

## **“Border Gothic” – History, Violence and ‘The Border’ in the writings of Eugene McCabe**

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### **Abstract**

As well as producing a rich body of novels, novellas, short-stories and plays spanning throughout seventy years of the century of partition, Eugene McCabe charts the broad trajectory of Irish history and politics from the Elizabethan Conquest and Ulster Plantation of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries to the recent ‘Troubles’ which spanned the thirty years between the beginnings of the Civil Rights Movement (1968) and the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (1998). They positively seethe with gruesome assassinations, indiscriminate bombings and deliberate shootings, while resonating with a veritable cacophony of deep-seeded ethnic rivalries and genocidal, religious hatreds, which are interlaced with poverty, social deprivation and dis-function, migration and emigration.

**Keywords:** Northern Ireland, Eugene McCabe, partition, the gothic

“Ireland, like Dracula’s Transylvania is much troubled by the undead”.<sup>1</sup> So wrote the historian ATQ Stewart and it is no surprise that Ireland, with its famines, massacres, ruined castles, silhouetted abbeys and graveyards, predatory landlords and persecuted, brooding natives should have inspired an English-language Gothic.<sup>2</sup> If Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto* (1764) spawned the genre, it comes to its apogee in Charles Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Camilla* (1871), Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) and, possibly Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), which have all been inspired in different ways by Ireland’s menacing landscapes, fractured politics and latent agrarian, political and sectarian violence.<sup>3</sup>

McCabe can conceivably be added to this distinguished company. He set much of his *oeuvre* on the Fermanagh/Monaghan border, a region whose politics, economics and culture have been defined by its violent colonial past, the partition of Ireland under the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 and the recent, so-called ‘Troubles’/‘Long War’ (1968-98). This geographical, political and socio-economic backwater, at once a jewel in Ireland’s archaeological, cultural, geographical and geological crown and a damp, dark, rural hinterland of bogs, drumlins, lakes and rivers provides a suitably ‘Gothic’ backdrop to the tragedies and travails of its inhabitants over four centuries. Its physical and metaphysical border has etched itself into the land and the minds of its inhabitants and are both graphically and unforgivably portrayed in McCabe’s writings.

Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that Eugene McCabe has done for the region what Brian Friel, Seamus Heaney, Patrick Kavanagh and John Montague accomplished for north-west Donegal, south Derry, south Monaghan and west Tyrone, other distinct, diverse areas of Ulster, Ireland’s most northerly and most troubled province.<sup>4</sup> As well as producing a rich body of novels, novellas, short-stories and plays spanning throughout seventy years of the century of partition, McCabe charts the broad trajectory of Irish history and politics from the Elizabethan Conquest and Ulster Plantation of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries to the recent

1 ATG Stewart. *The Narrow Ground: Aspects of Ulster 1609-1969* (London: Faber 1977; Gregg Revivals 1993; rep. Blackstaff 1997).

2 B. Stewart (ed). *That Other World: The Supernatural and Fantastic in Irish Literature* (Gerard’s Cross, 1998); L. Gibbons. *Gaelic Gothic: Race, Colonization and Irish Culture* (Galway, 2006); J. Killeen. *Gothic Ireland: Horror and the Irish Anglican imagination in the eighteenth century* (Dublin, 2005); J. Walton. *Vision and Vacancy: The fictions of J.S Le Fanu* (Dublin, 2007).

3 H. Walpole. *The Castle of Otranto* (London, 1764); J. S.Le Fanu. *In a Glass Darkly*, 3 vols (London, 1872); O. Wilde. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London, 1891); B. Stoker. *Dracula* (Westminster, 1897); T. Eagleton. *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* (London, 1995).

4 B. Friel. *Selected Plays of Brian Friel* (London, 1984); P. Kavanagh. *The Complete Poems* (Newbridge, 1990), S. Heaney. *Open Ground: Poems 1966-1996* (London, 1998); J. Montague. *Collected Poems* (Oldcastle, 2012).

‘Troubles’ which spanned the thirty years between the beginnings of the Civil Rights Movement (1968) and the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (1998). They positively seethe with gruesome assassinations, indiscriminate bombings and deliberate shootings, while resonating with a veritable cacophony of deep-seeded ethnic rivalries and genocidal, religious hatreds, which are inter-laced with poverty, social deprivation and dis-function, migration and emigration.

Ireland’s ‘Long War’, the setting for the works appraised in this chapter does not compare in body-count or intensity to Spain’s or Yugoslavia’s blood-soaked civil wars.<sup>5</sup> It had no mass bombings to rival Barcelona, Belgrade, Durango, Dubrovnik, Santander and Sarajevo and nothing comparable to Badajoz, Málaga or Srebrenica but a collective toll of 3,500 deaths and 47,000 injured constitutes no mean conflict in a close-knit population of less than one million.<sup>6</sup> It is also worth remembering that between the end of World War 2 and the outbreak of the Bosnian War in 1992, the biggest number of political refugees in Western Europe left Northern Ireland before the beginning of ‘Operation Banner’ – Britain’s longest military campaign.<sup>7</sup> Some of these people came in the towns and villages of the author’s childhood, across a border which had been imposed as arbitrarily and cynically as those now being fought over in the Africa, the Middle-East and the Asian sub-continent.<sup>8</sup> I remember arrests, assassinations and bombings, including the demolition of my own grandparents’ house, the regular bomb-scares and incessant, indiscriminate shootings, as well as the British Army’s check points and road-blowing campaigns. My father came back from filling in roads (which had been bombed by the British Army) with his pockets full of discarded CS gas canisters and rubber bullets which would be eagerly snapped up by visiting American relatives.

From the 1970s onwards, Northern Ireland became one of the most militarized parts of Western Europe. Britain deployed enormous resources in ‘low intensity’<sup>9</sup> military operations against the Irish Republican Army (or IRA) in

5 H. Thomas. *The Spanish Civil War*, revised (London, 2001); A. Beevor. *The Battle for Spain: The Spanish Civil War, 1936–39* (London, 2006); G. Toal and C. Dahلمان. *Bosnia Remade: Ethnic Cleansing and its Reversal* (Oxford, 2011).

6 D. McKetterick, S. Kelters, B. Feeny and C. Thornton. *Lost Lives: the story of the Men, Women and Children who died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles* (Edinburgh, 2001).

7 P. Arthur. ‘Northern Ireland, 1972–84’, in J.R. Hill (ed), *The New History of Ireland, vii, 1921–84* (Oxford, 2003); J. Boyer-Bell. *The Secret Army: The IRA, third edition* (New Brunswick, 1997); E. Maloney. *A Secret History of the IRA* (New York, 2003); B. O’Leary and J. McGarry. *The Politics of Antagonism: Understanding Northern Ireland* (London, 1993).

8 P. Murray. *The Irish Boundary Commission and its Origins, 1886–1925* (Dublin, 2011); ‘Thatcher and Fitzgerald talks: Redrawing of Northern Ireland border was discussed’, [www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-30610096](http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-30610096), accessed 14 Oct. 2015.

9 F. Kitson. *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency, Peace-keeping*, repr. (London, 1991).

Derry's city-side, west Belfast, south Derry, east Tyrone, south Armagh's and on the Fermanagh/Monaghan border, putting more boots on the ground than she subsequently deployed in Iraq or Afghanistan.<sup>10</sup> A necklace of military instillation and barracks housed a large army who, along with a predominantly Protestant/Unionist police force and reserve that waged war against a well-armed, highly resourceful and often ruthlessly efficient IRA. The British Government's, and particularly Prime-Minister Margaret Thatcher's 'normalisation', 'Ulsterisation' and 'criminalization' policies bore little fruit; indeed it would be the locally-recruited farmers' sons from this region, the heroes and villains of McCabe's writings who found themselves in the maelstrom of the IRA's relentless, ruthless military campaign. Similarly, and often in retaliation for these IRA attacks, the Catholic population suffered a campaign of bloody reprisal by pro-Union, loyalist paramilitaries in collusion with the British security forces.

Histories of the Northern Ireland conflict understandably tend to focus on urban regions, particularly Belfast and Derry, on high-profile abductions, assassinations, atrocities, counter-atrocity and the British and IRA's respective military campaigns. The literature tends to follow suit, *pace* Thomas Kinsella's *Butcher's Dozen* (1972); Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark* (1996); Glenn Patterson's *International* (1999); David Park's, *The Healing* (1992) and *Truth Commissioner* (2008). Eoin McNamee's, *Resurrection Man* (1994) could be included here, although his *Ultras* (2005), which is based on the abduction and murder of Captain Robert Nairac is set on the Armagh-Louth border.<sup>11</sup> Indeed South Armagh, with its 'Bandit-Country' reputation and South Derry, with its Nobel laureate (Heaney) are the exception which effectively prove the rule. Less attention has traditionally been focused on the periphery, although Toby Harden's *Bandit Country* (1999), Darach MacDonald's *The Chosen Few* (2000) have recently bucked this trend. More recently, Henry Patterson's *Ireland's Violent Frontier* (2013) and Ann Cadwallader's *Lethal Allies* (2013), which respectively explores the IRA's 'war' against the British Army in South Armagh, its 'genocide' against 'Border Protestants' and British 'collusion' with Loyalist paramilitaries in the 'Murder Triangle', have begun to address this imbalance. Likewise, this short paper will focus on the Monaghan/Fermanagh Border through the lens of one of its most insightful, incisive and perceptive observers.

10 T. Harden. *Bandit Country: The IRA and South Armagh* (London, 1999); D. MacDonald. *The Chosen Few: Exploding Myths in South Armagh* (Dublin, 2000); A. Cadwallader. *Lethal Allies: British Collusion in Ireland* (Cork, 2013).

11 T. Kinsella. *Butcher's Dozen: A Lesson from the Octave of Widgery* (Dublin, 1972); S. Heaney. *Selected Poems* (London, 1990); S. Deane. *Reading in the Dark* (London, 1996); G. Patterson. *The International* (London, 1999); D. Park. *The Healing* (London, 1992); idem, *The Truth Commissioner* (London, 2007); E. McNamee. *Resurrection Man* (London, 1994); idem, *The Ultras* (London, 2004).

*"That was the year of the Munich bother.  
Which was more important? I inclined  
To lose my faith in Ballyrush and Gortin  
Till Homer's ghost came whispering to my mind.  
He said: I made the Iliad from such  
A local row. Gods make their own importance".<sup>12</sup>*

Thus wrote Patrick Kavanagh of the Munich Conference (1938) in "Epic", one of his memorable sonnets that typify the uncanny ability of another of Monaghan's (and Ireland's) most un-sung writers to harvest global themes from the 'Stony Grey Soil' of his native county. When witnessing a small land dispute in Iniskeen parish, a trivial matter in contrast to Churchill's, Daladier's and Hitler's fateful deliberations over the Sudetenland, Homer reminds the poet that all politics is local.

Infused with a similar, unashamed localism and a forensic, insightful illumination of the flawed human condition and laced with a trademark black humour and hangman's wit, Mc Cabe's writings positively bristles with a veritable rogue's gallery of 'gothic' characters; rapacious English Planters, Elizabethan and Cromwellian Conquistadores and their B-Special-descendants, brooding, dispossessed Gaels, Fenians bombers, multi-denominational religious zelots, loyalist and republican paramilitary psychopaths, bigoted, racist and tyrannical priests, 'touchy', territorial small holders, rapacious, unscrupulous land-grabbers and strongmen. Attesting to McCabe's polemical preoccupation with history, Eileen Battersby, the *Irish Times*' critic, has described his Ireland as "a bleak hell of angry sex and tribal hatred".<sup>13</sup>

Mc Cabe is a sort of Monaghan Solzhenitsyn; his *Tales from the Poor House* (1999) graphically portray Ireland's famine poor-houses, Britain's Gulags, while his *Cancer* (1978) explore similar themes of moral responsibility, resistance, revenge and passive involvement that exercised the conscience of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Russia. Likewise, McCabe delivers a relentless, neo-brutalist Joycean critique of both Caesar and Christ; Irish and British Nationalism and what passes for Christianity amongst south Ulster's various denominations. This paper will specifically focus on the themes of history, partition and politics in *Victims: A Tale from Fermanagh* (1976) and *Heritage and Other Stories* (1978).<sup>14</sup>

In *Victims*, which has resonances of Frank O'Connor's *Guests of the Nation* (1931),<sup>15</sup> the IRA take the Armstrongs, a 'Big House', Protestant family, hostage

12 Patrick Kavanagh, 'Epic', in *Collected Poems* (London, 1964, 68), p. 136.

13 Eileen Battersby. *Irish Times*, 15 January 2005.

14 E. McCabe, *Heritage and Other Stories* (London, 1978); idem, *Tales from the Poor House* (Oldcastle, 1999).

15 F. O'Connor, *Guests of the Nation* (London, 1931).

in order to secure the release of its prisoners from Long Kesh.<sup>16</sup> The active service unit comprises the bomb-making McAleer brothers, ‘Tick’ and ‘Tock’, who are dominated by their mother, “an Irish Queen Victoria, with de Valera’s nose and Churchill’s mouth”.<sup>17</sup> She is in turn traumatized by her husband’s incarceration and torture at the hands of Northern Ireland’s security forces during the IRA’s abortive border campaign of the late-1950s.<sup>18</sup> On his death-bed the patriarch extracts a promise of vengeance from his sons, thereby recruiting them to the ‘Patriot Game’.<sup>19</sup> The brothers have imbibed and forcefully articulate an orthodox, unyielding socialist republican rhetoric. Their revolution will brook no compromise; “no Catholic gent on horseback, no Murphy in a wig” will lock them away, “no po-faced Prods” [Protestants] will whip them for white nigger trash.<sup>20</sup> In their world-view, the “wealth and privilege of the Armstrong” interlopers has been “gained by force and fraud”; “[i]f London refused to negotiate they would have to kill and be killed”.<sup>21</sup>

Their hostages are similarly in thrall to their own colonial and imperial past; the McAleers have their Patriot Game, the Armstrongs are at the fag-end of Kipling’s ‘Great Game’. Colonel Armstrong guest Alex Boyd-Crawford boasts that his family “never employed Papists” [Catholics],<sup>22</sup> who “cheat”, “lie” ‘thieve’ and are “dirty”, “careless”, “superstitious” and “stupid”.<sup>23</sup> Canon Plumm, their Cambridge-educated guest concurs, suggesting that they have a “lower IQ than negroes”. Furthermore, he gloats that “in sixty years” they [the Irish Catholics] have “ruined Dublin, painted pillar-boxes green, and produced more lunatics and alcoholics per square mile than any other country in the world”.<sup>24</sup>

Harriet, Armstrong, the Colonel’s wife upbraids Plumm by comparing him to the Rev Ian Paisley, the mealy-mouthed, Presbyterian demagogue of the 1970s, but “without the loudmouthed charm”.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, she dismissed the spurious, racist pseudo-science of his American Professor IQ “expert” or “indeed anything from

16 ‘Officially’ H.M, The Maze Prison.

17 E. McCabe, ‘Victims’, p. 157, in: E. McCabe. *Heaven Lies About Us* (London, 2007).

18 Ibid., p. 158. See also B. Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly – The Border Campaign, 1956–62* (Dublin, 2009).

19 Ibid.; ‘The Patriot Game’, a song penned by Dominic Behan in memory of Fergal O’Hanlon, killed in the IRA’s abortive attack on Brookeborough Barracks on 1<sup>st</sup> Jan 1957.

20 Ibid., p. 163.

21 Ibid., p. 164.

22 There is a possible allusion here to Sir Basil Brooke, Lord Brookeborough, the Prime-Minister of Northern Ireland who famously exclaimed that he ‘wouldn’t have a Catholic about the place’.

23 E. McCabe, ‘Victims’, p. 170.

24 Ibid., p. 170f.

25 Ibid., p. 171f. Paisley is the mealy-mouthed demagogue, who with Martin McGuinness, became one of the ‘Chuckle Brothers’ in post-Good Friday Agreement Northern Irish politics

that glorious civilization”.<sup>26</sup> The Armstrong matriarch then turns her ire on the third kidnapper, Lynam, a 23 year old Arts graduate and the only child of a divorced, drunken Fianna Fáil TD. She attributes Harriet’s barbs to a failure to understand Ireland’s colonial past.<sup>27</sup> Finally, Jack Gallagher, the last of the IRA quartet, deploys the imperial pin-up Sir Robert Baden-Powell, whose fictitious book, *The drama of Anglo-German Conflict in Africa in relation to the future of the British Empire* he has taken down from Armstrong’s shelf. It provides him with the perfect prop with which to savagely critique an English/British imperial project which began with the first Elizabeth and continues with the second; “she [Elizabeth I] could pick good butchers ... men with big swords, big cannonballs ... still does ... nice day for killing ... that’s what the paras said in Derry, Lizzie II’s high-jumping men”.<sup>28</sup>

Colonel Armstrong stoutly defends his ancestors, who reduced rents and mortgaged the estate during the Great Famine (1845-7) to feed their starving Catholic and Protestant tenants.<sup>29</sup> His wife attempts to engage Lynam on modern English poetry and Celtic Studies (her university subjects) and tells Lynam of her husband’s dismay after the ‘Bloody Sunday’ massacre in Derry.<sup>30</sup> However, there is little room for accommodation between both sets of hostages. Gallagher responds to the Colonel’s accusations of prisoner maltreatment with a characteristically withering put-down of British democracy and imperialism; “You talk of war and prisoners [...] [w]hen we look for common rights the way you got your empire [i.e. by violence], all your lackeys in the Press and Commons yap; hang them, hang them, hang them. Mother of Parliaments? A fat knacker’s wife who flayed the bloody world and you think the world is with you?”<sup>31</sup> The siege of Inver House ends in bloodshed and there is no escape from the deadly embrace of their disputed history. Canon Plumm concludes that “we are what we are because of history”<sup>32</sup>, for Jack Gallagher “[h]istory cannot be altered”<sup>33</sup>, a

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26 Ibid., p. 172.

27 Ibid., p. 177f.

28 Ibid., p. 179f. For further considerations on this topic, See V. Carey ‘Elizabeth I and State Terror in Sixteenth Century Ireland’, in D. Stump, L. Shenk, C. Levin (eds). *Elizabeth I and the Sovereign Arts: Essays in Literature, History and Culture* (Tempe, AZ, 2011) pp 201-6; D. Edwards. ‘The escalation of violence in Sixteenth-Century Ireland’, in D. Edwards, C. Tait and P. Lenihan (eds). *Age of Atrocity: Violence and Political Conflict in Early Modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2007), pp 34-78; D. Mullan. *Eyewitness Bloody Sunday* (Dublin, 1997).

29 Ibid., p. 189.

30 Ibid., p. 194f.

31 Ibid., p. 202. For further considerations on this topic, see P. Forde, *A Criminal History of the British Empire* (New York, 1915), in particular the illustrations.

32 Ibid., p. 209.

33 Ibid.

despairing end to the protagonists' Joycean attempt to fly the nets of nationality, religion and identity.<sup>34</sup>

In 'Cancer', the second last story in McCabe's *Heritage* series, Joady McMahan, a small Fermanagh farmer, succumbs to the disease while the adjacent morgue is filling with the shattered, dead bodies from an IRA explosion at nearby Trillick, County Tyrone.<sup>35</sup> Joady's terminal illness is symptomatic of the malevolence consuming Northern Ireland's body politic; his contrasting narratives of the event to Protestant and Catholic neighbours suitably underpin the fractured, duplicitous society in which he and his Protestant neighbours must operate.

However, the reality of their condition is rarely far from the surface. Under the whirring rotor-blades of a British Army helicopter, Dinny, Joady's brother, and Boyle, the driver, attribute the army's hectic activity and invasive curiosity both to this most recent atrocity and to their own "Catholic faces".<sup>36</sup> A scion of the McMahons, who were "[k]ings about Monaghan for near a thousand years, but "butchered, and driv' north to these bitter hills", Dinny despairs of change.<sup>37</sup> He recalls his altercation with Gilbert Wilson, his Protestant neighbour in Coranny Pub; they "talked land and benty turf, the forestry takin' over and the way people are leavin' for factories [...] then all of a shot he leans over to me and says: 'Fact is, Dinny, the time I like you best, I could cut your throat'".<sup>38</sup>

In another ringing testimony to *in vino veritas* Dinny and Boyle stumble "the wrong shop", a euphemism for the Catholic or Protestant who finds himself in a pub frequented by 'the other side'.<sup>39</sup> The barmaid baulks at Dinny's request for Irish whiskey, while Boyle observes a notice for the "Linaska and District Development Association Extermination of Vermin" which has been annotated to include a bounty of "one old penny" for "every Fenian [Catholic] fucker".<sup>40</sup> Confronted by George, an indignant loyalist firebrand who vows to fight to the last ditch, Dinny discards his drink and defiantly declares that he'd "as lief drink with pigs". On leaving the pub, he assures Boyle that those who "got it [his land] with guns, kep' it with guns and guns'll put them from it".<sup>41</sup>

34 You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets", J. Joyce, *A portrait of the artist as a young man* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1960), ch. 5, p. 207.

35 E. McCabe, 'Cancer', p. 75, in: McCabe. *Heaven Lies About Us*. See also McKetterick et al. *Lost Lives*.

36 Ibid., p. 76.

37 Ibid., p. 77.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid., p. 79f.

40 Ibid., p. 80.

41 Ibid., p. 81.



Eric O’Neill, George’s nephew, a reluctant recruit into the ultra-Protestant UDR, is the tragic hero of *Heritage*, the last and signature story in the collection of that name. His genocidal uncle regales him at the outset on Catholic treachery: “To them a hundred years was yesterday, two hundred the day before”. They are a “rotten race [...] good for nothin’ but malice and murder; the like of Hitler would put them through the burnhouse and spread them on their sour bogs and he’d be right, it is all they’re fit for”.<sup>42</sup> A fast captive of the history and politics of his family and partitioned country, Eric traverses a border landscape, “along an orchard and beech copse planted by his grandfather in 1921 to block off the view of the Fenian South”.<sup>43</sup> As the body rises among Eric’s comrades in the security forces, the threat of assassination is the elephant in a room filled with talk of land, neighbours and cattle prices.<sup>44</sup>

The black-edged threatening letter, the traditional calling-card of the Irish nationalist avenger, inspires anger not fear, as Eric tries to imagine which of his hard-working Catholic neighbours has put pen to paper. His continued UDR membership is a constant source of conflict between his parents. O’Neill’s father reminds his wife that she made him “feel a coward if he didn’t [join]; a gun, a uniform and the money’s good, that’s what you said ... what he’s got for himself won’t bury him”.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, he attempts to convince his son of the futility of his “someone must fight” stance, against “every second neighbour”, “American money” and “gangs of street savages” who “can’t all be locked up, hung or shot” and warns him that “they’ll come again, and again, and again”.<sup>46</sup> In another altercation with his wife, the indignant patriarch reminds her that his son will not be fighting for ‘God, Queen and Country’ but for “the big boys who splash more on weekends [of] whoring than he’ll make in a lifetime”.<sup>47</sup> Unlike his bigoted wife, who’d “live on black bread, water, the Bible and hating Catholics”, O’Neill will not let “one neighbour in ten thousand who wants to kill me and mine” make him hate the rest.<sup>48</sup> She, for her part, idealizes her bigoted brother George as “a good straight man [...] the best blacksmith in Ulster, afraid of nothing and no one”; whereas Eric’s father says about George, “he’s afeered of everyone and everything, drinks every penny he gets and [is] too mean to marry [...] All that loud rough talk” and hatred of Catholic is self-hatred “and I

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42 E. McCabe, ‘Heritage’, p. 88, in: McCabe. *Heaven Lies About Us*.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., p. 88f.

45 Ibid., p. 92.

46 Ibid., p. 93.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid., p. 94f.

wouldn't fault him for that".<sup>49</sup> George, in turn, despises his brother-in-law, with his suspect, rebel name, who drinks "in Papist houses, and doesn't give an ass's fart when his firstborn marries one of *them*" and because he fathered Maggie Reilly, "the Papist hedge-whore's" "eegit son" [Willie].<sup>50</sup>

The armed standoff between the Planter [Armstrong] and the surly Gael [Dinny] at the start of the otter-hunt provide Eric and his girlfriend Rachel with a launch-pad to their problematic heritage. Although she disdains her parents' bigotry against their Catholic neighbours, she is captive to their prejudices; to her the Catholics are "so coarse and stupid", with their "holy magazines and rosaries", and the "fuzzy-headed priest going about blessing" them, and "the horrid way they sucked up to him".<sup>51</sup> For Eric, "we [the Protestants] *made* this country, they [the Catholics] *are* this country and know it, they won't rest till they bury us or make us part of themselves. Like you I don't want that, maybe that's why I joined".<sup>52</sup>

Rachel's and Eric's prejudices have been distilled into a murderous hatred by his uncle George. The upwardly mobile Martin Cassidy, whom Eric and George meet on the road, is a "cog in the murder gang, one of your Yankee mafia" who he [George] "mind[s] barefoot, his auld fella out for hire", and who has now "tricked his way into Protestant land".<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, he [Martin] "knows who sent that note, knows when, how and where you'll be got [assassinated], it's all linked: Rome, politics, America, gunmen".<sup>54</sup> George claims that "they're [the Catholics] diggin' graves for us night and day and we're standin' lookin' at them like the Jews in Europe". Nonetheless, he takes comfort from the fact that "[w]e bate [beat] them before and we'll bate them again".<sup>55</sup> However, there is no victory and no side secures its heritage. Traumatized by the IRA's murder of Rachel's brother and his uncle's bloody, indiscriminate retaliation against the witless Willie Reilly, Eric's desperate, possibly suicidal effort to escape ends in his death at a British Army checkpoint. Eric's repudiation of George's inheritance, his subsequent death and his brother's self-imposed exile has severed the planter line.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, one of the childless McMahons lies dying, while the other stand guard over his sour acres. The Border Gothic comes full circle; art imitates life and life imitates art. The artist [McCabe] heard shooting on a night in September 1980 and learned the

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49 Ibid., p. 105.

50 Ibid., p. 106, p. 87.

51 Ibid., p. 120.

52 Ibid., p. 121.

53 Ibid., p. 125.

54 Ibid., p. 126.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid., p. 139.

following morning that Ernest Johnston, the UDR reservist on whom he based his tragic hero [Eric O’Neill] had been shot dead; the character is dead, now the original had been shot as well.

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### **»Obmejna gotika« – zgodovina, nasilje in »meja« v delih Eugena McCaba**

Eugene McCabe v svojih delih od opisuje širok razpon irske zgodovine in politike od delitve Irske pred sedemdeseti leti, pa tudi že prej od elizabetinske zasedbe in ulsterske plantaže v 16. in 17. stoletju, vse do novejšega obdobja in pojava civilnega gibanja ter podpisa sporazuma v Belfastu leta 1998. Članek se spričo težkega in krvavega zgodovinskega ozadja osredinja na gotsko stalnico v njegovem pisanju o »meji« in delitvi naroda.

**Ključne besede:** Severna Irska, Eugene McCabe, delitev, gotika