owen. *Fire Below*. London: Faber, 2017. Print.

---. "Scenes from the Big Picture." *Plays: One*. London: Faber, 2013. 219-362. Print.

---. *Quietly*. London: Faber, 2012. Print.

Mitchell, Gary. *Tearing the Loom and In a Little World of Our Own*. London: Nick Hern, 1998. Print.

Morash, Christopher. *A History of Irish Theatre 1601-2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002. Print.

Pankratz, Anette. "Jim Cartwright." *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary British Playwrights*. Ed. Martin Middeke, Peter Paul Schmierer and Aleks Sierz. London: Methuen, 2011. 62-81. Print.

Parker, Stewart. *Dramatis Personae & Other Writings*. Ed. Gerald Dawe, Maria Johnston and Clare Wallace. Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2008. Print.

Phelan, Mark. "From Troubles to Post-Conflict Theatre in Northern Ireland." *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre*. Ed. Nicholas Grene and Christopher Morash. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2016. 372-88. Print.

---. Introduction. *Owen McCafferty: Plays: One*. London: Faber, 2013. vii-xx. Print.

---. "Owen McCafferty." *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary Irish*

Playwrights. Ed. Martin Middeke and Peter Paul Schnierer. London: Methuen, 2010. 194-212. Print.

Richtarik, Marilyn. *Stewart Parker: A Life*. New York: Oxford UP, 2012. Print.

Solga, Kim. *Space*. London: Methuen, 2019. Print.

Taylor, Paul. "Scenes from the Big Picture, National Theatre, Cottesloe, London: A Colorful Slice of Belfast Life." *Independent*. 21 Apr. 2003. Web. 15 June 2017.

<<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/scenes-from-the-big-picture-national-theatre-cottesloe-london-116194.html>>.

Wilde, Oscar. *Lady Windermere's Fan*. Ed. Ian Small. London: Methuen, 2013. Print.

Woolf, Virginia. *Moments of Being*. Ed. Jeanne Schulkind. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985. Print.

Spatializing the Everyday in Post-Troubles Northern Ireland: Owen McCafferty's *Scenes from the Big Picture*

Abstract

Lee, Hyungseob (Hanyang Univ.)

Post-Troubles theatre in Northern Ireland has witnessed theatrical projects that push Belfast beyond its unenviable position as the predominant spatial imaginary of the Northern Ireland conflict. Informed by Michel de Certeau and Michel Foucault, this paper analyzes the spatialization of the everyday in post-Troubles Belfast in *Scenes from the Big Picture* (2003) by Belfast playwright Owen McCafferty. McCafferty prioritizes the ordinary over the traumatic. His dramatic project consists in re-imagining the quotidian space in which ordinary citizens of Belfast tactically endeavor to constitute their own spaces. McCafferty challenges the “given-ness” of quotidian space by offering a heterotopic conception of Belfast’s everyday space in which heterogeneous spatial practices are rearranged and juxtaposed to reveal the counter-sites of the everyday. In the play, the daunting parameters of the everyday space are delimited and controlled by a taciturn old city walker whose subdued presence leaves its traces to demarcate the contour of the quotidian space. Major issues addressed in the paper include the play’s relationship to and position in post-Troubles theatre, its thematic and experiential prioritization of the everyday, and its formal and linguistic features that enable the dramatization of everyday life in Belfast. McCafferty presents a “big” picture of Belfast, bigger than the Troubles, by staging those ordinary individuals whose lives are deeply affected but not determined by sectarian violence.

Key Words Owen McCafferty, *Scenes from the Big Picture*, Belfast, Post-Troubles Theatre, the everyday, heterotopia

Notes on Contributor:

Hyungseob Lee is Associate Professor in the Department of English Language and Literature at Hanyang University.

Email: sabby@hanyang.ac.kr

논문투고일: 2021년 11월 15일

논문심사일: 2021년 11월 19일 ~ 2021년 12월 02일

게재확정일: 2021년 12월 12일