

Fatal Fathers and Sons in Tom Murphy's A Whistle in the Dark

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Abstract: *Under this general title I want to discuss several instances of “filicide” throughout twentieth century drama. As W.B. Yeats was a great advocate of the importance of the unconscious, I would start with Yeats’s idea of the father, as he goes from Cuchulainn’s slaughter of his son in *On Baile’s Strand* (1904) to that other infanticide (or rather adulticide) in *Purgatory* (1939), whereby his two Oedipus plays Sophocles’ *King Oedipus* (1928) and Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus* (1934) yield important material to understand the complications inherent in father-son relations.*

*Then I would move to Tom Murphy’s *A Whistling in the Dark* (1961), where the father has his rival son killed in more contemporary circumstances, to end with the very complex picture of the father-son relations Frank Mc Guinness offers in his *Mutabilitie* (1997), both in the colonist’s and the colonised households. I would hereby use a Lacanian approach, since this would allow for an in-depth analysis of the problems at stake. This approach, however, has already a respectable tradition, which means that the obvious works like Deleuze and Guattari’s *L’anti-Oedipe, capitalisme et schizophrénie* (1973) will first have to be nuanced by more recent studies like Philippe Julien’s *Le manteau de Noé* (1991). While the latter offers an excellent status quaestionis, this can be refined by remarks made by Didier Anzieu in his analysis of father-child relations in *Créer détruire* (1996), as well as by new representations of the concept of identity and desire by Philippe van Haute (*Tegen de aanpassing*, 2000).*

1. Introduction

In this article I would like to illustrate that forms of knowledge “other” than purely literary ones can indeed be very elucidative in the study of (Irish and other) literatures. Sometimes, a philosopher’s line of thought can help us find our way in a labyrinthine text (as has so often proved to be the case in Joyce). Sometimes, economic theories prove to be a handy spade to dig up a whole microcosm of references to the surface in some textual field.

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Again, in other constructs, psycho-analysis may provide the magnifying glass that allows us to disentangle a complex knot of stylistic patterns which may characterise the different figures' mental make-up. Indeed, some schools of English have shown a special interest in widening the range of approaches to literature, and those critics who use psycho-analysis appeal most to me. I am thinking here of Soshana Felman, Meredith A. Skura and Peter Brooks, Jonathan Culler and Johan and Tim Schokker, Slavoj Zizek and Philippe Willemart.¹ In his article, "Nouveaux paradigmes et psychanalyse", Willemart immediately points out that the link between sciences (i.e. psycho-analytic theory) and literature is not obvious, but the ditch between them can be crossed,² and I fully endorse this view, as I have tried to argue and illustrate in an issue of EJES which concentrates specifically on the question of possible interrelations between theory and Literatures in English.³

What I want to undertake here is an analysis of Tom Murphy's *A Whistle in the Dark*, where I will use a Lacanian approach. I have chosen this play, which has become one of the modern canonical texts of Irish drama, for two reasons: first, it focuses on the problematic father-son relationships,⁴ a recurrent phenomenon in twentieth-century Irish literature; and secondly, its dialogue matches the different characters so well that this language rolls out the red carpet for us to go into the underlying conflicts that were generated in the family's past.

But before I start my own analysis I will give a brief survey of how others have read Murphy's play. We see that three lines of thought can be delineated: some critics focus on the national and sociological context in which the protagonists are to be situated,⁵ a second group foreground political issues, while a third group stress the mythic dimension which Murphy's tragedy is claimed to share with its Greek predecessors.⁶ I side with the last group, and agree with Colm Toibin that Murphy's work is an investigation into "the human predicament"⁷ as such. It is interesting to see how those who approached Murphy's work from a more political angle, like Fintan O'Toole, have moved from a marxist view ("the play is [...] about the battle between a pre-industrial nationalist Ireland and the capitalist, meritocratic 'Ireland of the future'"⁸) to a more individualistic focus with psycho-analytic points of interest: "Much of the play reminds us of the Greeks – the story of a house accused in which the sins of the fathers are visited on the sons.. the Oedipal tinge in the make-up of Michael, who tries to usurp his father both as protector to his mother and as father figure to Des"⁹ The special 1987 issue of the *Irish University Review* on Tom Murphy's work tends to move from the political to the psychological: Chris Murray considers "Murphy [...] not a political writer. He is a tragic poet",¹⁰ while Anthony Roche retraces Murphy's origins to "their great Greek and Shakespearean predecessors".¹¹ Finally, within the group of the more psycho-analytically oriented critics, we may distinguish between the "ontologising" Jungians and the "de-ontologising" Derrideans: while the former see the "archetypal and universal" in Murphy's "twisted relationships of family and parents",¹² the latter use Colonialist theories like Frantz Fanon; with its stress on contingency and factitiousness, this way of reading connects more easily with a Lacanian approach to language.¹³

So most of the abovementioned critics refer to the problematic father-son relation, and Lionel Pilkington even mentions Lacan's RIS system, but only superficially, which accounts for some imprecision in his character description.

One decided advantage in using Lacanian categories is that they focus entirely on language, which is the very medium of literature. In drama, however, there is not only verbal dialogue, but also an “underlying dialectic of physical action and language” and, as many critics have pointed out, Murphy’s masterly exploitation of “the non-verbal aspect of drama” “generate[s] alternative sign-systems”.¹⁴ With “a language so purely theatrical”¹⁵ all depends on patterns in speech and action, set by the “pater familias”, which will ruthlessly lead to the tragic events in the play.¹⁶ So, like the psychoanalyst who listens to a speaker’s language to hear how his or her psychic system functions, I want to look for clues in dialogues and interactions to understand how the Carney family relations are constituted.

Thus I will concentrate on the father figure because his vital role consists in separating the baby from the first caretaker, and this first frustration will be formative for the constitution of one’s psychic reality.¹⁷ Before we go into Murphy’s play, I will briefly sketch how Lacan sees the psychic system, the RIS system, which is divided into three dimensions: the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic. The child must pass through all three phases, and through his contact with the nearest of kin in his home he must assimilate the fears and abilities each phase brings, in order to balance them as dimensions of his psychic system. As we will explain, this can only happen if the Name-of-the-Father is realised.

When the baby is born he goes through the “Real” phase, that is, it cannot distinguish between itself and others, between subject and object; everything is a blur. The baby itself is primarily a body in need of food (milk) and attention. Its main sense is feeling, matter is the first thing to go by. As a result, communication will be realised mainly by means of things and inarticulate language. But when the baby is about six months old, two things happen that mark the transition to the anal phase: the child is weaned, and he recognises himself in the mirror. This event leads him to an “Imaginary” perception. His image of himself gives him a first idea of his own contours, but the specular image also teaches him a new language: the child notices that the image in the mirror imitates him, and that he can control it. As a result, the child’s self-love and ideal image of his self grows; and since the mirror stage coincides with the anal phase, children become aware that they can control their muscles and either give or refuse to give their faeces to their parents. In this stage, the world is interpreted in dual terms: the child can obey or disobey the parent, be clean or dirty, orderly or not. His majesty the baby knows he is loved by the mother (who represents the whole world for him, all women who adore him), which brings (especially) the boy into a position of rivalry with the father. So, the Imaginary component is the one in which the narcissistic “I” seeks to establish itself, playing roles, in competition with others. The third component of the psychic system, the Symbolic aspect of perception, develops when the child goes through the oedipal complex, which means that the boy has to accept the “no” of the father, the “*non du père*”, a symbolic castration which implies that the boy must learn that not his individual father is the boss, but that his authority is borrowed: he is powerful because

both his wife and the community have invested him with paternal authority. Castration means that the boy is confronted with the enigma of *sexuation*, on the one hand, with the *Law* on the other hand. This implies that the boy acknowledges that he is incomplete, that his mother does not desire him but his father, and that he has to go and seek his own desire elsewhere. As a matter of fact, symbolic castration, or the acceptance of the Name-of-the-Father¹⁸, implies three things. First, the child moves from a belief in the Imaginary phallus (i.e. a belief in what you see, that the father is powerful because he is tall and strong) to a belief in the Symbolic phallus, which is an awareness that his authority has been assigned to him by society at large, through the Law. Hence the *Name* of the Father: not the physicality of the father is meant here, but the fact that the child bears his name and thus is assigned to the father's responsibility. Second, castration, or being marked by the Name-of-the-Father, means that the child must hand in his *jouissance*, the chaotic energies of the unconscious which have only one law: they return – to have them transformed into *desire*. The loving mother who was always at hand to fulfil the baby's wishes is now turned into a distant, puzzling Other, out of reach, who represents the enigma of sexuation and thereby the child's awareness of a fundamental lack. Whereas *jouissance* is an energy that is "full", urgent, recurrent, escaping all reality check, desire is an energy that adapts itself to actual possibilities and goes for compromise.¹⁹ Third, the Name-of-the-Father implies that body and image become less important signifiers; they are replaced by verbal communication. Thereby the Symbolic person realises that "words, words, words" can never fully cover one's desire; there will always be a gap between experience and expression.

Briefly, the realisation of the Name-of-the-Father implies that the boy finds the right distance to the Other, which appears in a threefold form: sexuality (with the boy's mother as its prime representation), society (with its laws which are suprapersonal) and the Law, i.e. the laws of language which allow the individual to link up the three dimensions of the Real, Imaginary and Symbolic with each other. This means that he can connect (respectively) his unconscious, his narcissistic selfconsciousness (Ideal-I) and his Super-I (I-Ideal), in other words – the body he was, the individual he is and the ever-desiring person he will ever be. So the child moves from the Real, where the "It" is predominant (the body and the unconscious drives), to the Imaginary, where the "I" prevails (and the eye is the central sense, which looks for impressive examples to imitate); while the child who enters the Symbolic dimension internalises the Name-of-the-Father, the laws which are passed on by the parents, and thus builds a "Super-I". It is only in this last stage that the subject fully accepts his dependence on the Other, i.e. his trust in the Laws of language that regulate sexuation and allow the human being to promise, and thus to create continuity. So in the Real dimension all is one, the subject-object difference is blurred; in the Imaginary realm the (Ideal-)I lives by self-pronounced, clearly drawn differences,²⁰ while in Symbolic perception difference is experienced as something ungraspable, to be felt in one's shortcomings with the sexual partner and with society's rules which one can never perfectly fulfill. As a result of the subject's

awareness of his lack of completeness, the I-Ideal always moves and transforms itself constantly into something new to strive for. Language, too, changes in the transition from one stage to the next. Real language is called *lalangue*: it is an unarticulated babble or halting language with stammers. Imaginary language can still remain strongly underpinned by *lalangue*, in which unconnected, free-floating, meaningless signifiers are still completely permeated by jouissance,²¹ which Lacan punningly characterises as “enjoy-meant”. Symbolic language, finally, is the language of suggestion, which calls for a communication in which both speakers and listeners are disciplined by a real attention to the fine nuances of a language system. Of course, people can regress from the Symbolic to the Imaginary and lapse back in the Real. The regression into the Real is thereby marked by symptoms: if language no longer works, body language takes over, which is prompted not by the linearity of desire but by the recurrence of the drives; and the “grammar” of one’s actions also becomes symptomatic, as the lapsing person reiterates certain actions which become purposeless.²²

These types of speech and characters, stuck in or in between these different realms of existence, is what Murphy so masterfully stages in *A Whistle in the Dark*.

2. The play

A Whistle in the Dark (1960-61) is not just typical of the times, but a classic in its genre. It can even be lined up with masterworks of the grandest calibre: as Anthony Roche pointed out, the play has “Shakespearean roots”. I think we may be even more precise, and to make my point I will briefly sketch some striking similarities between *Macbeth* and *A Whistle*.²³

In *Macbeth* the tyrant needs the witches to whisper (self-)destruction in his ear, which he then realises with the help of an unsexed Lady Macbeth. In Murphy’s play the witches are embodied in Mr Carney Sr hatred of society. In the process of his self-destruction he is helped by Harry, who is “unsexed”. He is not castrated, as he does not allow for any notion of dependence or lack on his part: sex for him is absolute mastership, it has nothing to do with a mystery of exchange. Indeed, the Carney children are not really confronted with a female presence: Mr Carney’s “undaunted mettle” annihilated his wife’s presence and brought forth men-children only.²⁴ *A Whistle* also opens with *Macbeth*’s central clothes’ metaphor: both Dada and Harry are characterised by their borrowed clothes: Harry puts on Michael’s socks, Dada steals a coat he subsequently throws away, thus symbolising his *jouissance*, the vicious whirl of pointless gratuitous behaviour Macbeth too is sucked into. Michael Jr is cast in the role of Macduff, who loses his child (Des) and his wife (who leaves), but who is finally able to unmask the tyrant. And, like the Macbeths, the Carney Clan break the most fundamental laws of hospitality, in the sense that they actually expel the hosts from their own house.²⁵ Both plays are based on the same fundamental opposition: Macbeth, like Dada and his

followers, upholds an Ideal-I that must obliterate all ideas of an I-Ideal, which Michael jr constantly propagates. In both plays, the world is turned upside down: at the moment where Macbeth is given a new lease of life in society, with a new title and newly installed Name-of-the-Father, he kills his benefactor and further blocks the Symbolic system. In *A Whistle in the Dark* Michael jr welcomes his father, inviting him to (belatedly) affirm the Name-of-the-Father with his brothers, but all the rules are inverted: the owners are expelled by the guests, grown-ups are treated like children, and the most promising son is killed.

In both plays one group is stuck in the Imaginary and the Real; they are *remiss* in all aspects of life. Their language consists mainly of repetitive expressions of hatred, of a hunger for complete annihilation: they are caught in the mechanics of the death drive. The other group wants to install a *promising* mode; they cautiously invite the others to respect and forgive each other, and to move from gratuitousness to a sense of responsibility, calling for the unfolding of the Eros drive and their adaptation to the country's laws.²⁶

Indeed, Mr Carney – alias Michael Sr – is *the* imaginary father par excellence.

“Le père imaginaire [...] est le père effrayant, tout-puissant comme le bon Dieu garant de l'ordre du monde, qui s'évit dans une relation imaginaire avec son cortège d'agressivité et d'identification. C'est le père avec lequel on est en rivalité fraternelle”.²⁷ As Porge points out, he is one of those Imaginary fathers who are chosen by Imaginary people. This kind of relation is destructive: they are deathly fathers.²⁸

The Father Figure

The story is quickly told. Michael Carney has five sons, four of whom have left Mayo to live in Coventry. The eldest, Michael jr, is the only one who married; his wife, Betty, is English. Michael jr feels responsible for his brothers Harry, Iggy and Hugo, who have set up a minor criminal business in prostitution with young girls and in a building enterprise's illegal practices. Michael has invited his father and younger brother, Des, over to Coventry for two reasons: to make his peace with his father, whom he left after years of having been violently abused, and to ask the father to lay down the law for his three sons, who may end up in jail or worse. The father, however, endorses Harry's views, who loves stealing and fighting. Harry has arranged a fight with the Mulryans, another family of thugs, and wants to draw Des into it. Michael jr opposes Des' taking part, and refuses to participate in it himself; the father pretends he will be there but sneaks out. Due to their foul fighting, the Carneys win, but the father now wants to be revenged on Michael and tries to humiliate him by egging him and Des on to have a fight. Michael jr accidentally kills his favourite young brother. Again, Michael Sr wants to shift the responsibility to his eldest, but the appalling outcome of his machinations finally unmask him in the eyes of the other brothers.

It will already have become pretty obvious to the reader that Michael Carney Sr has not only failed to reach the Symbolic phase, he even inverts the father's function by dissuading his sons from complying with any law apart from his own. In this sense, one might say he is Imaginary, going by his own individual sense of control, but he goes further: he does not merely ignore the laws of society, but wants to destroy them. Whereas the function of the father is to introduce the child into society, to national education and to human culture,²⁹ Mr Carney bars his sons from the world beyond the family and tries to destroy it. Expelled from the police, he wants to keep his sons out of the "polis" in general;³⁰ national education is obliterated and only echoes of Mayo provincialism are heard, as in Dada's song (79); and instead of instilling his sons with examples to follow, with a desire to improve themselves, to grow in respect and authority, he vilifies everything that is beyond his own scope. As a result, he made his boys see the world from the vantage point of his Ideal-I, rather than in terms of a possible I-Ideal. Being stuck in his self-admiration of his own stagnant "I", Dada ridicules all culture, all progress, all forms of meritocracy.

Dada's introduction underscores the Imaginary aspect of his being: "DADA is a fine tall man and aware of it." (29) The opening of the second act characterises him in a similar way: "DADA is viewing himself from different angles in the mirror." (43) Like his manner, his expression is grandiloquent, as we hear in the way in which he addresses his sons: Desmond, Ignatius, Hubert – not Des or Dessie, Iggy, Hugo [...] only, his self-magnification proves totally empty, as when he boasts to Betty how he has many books at home, *The History of Ancient Greece*, and *Ulysses*: about the former book he says "Very interesting on how [...] Yeh"; about the latter: "Famous book. All about how [...] how [...] Yeah [...]." (70) He never reads, since he has no curiosity about a world beyond himself.

His body language perfectly illustrates how he presents himself as the Imaginary Phallus, the ideal example that is beyond all criticism; only, it turns out again that he is a hollow statue: Dada tells his sons to "stand up as a man", and initially even Betty is "impressed by him" (30); but his bragging language makes her sceptical and the extra chair he needs to "pull his height" in order to incite his sons to fight will lead to his ultimate downfall.

This very body language is symptomatic of all Dada's dealings with his family and with the world at large. He cannot stand anyone beside him, so he obliterated his wife: when he comes home at night he does not join his wife but addresses the children, making them fight each other.³¹ But not only does he never refer to her – thus also forbidding the possibility for his sons to acknowledge their castration, i.e. the sexuated and therefore interdependent nature of the human being – he humiliates her, literally sub-jects her, as we deduce from Michael's description: "And you talk about pride! And you smoking cigars and drinking brandy with them and your wife on her knees scrubbing their floors." (94)

Like his wife, his sons were never allowed to stand beside their father, let alone to outgrow him. In this context, Michael's inquiry about the trees he planted is significant. He asks Des about the "five young ash trees. And we planted them [...] one for each of us, five sons, you know. I was wondering, did they all grow?" Des, apparently, is not

very sensitive to their symbolic value: “They did. I think. Some of them.” Dada’s answer is characteristic: “I never seen them. It’s dangerous anyway having trees near a house like that.” (31) Anything too near him is threatening, and he will always concoct an explanation for it: “Dada: [...] the carbon dioxide. Gas. The trees give it out at night. The carbon dioxide. Tid poison you.” (31) This fear of being out-rivalled links up with the fact that Michael was expelled from the home, something Dada omits to say, just before he starts to riposte about the trees.

Dada will do exactly the opposite of the Symbolic father. “Il n’y a de véritable autorité paternelle que reçue d’une femme”, as Julien informs us,³² and indeed Dada will never have authority, only power. “The normal” in this household is the male norm, not the law of castration and culture, of interaction. An angry pseudo-certainty is all Mr Carney has to offer, and since fatherhood is never certain, and hence must be underscored by prescribed rituals, Mr Carney counteracts the classic rituals, used to acknowledge fatherhood”. This consists in lifting a child from the floor,³³ but Dada will have one son smash the other to the floor.³⁴

Dada’s behaviour is strongly Imaginary, but this is only a protective layer over his deeper self which is a whirl of destructive energy, a strong underlying Real dimension. This Real is clearly expressed in his language, which is characterised by three features. It is *contradictory*, *meaningless*, and a merely *repetitive* expression of sheer spite. And because there is no Other beyond the I, Dada’s expressions have *no clearly defined addressee*: his “communications” are entirely caught in the mill of *jouissance* and he will often use *thing* language.

Contradictions abound: while Dada is the absolute coward who never fights, he eggs his sons on to fight. Though he is of imposing stature, he only dares to attack children; and though he tries to pretend to be a connoisseur in books, it turns out he has not read any. But his speech also reveals the deep rift in himself, between threatened Ideal-I and chaotic unconscious. The Imaginary and Real dimensions of his psyche remain unlinked, and his speech never connects with any social perspective, since he does not acknowledge the Symbolic aspect, the laws of society. As a result, Dada cannot use the promising mode of language. Promises turn to curses, continuity to destruction. The discrepancy within his psychic system comes to the fore in the contradictory link between Dada’s personal anger and the religious authority he wants to borrow power from: “I hate! I hate the world! It all! [...] But I’ll get them! I’ll get them! By the sweet, living, and holy Virgin Mary, I’ll shatter them!” (70)

Secondly, his life is aimless, and since he does not want to acknowledge this, his utterances are often aborted: “A man must fight back at – at – at A man must fight back. I’m a fighting man myself, and I can talk with the best [...]” (39) “I came in here like a man to – to – to – And this is the reception.” (46-7) When Dada senses that Des maybe impressed by Michael, who tends to put his finger on Dada’s problem, he will not allow this to be expressed: “that’s a highly intelligent way of talking. I bet he told you I was – Well, imagine. What else did he say?” (57) Indeed, Dada has never allowed

anyone to check his aggressive energies, he has never accepted any form of symbolic castration, and as a result both his actions and words are not steered by desire but by *jouissance*, the aimless energy of the death drives that turns on itself, without ever allowing for a reality check.³⁵ We see this clearly when Dada wants to beat Michael in the same ritual way he used when his sons were children. However, Betty's horrified look makes him realise "he has let *himself* down; it drives him to excesses" (41, my italics). This brings us to a word that is central to our understanding of Mr Carney. Like Macbeth, the "restless ecstasy" of fear³⁶, the Real that often breaks through the surface of the Imaginary, is what makes him lash out regularly. That his energy is fundamentally aimless (and thus, *jouissance* instead of desire) becomes especially clear in his failure to delineate his addressees. This has ironic effects. Dada, who delights in shows of (negative) power, redirects the insults that were levelled at his sons to these same boys to make them fight: "Yaa-hah-haa! Man, Desmond Muck and trash! Again! Again! Keep it going! [...] Into it! Go on! Dirt! Dirt! Filth! Dirt! Muck and trash! Scum! Tinkers! Filth! [...]" (96) So Dada's unconscious is so strong that the words he repressed come back and speak through him, so that, ironically, Dada is imitating the society he hates, accusing his own sons now of what he and his family were said to be.³⁷ Indeed, Dada loses control over the basic condition of communication: he is so deeply steeped in the Real that he cannot make any distinctions any more, as we see in his confusion with personal pronouns, which normally delineate the "situation of discourse"³⁸. Dada, transported by and wrapped in his own anger, previously used "them" to indicate the society that was hostile to the family, but now the "them" are his own sons: "Mister intelligent sneerer! We'll get them!", whereon Michael Jr puts his finger on the problem: "Jesus, our victory over *them*! Are ye happy now? Look at him: another victory for us over *them*!" (96). Thereon he kills Des and Dada immediately backs out, trying to deny his responsibility: "Dada: I was up on the [...] Ye were [...] Ye were all [...]" Whereon Harry: "Who's ye?" (97) Indeed, his own sons are "them" to Dada, as we saw with the trees. This is translated into stage language when the sons realign themselves against him. With Des' death, castration finally takes place in the family, and the question of clear reference is asked for the first time.

Dada's language betrays him as a man, up to his ears in the Real. Not only are his utterances contradictory, aimless and non-referential, but he also recurs to thing language. He uses the materiality of the bottle – i.e., its contents – to fortify his speeches (his sons use the bottles themselves as weapons); he uses his belt to hit his son (who is too strong with words), and needs the chair to add to his height. In normal, symbolic use, this object is used to sit on, as fits an impartial referee; but Dada needs the chair to be able to literally shout his sons down; it is merely a kind of amplifier. Finally, there is the silver cup Mr Carney offers his sons after their fight with the Mulryans. His cover-up story is not enough excuse for his absence at the fight, and so the cup must serve as an alibi.³⁹ This literal cup will get a fatal, metaphorical meaning when it becomes symbol of the final "Carney World Championship".

The Sons

It is obvious that, under the long and tight rule of a father who is sliding from the Imaginary into the Real, the sons have not been introduced to the Symbolic order. Never is there any form of real, i.e. reciprocal, communication. The opening stage directions immediately tell us that “*Generally, all of them are preoccupied with themselves.*” (13) Indeed, most brothers see their father as “le père maître, Père primordial, Urvater,⁴⁰ who is not to be questioned. But, lacking all confrontation with the Other in themselves (the question of sexuation and the Law) they cannot question themselves either, and the differences between male and female, between good and bad are never indicated.⁴¹ As a result, the boys (especially Harry, Hugo and Iggy, who suffered most from their father’s rule, are also steeped in the Real, urged in their actions by mere *jouissance*. Their one example in life is their father’s Ideal-I, his own made-up ideal male image which never changes. As Pilkington puts it: “Like the fetish, the stereotype normalizes the trauma of difference by affirming an original identity or plenitude that seems to mask and conceal that difference”.⁴²

Indeed the sons are perfect mirrors of their father. The brothers treat Michael’s wife as a skivvy, as their father had done with their mother; in the end, even Michael Jr will do so. Harry is even worse: he uses prostitutes in a doubly unlawful way. Not only are they misused by their employer, but they are too young: “Do you know what I mean when I say he has a few little girls working for him? Kids.”(45) That not only sexual and moral differences are wiped out in this family, but also generational differences, should not surprise us. The pattern, whereby a cowardly Da could only bully his sons when they were children, has been set long ago. Dada repeats it, when he wants to subject Michael Jr to a childhood punishment, Harry echoes it as he prostitutes only little girls, and Des is said to have fought only a small boy in the famous fight with the Mulryans: he gave “one little bloke, that was just standing watching, a terrible dig in the head” (72). Even Michael Jr will not escape the devilish round of *jouissance*, when he will kill his youngest brother Des.

Harry

Harry is the one who proceeded farthest into the Imaginary, in the sense that he is the boss of the Carney gang. He respects neither women nor the law (he has Iggy steal money from his own workers), but he wants others to boost his Ideal-I, like when he invites Mush to sing a song about him (77). Only, he misses the irony of its title “Harry from the land of Saints and Scholars”(79). Both Saints and Scholars are typical representatives of the Symbolic order into which Harry was not only not introduced: this entrance was refused to him both by his father and his teacher. Harry had wanted to become a priest –of all things – but was mocked by the teacher, who told him he would become “a Jewman” (53) like his father. So here again he misses the Name-of-the-

Father: on the occasion when he could have expressed his desire, to be of service to society, to become something different from his father, he is pushed back into the chaotic patterns of his family by a figure who should have done the opposite, to educate him. Not being allowed to voice his desire, let alone become a priest, we see that the 'Name-of-the-"Fawther"' was literally kept from Harry; and so his communicative skills were severely reduced, and his language dwindles to mere body language.

In Harry's utterances, the dialectic of physical action and language is telling. His understanding of metaphor is always closely linked to the literal. When people find him cocky he interprets this in a literal way: "And then some people'd want our cocks chopped off too." (20)⁴³ Or when he calls himself "We're all iron men" he immediately adds: "Aw, but look, more iron", showing how he wears an ass-shoe as his knuckle duster. His language is very "material" anyway: he uses the word "thing" all the time and is angered by the density of things, as they seem to reflect the enraging density of his own being to him. So the passage "*Things! (He kicks a chair.)* (89)" clearly illustrates the gestural and thing language which must relieve his pent-up, unspeakable frustrations. Harry is also repetitive in his language. He does not stammer like his brother Iggy, but the fact that the opening sentence of the play goes "Sock-sock-sock-sock-sock?" already indicates how important the principle of repetition (of old troubles) will be for the whole family.

Yet he knows that fuller forms of expression exist: he has notions of a kind of communication that goes beyond the moment, that can create continuity, and at one time Harry stresses the importance of being honest: "I don't mind a man, no matter what he talks, if he *means* it. If he's *faithful*". (88) Only, Harry has not had many examples of men who provided "meaning", i.e. purposeful speech, and who instilled confidence, by fulfilling their promises. The promising mode, typical of the Symbolic order, is nowhere present in any Carney discourse.

Des

Being the youngest by far of the brothers (Michael is thirty-seven, Des only sixteen or seventeen) Des may have escaped the ritual of competition Dada imposed on his sons, and he was linked to a twofold authority: that of his father and that of his eldest brother Michael who sent him money from England. This dual loyalty, and the reference to a place beyond Dada's rule meant that Des had slightly better chances of being introduced to the world of general conventions and fair play. Des shows in three instances that he makes an opening to the mystery of the Other: he refers to the mother, the law (of reciprocity) and to the enigma of another person's deepest desire. Indeed, only the youngest and the eldest mention the mother at all⁴⁴; they are the only ones that plead for compromise with Dada; and it is Des who finally invites Harry to express his own deepest desire, after the school teacher had cut him short, so that Harry can at long last own up that he wanted to become a "Priest." (53)

Yet – and this is Murphy’s mastery again – in the short time of the play Des enacts all the bad examples the Carneys set him: in the fight he hits a small, innocent bystander; he fishes for compliments, and wants Mush, the hanger-on of the family, to sing a song to boost his own Ideal-I. Next, confronted with Betty, he does not know how to behave, his “cockiness” escalates to excessive abuse, in a tirade of gross insult, which leads to the final fight. This killing shows in symptomatic form the short-circuiting of the uncastrated drives. That Des incarnates the Carneys’ destiny can be seen in his gradual deterioration from “I-Ideal” to corpse, dead body.

Michael Jr

In the eldest brother the Symbolic dimension is most developed, yet his Super-Ego will not prove strong enough to withstand the rest of the clan. He invited his father over for two main reasons: to be reconciled with him, and to give him another chance to install the Law, to realise the Name-of-the-Father (or the “No of the Father”) for his brothers. Yet Mr Carney does exactly the opposite. Instead of reconciliation – the German word “*Versöhnung*” is more appropriate here, as it literally indicates that one becomes again the son (Sohn) of the father⁴⁵ – Mr Carney daemonises his son; instead of being alarmed at Michael’s report of his brothers’ gross crimes, he endorses his sons’ exploitation of girls and working men: “The whole family could be in on it. Michael Carney and Sons. Hahaa, Michael Carney *Senior* & Sons.” (45)

So Michael and his wife stand isolated, opposed to the antagonising Carney clan. They are diametrically opposed in many aspects. First, in their orientation. The brothers choose Mush, a weak character, to sing the praises of their Ideal-I; Michael chooses people he can look up to, as he wants to work on his I-Ideal. Second, Michael goes for promise and compromise, whereas Dada champions competition as his top value. This is clearly illustrated in one of the opening scenes, where Iggy is holding the door handle against Michael and then releases it, in the expectation that he will come flying in, but he doesn’t. Harry notices the difference between the symmetry of Iggy’s thinking and Michael’s attitude which has always something asymmetrical: “that’s what’s called antic’pation.” (15) Michael Jr follows the same principle with his da: while Dada expected Michael to retaliate for his calumny, Des and Betty tell him he usually says nothing at all about Dada.⁴⁶ Not only does the son shun revenge, he has invited the father also to forgive him. This act, too, is a typical manifestation of the Name-of-the-father, since it indicates that the Other is more important than the wronged I. In the act of forgiving, the suprapersonal prevails over the narcissistic dimension.

Throughout the play, the patterns of the Imaginary versus the Symbolic, of Dada versus Michael, are kept up in a consistent way. Dada always repeats his old patterns, Michael wants change; the Da wants profits, the son forbids, cuts in with the No of the Father; Carney senior accepts money from his sons, the junior pays for other sons; one hides his real fears and yells, the other chides and questions. The former challenges,

incited by anger and jealousy, the latter eases, led by hope and humour; Dada cowardly escapes fights, Michael bravely refuses to fight. Dada refuses to adapt, casts annoying children out and locks the others in a box of rules of his making and keeps up an illusory immunity; Michael wants to adopt Des but send him away back to Ireland, and tries to make them all fit in a community.

Indeed they function in totally different systems. The Carney clan is fuelled by *jouissance* only, and Michael is very precise in his diagnosis of this basic evil that destroys the family: because there has been no “No of the father”, no castration, there is no desire, no social perspective, no linearity at all, but merely the recurrence of the *jouissance* which keeps turning around nothing: M: “That daft father has ye all gone mad. “Fighting Carneys! If ye were fighting for a job, even! – A woman, even! Can’t you see *there’s no point*.” (61/62, my stress). Michael, on the contrary, sees the wider perspective. Whereas his brother Harry harps on the individual, Michael can see the superstructures that steer those subjects. So he points out to Harry that both antagonistic families, the Mulryans and the Carneys, are really each other’s mirror: “He was Mulryan, you’re Carney. It’s the same thing”(64).

And yet, Michael Jr will be seduced back into the fold of the Imaginary world, and even further dragged down into the shapelessness of a Real perception. It all starts with the impact of the proper name. In *L’identification*, Lacan indicates that there is a strong link between the Name-of-the-Father and “le nom propre”.⁴⁷ Indeed, that “The subject of the unconscious is intrinsically linked to the autonomous efficacy of the signifier”⁴⁸ is powerfully illustrated at the very point when Michael starts his attempt to be reconciled with his father and to start the family anew, this time in his law-abiding way. At that very moment the father ignores the law and binds the eldest son to him in one sentence, “Hah-haa, Michael Carney *Senior* & Sons!”(45). Michael will indeed become a Carney, in the carnage at the end.

Like Oedipus, Michael Jr is to a certain extent blind to his family links. In the stichomythia at the end of Act Two, Betty tries to make Michael see that he, too, belongs to that Carney family ethos, with its deadlock of rivalling interactions. Like Harry, Iggy and the father, Michael starts repeating himself, especially in his refusal to see how, gradually, he is re-assimilating his father’s attitudes: he, too, does not assist his brothers when they are in trouble; and he, too, develops a tyrannical attitude to his wife, whom he tries to subdue into silence. However, this does not quite work, and the outcome of this dialogue will be decisive for the fatal outcome of the final act.

B.: What do you want to do?

M: He’s a great help now for his fighting sons.

B.: But what are you going to do?

M.: He’s a great help to his army.

B.: But what are you –

M.: Well, I don’t believe in fighting Carneys⁴⁹.

B: I'm only trying to tell you stop and think for a moment. It's no good going from one thing to the other.

M: I'll do the deciding about what's good and bad. (67-8)

Right. Right then. I'm Carney too, another Carney. Right. (End of Act II)

Both Betty and Michael regress from the Symbolic into the Imaginary. Whereas Betty stood out from the rest in her encompassing interest in the well-being of others (she made sure Iggy liked his campbed), while the single-minded Carneys were “*all of them [...]preoccupied with themselves*” (13), she is pushed into the duality of Imaginary perceptions, and repairs to a clear either-or stance: “To hell with Des and the rest of them! It's us or them. Which is more important to you?” (19) Later, she has to repeat her question: “Are you coming with me *or* are you staying with *them*?” (94, my stress) Michael is torn between the family and the male gang, and he vacillates, until he is churned back into the *jouissance* of the male group. At that very moment, Michael, who could have left as *le bouc émissaire*, is brought back in, which means that an inversion of the scapegoat ritual takes place: the sins of the whole family are hauled back into the centre and so this small “community” explodes in the disaster of the murder. It is interesting that Michael becomes here the symptom⁵⁰ of the family: as the “man of action”, murdering his brother, his body language reveals the deadlock into which Dada had led the family.

That, deep down, there was still a big “rest” of Real in Michael can be gleaned from his language. He picks up Harry's thing-language very easily, like in an angry outburst: “Michael: If I had got away from *things* like ye!” (87, my stress).

3. Conclusion: the Modalities of Place and Time

So, finally Michael's effort to escape his family failed,⁵¹ and by way of summary, I would like to see how indications of space and time reflect the changes in the Carney family “history”.

Space

From the opening passage, the Carney's attitude to doors is telling. First, Hugo and Iggy want to break in one door, but at Michael's arrival change their mind and keep a door closed (15). This shows us how their use of things is neither functional nor conventional; it reveals the dual either-or logic Betty would later pick up from them. Indeed, once the Carneys have conquered (and taken apart) the house, people are either expelled (like Mush and Betty) or locked in (Michael is kept from leaving, only to deal the fatal blow).⁵²

In his move through different locations, we see how Michael breaks out to the Symbolic, but only to regress through the Imaginary to the Real mode of perception and

expression. He had left Ireland to start a life for himself, in law and order in another country, where he marries Betty and settles. At this point they start on a Symbolic existence, in which they want to realise their desire. But when the couple move within Coventry to be nearer to the criminal Carney brothers, and consequently invite Dada and the whole clan to their house, the either-or logic of the Imaginary divides the couple, until Michael is caught in the Real when the tensions rise, as the invited party starts to expel Betty from the house. Once this arbiter is gone, all distinctions are lost, and instead of destroying society they destroy each other.⁵³ This had been prefigured in the trail of violence the brothers leave behind: Iggy broke the billiard table in a nearby Club (54), and a Carney probably broke the TV at Michael's house (55); further, four cups were broken, and finally the World Champ Carney Cup will break them.

Time

The Carneys stand out in the fact that their experience of time is circular and their view on it idiosyncratic.

Of course, the circularity of the family's dealings is symptomatic for the fact that they are driven by *jouissance*. The Carneys have no continuity, no perspective. They have no past, because their violent acts are still re-enacted in the present; Michael skips the present, as he never wants to stop and think, though Betty implores him to reflect on his own desire, instead of being milled into the Carney patterns. And of course they have no future, since Dada condemns all constructive actions, like growing up, being educated and getting a decent job.

The idiosyncratic view of time most Carney brothers share reflects their refusal to accept any objective norm. This becomes clear in two passages. First, the brothers are late to welcome Dada and Des at the station. Second, they have no sense of social framework to situate their family rituals in. Though Riana O'Dwyer sees the Mulryan versus Carney fight as a remnant of a traditional kind of ritual, "a version of the faction fight, which was once a common feature of Fair days and markets in rural Ireland⁵⁴" I do not quite agree on this point, since the appointment was merely made with the Mulryans for the occasion of Dada's and Des' arrival.

Yet there is one who refers to a more common, socially sanctioned time, Des: "Wouldn't it be great if we were all at home together *at Christmas?* [...] I think she gets sort of lonely. Us all gone, you know" (49, my stress)⁵⁵ But since Dada forecloses all references to the Other, the mother, society, the language of promise, this could not take place. Instead, Des will be "all gone" indeed, and all continuity stopped for the Carneys, who end up as a "Despossessed" family.

Notes

- 1 Felman, Soshana. *La Folie et la Chose littéraire*. Paris, Seuil, 1978; *Le scandale du corps parlant. Don Juan avec Austin ou la séduction en deux langues*. Paris, Seuil, 1980; and "Turning the

- Screw of Interpretation”in: *Literature and Psychoanalysis. The Question of Reading: Otherwise*. Shoshana Felman (Ed.). Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1989. (1977) Skura, Meredith Anne. *The Literary Use of the Psychoanalytic Process*. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1981. Peter Brooks, *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling*. (Cambridge (Mass.)/Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) Schokker, Johan en Tim. *Extimiteit. Jacques Lacans terugkeer naar Freud*. Amsterdam: Boom, 2000. Zizek, Slavoj. *Looking awry: an introduction to Jacques Lacan through popular culture*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991; “The Detective and the Analyst.” *Literature and Psychology*, v. 36, n. 4, 1990, 27-46; “The Seven Veils of Fantasy.” *Key Concepts of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. Dany Nobus (Ed.). London: Rebus Press, 1998, 190-218.
- 2 “Il n’est sans doute pas impossible [...] de combler le fossé épistémologique entre ces deux domaines.”
Willemart, Philippe. *Au-delà de la psychanalyse: les arts et la littérature*. Paris/Montréal: L’Harmattan, 1998, 143.
- 3 Schwall, Hedwig. “Mind the Gap: Possible uses of Psychoanalysis in the Study of English Literature with an Illustration from Joyce’s ‘Eveline’.” *European Journal of English Studies* 6 (3), 2002, 343-59.
- 4 W. B. Yeats broached it in *On Baile’s Strand* (1904) and took it up again in *Purgatory* (1939); J.M. Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) offered another version of the conflict, while this tension is present in most of Brian Friel’s plays and Frank McGuinness’s, among which *Mutabilitie* (1997).
- 5 Ivor Browne observed how Murphy’s play brings “to the surface the hidden violence and covert aggression in so many Irish families” (Browne, Ivor W. “Thomas Murphy: The Madness of Genius”. *Irish University Review* 1987, 1 (17), 136); Gerry Smyth pointed out that “The dysfunctional family is a symptom of an increasingly disjointed society” Smyth, Gerry. Qt. in Imhof, Rüdiger. *The modern Irish novel*. Dublin: Wolfhound, 2002; 246. In an article on Working-class heroes of Robinsonion fiction Schwall, Hedwig. “The Working-Class Hero’s View on 20th-Century Ireland in Recent Historical Novels”; BELL, *Belgian Essays on Language and Literature*, 2001; 123-38) I underscore the view that the dysfunctional family is omnipresent in contemporary fiction, but agree with Rüdiger Imhof that Doyle (and many other novelists) does not picture that disjointed society in great detail. However, as I have explained in another article, Doyle has good reasons not to do so in *Paddy Clarke Ha ha ha*. For the full argument on this novel, see “Drie meester-vertellers uit Ierland”. *Onze Alma Mater*, Leuvense Perspectieven. (56 jg), 2002, 3; 304-25.
- 6 Richard Kearney maintains that “the Irish sense of identity is closely bound up with myth” (“Myth and Motherland”, 23-4, qt. in José Lanters, *Irish University Review*, 286) It does, of course, but all identity is bound up with myth, not just the Irish.
- 7 Toibin, Colm. “Thomas Murphy’s Volcanic Ireland.” *Irish University Review*, 1987: 1 (17), 30.
- 8 Fintan O’Toole in *The Politics of Magic*, qt in Pilkington, Lionel. “‘The Superior Game’: Colonialism and the stereotype in Tom Murphy’s *A Whistle in the Dark*.” *History, Myth and Politics in Anglo-Irish Drama*. (Ed.). C.C.Barfoot and Ria van den Doel. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995, 173.
- 9 O’Toole, Fintan. “Introduction”. *Plays: 4* by Tom Murphy. London: Methuen Drama, 1997. (xiii)
- 10 Murray quoted in FitzGibbon, T. Gerald. “Thomas Murphy’s Dramatic Vocabulary.” *Irish University Review* 1987: 1 (17), 47.
- 11 Roche, Anthony. “Bailegangaire : Storytelling into Drama.” *Irish University Review* 1987: 1 (17) 114.
- 12 Browne, Ivor W. “Thomas Murphy: The Madness of Genius”. *IUR* 1987: 1 (17), 133. Personally I am not keen on Jungian psycho-analysis, as it thinks too much in general terms, whereas Lacanian analysis is diametrically opposite to anything universal, in that it concentrates on the grammatical, imaginative and emotional peculiarities in a certain individual’s expression. As Willemart puts it:

- “Les deux fondateurs (Freud and Lacan) savent [...] que chaque analysant présente [...] mille variables de ces conditions initiales [...]” (Willemart, Philippe. *Au-delà de la psychanalyse: les arts et la littérature*. Paris/Montréal: L’Harmattan, 1998. 145)
- In a same vein, I do not concur with Michael Etherton. Though he rightly sees a “deep sexual ambiguity”, he thereby observes that “there is not just a Freudian link here but a metaphysical as well”, the latter of which I fail to see. (Etherton, Michael. “The Plays of Thomas Murphy”. *Contemporary Irish Dramatists*. London: Macmillan, 1989, 110).
- 13 Pilkington, Lionel. “‘The Superior Game’: Colonialism and the stereotype in Tom Murphy’s *A Whistle in the Dark*.” *History, Myth and Politics in Anglo-Irish Drama*. (Ed.) C.C.Barfoot and Ria van den Doel. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995, 165-79.
 - 14 In his article, “Thomas Murphy’s Dramatic Vocabulary” (*Irish University Review*, 1987, 46-7) T. Gerald FitzGibbon promises to analyse both “the underlying dialectic of physical action and language” “sign-systems” generated by “the non-verbal aspect of drama”, he never does.
 - 15 Stembridge adds: No matter what way I look at it it comes back to language, [...] Stembridge, Gerard. “Murphy’s Language of Theatrical Empathy”; *Irish University Review* 1987: 1 (17) 51-61.
 - 16 Indeed the Carney world is dominated by the father’s speech and action patterns. “In this theatre effect follows cause, we are concerned primarily with motivation, and the climax [...]has been determined by the past” (O’Toole, 96). Or as Etherton puts it: “Their relationships, marred by language, force them into conflict with each other.” (Etherton, Michael. “The Plays of Thomas Murphy”. *Contemporary Irish Dramatists*. London: Macmillan, 1989, 115.)
 - 17 In “La réconciliation avec le père.” *Esquisses Psychanalytiques*, 1993: 19; 9-25, Paul-Laurent Assoun clearly shows how one cannot account for the formation of the unconscious without retracing the development of a subject’s attitude to his or her father: “On ne peut pas en effet ‘faire sans’ le père pour le savoir de l’inconscient.” (Assoun, Paul-Laurent. “La réconciliation avec le père.” *Esquisses Psychanalytiques*, 1993: 19; 9.
 - 18 Lacan loves punning on this central concept to indicate that “Le Nom-du-Père” and “le Non-du-Père” are identical both in pronunciation and in meaning.
 - 19 Le phallus signifie donc ce qui, dans la sexualité, ne peut pas être assumé par l’individu, ou, à proprement parler, ce qui est non subjectivable: il connote [...] le sujet [...] comme manquant, et du même coup comme désirant. [...] (*Dictionnaire* 596-7) Or, as Dylan Evans puts it: “castration is “an operation by which jouissance is drained away from the body”; it “is primarily a symbolic operation of language. It is the imposition of rules and prohibitions that drains the initial quota of jouissance from the child’s body in the castration complex.” Evans, Dylan. “From Kantian Ethics to Mystical Experience: An Exploration of Jouissance.” *Key Concepts of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. (Ed.) Dany Nobus. London: Rebus Press, 1998, 13.
 - 20 In Lacanian thought “the ‘me’ is not the representative of reality, as Freud conceived it, but a showpiece of illusory mastery, a simulacrum of individual control.” (Nob 117)
 - 21 Evans, Dylan. “From Kantian Ethics to Mystical Experience: An Exploration of Jouissance.” *Key Concepts of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. (Ed.) Dany Nobus. London: Rebus Press, 1998, 13.
 - 22 Profitant de changements significatifs dans la vie du sujet, le symptôme touche des trajectoires encore non atteintes, perturbe la linéarité de sa vie et change alors de statut, exigeant la répétition fréquente d’actes sans motifs apparents et, de solution stable, devient indice de non linéarité dans l’ensemble de la vie du sujet.” (Willemart, Philippe. *Au-delà de la psychanalyse: les arts et la littérature*. Paris/Montréal: L’Harmattan, 1998, 146)
 - 23 One might also compare the family structures in *A Whistle in the Dark* and the film *Festen*. In the Danish film, the eldest son challenges the father to air their dark secret and open up the box of their chaotic family life, to liberate his brothers and himself from the suffocating tyranny of the “pater familias”. Murphy’s play has been “translated” into a film as well.

- 24 *Macbeth*, Arden Edition, 1.7.73-5.
- 25 Betty: It's no use trying to get them out. We'll have to move ourselves. (64)
- 26 "Aggressivity is thus as much an intrapsychic, as an inter-personal incident, a phenomenon Lacan linked to 'destructive, and, indeed, death instincts'" (Nobus, Dany. "Life and Death in the Glass: A New Look at the Mirror Stage." *Key Concepts of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. (Ed.) Dany Nobus. London: Rebus Press, 1998, 113.
- 27 Porge, Erik. *Les Noms du père chez Jacques Lacan*. Points hors ligne. Ramonville: érès, 1997, 35
We will see how Mr Carney is "the terrifying father [...] omnipotent like God who vouches for the order in the world, who expresses himself in an imaginary relation with his train of aggression and identification. It is the father with whom one is in fraternal rivalry". Indeed, Michael Jr will point out precisely this – that the stories their Dada makes up have no general value whatsoever: "I'd just like some people to know that a lot of the rubbish talked isn't the gospel." (51)
- 28 "Ce sont des pères imaginaires, qui sont choisis selon la relation imaginaire; morcelante. Ils sont des pères mortifères." (Porge, 23)
- 29 "d'introduire l'enfant à la société, à l'éducation nationale et à la culture humaine." (Julien, Philippe. *Le manteau de Noé: Essai sur la paternité*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991, 21)
- 30 Lionel Pilkington maintains "Dada himself has left Ireland.. because he has inexplicably left his job as a Garda" (Pilkington, Lionel. "'The Superior Game': Colonialism and the stereotype in Tom Murphy's *A Whistle in the Dark*." *History, Myth and Politics in Anglo-Irish Drama*. (Ed.) C.C.Barfoot and Ria van den Doel. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995, 169. As far as I can see, Dada has left Ireland merely to visit his sons. The reasons why he was sacked from the Garda can easily be got by circumstantial evidence: first, he believes his authority is his own; he never presents himself as the representative of the State or any other instance, so he is too Imaginary for such a position. Secondly, he lapsed back into the Real when his *jouissance* got the better of him when he stole a coat, only to throw it away later. The sheer gratuity of his (unconscious) angry energy shows that he was not fit to function as a policeman, which is a Symbolic position par excellence.
- 31 "Pulling four little kids out of bed, two, three, four in the morning. And up on a chair. 'World Champ Carney! Ah-haa for the Carneys! We'll get them! Charge!'" (92-3)
- 32 Julien, Philippe. *Le manteau de Noé: Essai sur la paternité*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991, 36
- 33 "en l'élevant au-dessus du sol" (Julien, 15)
- 34 If ritual is not allowed, play will a fortiori be absent. A certain playfulness, necessary for the boy to find a viable relationship with the mother, is entirely absent in the Carney household. "Précieux espace de jeu qui autorise, au-delà du lien-à-la-mère, de fonder un rapport sur le père. (Assoun, 10)*
- 35 Dylan Evans describes *jouissance* as a "circling" movement of the unconscious, the "unserviceable part" of one's psychic system. Evans, Dylan. "From Kantian Ethics to Mystical Experience: An Exploration of *Jouissance*." *Key Concepts of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. (Ed.) Dany Nobus. London: Rebus Press; 1998, 11.
- 36 Arden edition, 3.2.22.
- 37 Pilkington observes that "Ireland is associated [...] with an anonymous middle-class 'them' that insists on the Carney's subordination."(Pilkington, 170) This is true, but there is more at stake: the father is lapsing back into the Real, where the subject-object relation is obliterated, so that pronouns cannot work.
- 38 "Les pronoms [...] indiquent précisément [...] avant le monde même des significations, à l'événement de langage à l'intérieur duquel seulement une chose peut être signifié." Porge, Erik. *Les Noms du père chez Jacques Lacan*. Points hors ligne. Ramonville: érès, 1997, 12-3)
- 39 Hugo too likes to use extra instruments in fights: "a chain or a rasp or a belt or a chair" (34). Iggy doesn't, and this is very significant. After Michael, he is the one who most differs from his Da. He is not so locked into himself, as we see in his attention to others: he enquires after Harry's well-

- being and wants to be on time for the train to welcome his Da and Des. This is underscored by his refusal to use weapons and his insistence on fairness in battle.
- 40 Julien, Philippe. *Le manteau de Noé: Essai sur la paternité*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991, 38.
- 41 It is typical that none of the boys, except Michael, is married. The others only giggle when women are mentioned. That they mix male and female pronouns (talking about an actor as “she”) may be an indication of the Real dimension in their speech, but it is also not uncommon in certain Hiberno-English dialects. I owe this insight to Nick Grene.
- 42 Pilkington, Lionel. “‘The Superior Game’: Colonialism and the stereotype in Tom Murphy’s *A Whistle in the Dark*.” *History, Myth and Politics in Anglo-Irish Drama*. (Ed.) C.C.Barfoot and Ria van den Doel. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995, 175. He adds: “In Lacanian terms, the subject is fixed in the Imaginary and denied the access to the Symbolic” (ibidem, 175). Yet, as we will see, the Real predominates over the Imaginary.
- 43 Des is explicitly said to be “*At times given to cockiness*” (29)
- 44 He even suggests they should focus on her: “Wouldn’t it be great if we were all at home together at Christmas? I think she gets sort of lonely. Us all gone, you know.” (49)
- 45 As Paul-Laurent Assoun points out, the “Versöhnung” implies the passage from enmity to a relation of friendship – “le passage de l’inimitié à la relation amicale” (“La réconciliation avec le père.” *Esquisses Psychanalytiques*, 1993, 19; 11).
- 46 When Michael becomes impatient with the euphemistic way in which Des sketches his mother’s misery, he bursts out but contains his anger: “He never made things easy for her. He – (*Restrains himself*.) (49)
- 47 Porge, Erik. *Les Noms du père chez Jacques Lacan*. Points hors ligne. Ramonville: érès, 1997, 45.
- 48 “het subject van het onbewuste is intrinsiek verbonden met de autonome werkzaamheid van de betekenaar.” Van Haute, Philippe. *Tegen de aanpassing*. Nijmegen: Sun, 2000, 60.
- 49 The ambiguity of this passage is telling. Is “fighting” an adjective or a verb? In the former case, it means Michael condemns his family’s aggression against others in the wider society. In the latter case, it would mean that Michael does not believe he can fight and change them. Indeed, it is this vacillation that is at the heart of Michael’s deadlock, which will lead him to kill his brother. So Michael proves how the structure of the subject is reflected in his link to his proper name, illustrating Porge’s remark about the Name-of-the-father: “Il y a la structure du sujet, que cache et révèle à la fois le rapport à son nom propre. (Porge, 89)
- 50 As Willemart puts it: the symptom reveals a disjunction in the whole texture of being. “Le symptôme[...] révèle une disjonction dans l’ensemble de l’être” (Willemart, Philippe. *Au-delà de la psychanalyse: les arts et la littérature*. Paris/Montréal: L’Harmattan, 1998, 151)
- 51 Though Vivian Mercier seems to doubt whether Des or Michael is the protagonist and victim, I do not. “the problem for the critic lies in deciding which of two characters is in fact the victim/protagonist.” (Mercier, Vivian. “Noisy Desperation: Murphy and the Book of Job”. *Irish University Review* 1987: 1 (17), 22)
- 52 Mush is on the same wavelength: he either sees “Harry Carney as one “from the land of Saints and Scholars” (79), but on the next page as “Tinkers! Carneys! Tinkers! Tinkers!” (80).
- 53 They are tinkers in that they act as if they were beyond the law. They never take objective differences into account, like Ireland-England, or darkies – Irish; the fights they pick are with their own kind: the Mulryans, and later the circle becomes even tighter, when they kill one of their own.
- 54 O’Dwyer, Riana “Play-Acting and Myth-Making: The Western Plays of Thomas Murphy” *Irish University Review* 1987: 1 (17), 35.
- 55 Interestingly, Porge points out that Father Christmas is another instance of the Name-of-the-father, the wider scheme of things. “Le Père Noël [...] [est un] autre nom du père” Porge, 155.

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