Subaltern aesthetics: Tracing counter-histories in contemporary Scottish, Irish and Northern Irish literature.

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Abstract
This PhD thesis proposes an Irish-Scottish comparative framework for examining a range of shared ethical, socio-political and theoretical concerns, pertaining to aspects of class and gender, in contemporary Irish, Northern Irish and Scottish literature. My approach galvanises Lévinasian ethics with the socio-cultural category of the 'subaltern' in relation to postcolonial, Marxist and feminist theories in order to trace what I term a 'subaltern aesthetics' between selected works of Scottish, Northern Irish and Irish writing that show a specific sensibility to the social inequalities and inequities that are part of the current restructuring of the global capitalist system. My work explores how these texts engage with both the processes of political and economic transformation in the Atlantic archipelago, and critical-theoretical approaches which, I argue, show the tendency to subsume the specificity and intensity of subaltern concerns. The first chapter delineates key debates in Irish and Scottish studies, offering a critique of conventional applications of postcolonial and postmodern theory. I demonstrate that dominant versions of postcolonialism are analytically entrapped in the nation as a paradigm. Additionally, I show that for all its apparent celebration of difference, postmodernism reduces otherness to the terms of the self. Chapter 2 outlines the model of a subaltern counter-history as a theoretical framework for reading ethical issues of historicity on the basis of texts by James Kelman, Patrick McCabe and Robert Mc Liam Wilson. This engagement with history is continued in chapter 3, which investigates the desire to archive Northern Ireland’s recent past in the context of its peace process in Glenn Patterson’s and Eoin Mc Namee’s recent novels. The emphasis of the three subsequent chapters turns the attention of my counter-historical method to issues of gender. The fourth chapter evaluates the material consequences that the gendering of the imagined nation has on female bodies in particular. Whereas the focus lies here specifically on the Irish context, the following chapter 5 engages in a comparative reading of traumatic herstories in three Irish and Scottish novels by Roddy Doyle, Janice Galloway and Jennifer Johnston. The purpose of both of these chapters is to examine women’s experience of disempowerment and their struggle to reclaim agency. My last chapter then investigates the relationship between men, gender and nation in the allegorical imagiNation of Alasdair Gray and McCabe with specific regard to the turn to the feminine that has taken place in contemporary criticism.

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