Article

'Not-All-There' in the Necropolis: Afterlife and Madness in Urban Novels

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Abstract: The paper takes its departure point from a seemingly innocuous idiom that common English parlance uses to describe a person who has lost possession of their rational mind: "not all there." Interrogating the locality that this deictic "there" implies, the argument juxtaposes it with recent religious scholarship on the Afterlife, which posits that, by extension, from the absence of the risen Christ from the tomb, the Christian subject is essentially similarly 'not there'. Thus, the paper treads a thin line between sacredness and profanity in attempting to map out the spatial coordinates and configuration of the imaginary realms of the life-less and mind-less, that is, the Afterlife and madness, respectively. This examination is conducted through late 20th-century literary representations of, on the one hand, the Afterlife as an urban netherworld, experienced as infernal and life-negating, and of the city perceived through a schizophrenic mind, which displays an uncanny similarity to Hell: disorienting, dissipating, and ghostly. In this manner, following recent scholarship of embodied cognition, the paper demonstrates an unexpected and hitherto unexplored affinity between the Afterlife as a key concept of conventional religious thought and madness and the mad subject as an oft-reviled cultural, social, and literary figure.

Keywords: afterlife; madness; embodied cognition; urban novel; underworld

1. Introduction

In most Christian-based Western religious and philosophical thought, the Afterlife is a temporal rather than a spatial concept. It signifies that which is to follow one's life on earth, the phase of one's existence that implies eternity, and a linear movement along the axis of time. Little there is in the term itself that implies a spatiality, a boundedness to or fixity in a particular space or place. Individuals who undergo a near-death experience oftentimes depict the imagery surrounding the immediate aftermath of death as 'movement, such as drifting through darkness, empty space, or a tunnel' (Zaleski 2008, p. 618). Such representations, whether dreamed, imagined, or truly experienced, have flooded popular culture yet remain within the symbolism of passage, transition, and a lack of anchorage. Moreover, while reports on near-death experiences do tend to describe the atmosphere experienced in the space of immediate posthumousness, such as an extension of the surroundings of the person's physical death, the sounding of 'uncomfortable noise', or the view of one's own dying body from a distance (ibid., p. 616), they hardly ever feature specifics on the coordinates, landscape, or architecture of the place wherein the experiencer finds herself. Evidently, such reports may include the spaces of the earthly life of the nearly-deceased, and while they supply affirmation of the soul surviving the body, they demonstrate the lingering ability to register physical sensations, like sights, sounds, and proprioceptive information, such as distance and movement.

Although one might be inclined to dismiss reports of the spatial phenomenology of near-death experiences as mere conjectures, cultural representations of hope, or figments of the imagination potentially derived from the secular imagery of the beginning of human life as a passage through a uterine canal, the answer to *where*, as a complement to *when*

the Afterlife may be situated, has received myriad iterations. In the words of Alberto Vanolo (2016), 'Many idealizations of heaven, paradise, hell, or the underworld are often described by means of spatial referents or spatial metaphors' that do not stray far from the earthly spatial experience (p. 194). However, the advent of modernity recognises Vanolo, has transformed the religious imaginary of the Afterlife 'as a worldly space' by abandoning conceptualisations of it as a material, physical place and veering rather towards a spiritual definition. Considering that the passage to the realm after life entails discarding one's corporeality, in other words, a disembodiment, Vanolo wonders how one can imagine a geography of the Afterlife in purely abstract terms. Or, 'where is the self located in experiences without or outside physical bodies?' (ibid.). In a similar vein, when spatial theorist and founder of non-representational theory Nigel Thrift (2008) ponders the most apposite narrative with which to immortalise the idiosyncratic worldview and demeanour of his late father, he asks: 'How, then, might we find a space for my father?' (p. 214). He begins the search for such an 'Afterwor(l)d' by acknowledging its existence as 'unmarked'—'an attempt to find, value, and retain what is not marked as "here", yet palpably still reverberates' (ibid.). Put another way, by leaving indelible traces yet materially disappearing, Thrift's father's spatial existence can be marked neither as fully 'here' nor as entirely 'there'. Hence, the post-life space that will receive him must, by analogy, be similarly an elusive territory. Thus, in the centre of the quandary of locating the Afterlife lie two issues, firstly, that of disembodiment, or the absence of a physical form to inhabit the world of the postliving, and secondly, the difficulty of conceiving of a stable landscape that would accommodate a partial, fluid existence.

Studies of sacred spaces have indicated that the lack of spatial stability is deeply embedded within Christian religious doctrine. Contrary to modernist phenomenological understandings, such as that of Martin Heidegger, that the kernel of being is to be found in dwelling, Graham Holderness observes that the Christian subject is, in essence, a pilgrim, and Christian spatiality is that of ambulation and constant flux. More specifically, in his interpretation of the sacredness of spaces, based on Albert Rouet's and Mircea Eliade's writings, a church is regarded sacred precisely because it symbolises a transition, an elevation, from the plane of the profane to the plane of the sacred. Following Eliade, he regards churches as open-ended, interstitial spaces. Consequently, the sacredness of churches is derived from their ability to afford heterogeneity in space and open up channels of communication between levels in the vertical cosmic order. Nevertheless, their status as 'apertures' and 'horizons', as Holderness terms them, testifies to the spatial instability implicit in Christianity, whose promise of salvation and Christ's Second Coming is not predicated 'on land or temple but on an event and a person' (Holderness 2007, p. 277). To borrow from Holderness again: 'The event of Jesus was a coming and a going; the place of Jesus is an empty tomb. "He is" by definition "*not here*" (Matt. 28:6)' (p. 277, emphasis original).

This notion of partial absence, or alternatively, incomplete presence, expressed in spatial terms, underlies the ontological situation of another subject whose cultural representations are as multifarious as those of the Afterlife and span the sacred and the profane, the metaphysical and the material, the deviant and the divine: namely, that of the lunatic. Among the cornucopia of imagery that the English idiomatic language conjures up to describe a "mad" or "crazy" person, that is, someone who has lost possession of their mental faculties and/or grounding in consensual reality, one stands out as emphatically spatial: being 'not all *there*'. Unlike, however, the disembodied yet reverberating presence of the deceased, and indeed that of the risen Christ, the 'not-thereness' of the mad person rather implies a mental absence but a corporeal presence, an existence teetering on the fence between mindfulness and mind-lessness. Yet, despite the semantic implication, the exact reference of the spatially deictic 'there' in the idiomatic expression remains a slippery slope: where exactly is this 'there' located, and what would it mean for a person to, in contrast, be 'all there'? If we take for granted, as a handful of English language dictionary entries do, that the phrase is an abbreviation from 'not all there in the head', then 'there'

would identify the 'head' as the putative seat of reason. Circumscribing thus the head as the site of human cognition and rationality, situated on the summit of the human body and therefore distinct from and superior to it, points to a Cartesian mind-body dualism. Considering that the etymology of the phrase traces it back to either the mid-18th or 19th century, it is small a wonder then that its spatial referent 'there' would be predicated on the Enlightenment model of human cognition when denoting the place the insane person is absent from. However, current debates on cognition tend instead to interpret insanity, or more narrowly, psychosis, within an embodied and emplaced view of human mental life.[1]

2. The 'There' of Embodied Cognition

In recent years, the cognitive sciences have been increasingly departing from the Cartesian model of strict and hierarchical separation between mind and body and opening up to phenomenological philosophies of mind. Rather than fully subordinating corporeality as ancillary to mental faculties, phenomenologically informed cognitive models foreground the embodied and emplaced nature of cognitive processes, a person's being-in-the-world, as integral to and constitutive of being and selfhood. The operation of the body's sensorial systems, movement, and proprioception, as well as the configurations and encounters afforded by the environment, actively shape perception, emotion, recollection, comprehension, decision, and action in an interdependent fashion. In order to aid the analysis of literary representations of extreme states of mental ill health as embodied experiences, especially in juxtaposition with fictionalised experiences of the Afterlife, particularly relevant are contemporary theorisations of the self as an embodied entity. Foremost in this regard is Michelle Maiese's (2016) *Embodied Selves and Divided Minds*: it is a disciple both of Merleau-Ponty's ([1945] 2012) *Phenomenology of Perception* and of FranciscoVarela et al.'s (1992) trailblazer *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*. Thus, Maiese advances the argument that 'human consciousness and cognition are *essentially embodied*' (p. 1, emphasis original). This, she notes, is not to say that any actual cognition takes place in organ systems other than the brain but that cognition 'would break down, or be incomplete, or be something other than what it is, without their constituency' (ibid., p. 2). She thus posits a basic mode of self-awareness that stems directly from our neurobiological configuration, which she names 'sensorimotor subjectivity'. One of the foundational premises of sensorimotor subjectivity is rooted in the body's unconscious internal mechanism of spatial orientation—its proprioception, i.e., the body's overall capacity to locate and orientate itself. As a ramification of this premise, Maiese delineates an entire spatial structure of the body's being in the world:

> Subjective experiences such as sensations necessarily occur here—that is, wherever my body is located . . . By virtue of its spatiality, sensorimotor subjectivity is also necessarily orientable and balanceable via the body's proprioceptive capacities . . . I see and touch things that are over there, while my body is always experienced as here. Thus, the body functions as an indexical "here". (Thompson 2005, p. 411; Maiese 2016, p. 9)

Rather than subscribing to a fragmentation of the body into the head as the seat of reason and the remainder as its vessel, Maiese considers the body as an integrative whole, the reference point for spatial orientation and making sense of the world. Maiese's view of the schizophrenic disturbance is that it involves a rupture of subjectivity which is caused, among other things, by 'bodily alienation and hyper-reflexivity' and "'unworlding'" (of the perceptual sphere)". Bodily alienation, thus, refers to a rift between the subject and the subject's body, and its opposite is integral to a 'sense of . . . self-belonging, and a sense of being "at home" in the world' (ibid., p. 143). The unworlding of the perceptual sphere, on the other hand, comprises a strangeness, *unheimlichkeit*, in the appearance of the external world, as it no longer provides items with which one may engage, but only 'a realm of images', a *ghostly* world (ibid., pp. 141, 147). 'In addition, spatial and temporal relations undergo a profound change, and the subject has a sense that objects do not have a causal relationship with each other, nor with her own body' (ibid., p. 141). In essence, the world is

'unworlded' or 'unbuilt', thus precluding the subject's establishment of relationships with his/her surroundings.

> One might say that schizophrenia patients have lost their footing in the world . . . Without the guidance and attentional focusing ordinarily afforded by affective framing, they lack a "map" of where they are in the world and may lose hold of even basic structures of space and time. (Maiese 2016, p. 150)

According to Maiese, the world that is inhabited by madness is one marked by unmooring, disorientation, and an inability to name one's spatial coordinates, one where the laws governing the relationships between and among objects, time, and space, fail to obtain. As this paper will demonstrate, such a world resonates closely with figurations of the Afterlife.

3. Late 20th-Century Literary Afterlife as Hell

Broadly speaking, the notion of the Afterlife as herein employed stems from the traditional Catholic Christian teaching of the *eschata*, or the 'last things': 'death, judgment, heaven, and hell' (McFarland 2023, p. 156), according to which 'the present world of nature as well as of human history' will cease to be and 'the risen Christ will come again to hold a final judgment, to raise the dead, and to receive those who believe in him to participate in his eternal life that he shares with God the Father' (Pannenberg 2008, p. 493). However, studies that historicise the developments in eschatology and overall Christian theological practice have observed that the expansion of scientific knowledge from the Enlightenment era onwards precipitated a crisis in the belief in an annihilation of the natural world and the re-institution of a supernatural collective realm of salvation (ibid., pp. 493–94). Furthermore, scholarship on the Afterlife has noted that since the advent of modernity, Christian doctrine has had to contend with a diminution in the belief in the existence of Hell as a 'region of eternal torment' (Falconer 2005, p. 13; see also Camporesi (1990)) to which one is condemned for sins committed on Earth or as a 'worldly space' that exists in 'material terms', such as that found in ancient Greek mythology (Vanolo 2016, p. 194). Indeed, Duncan Thaw, the protagonist of one of the two works of literary fiction that this paper interrogates, may be deemed a proponent of such eschatological scepticism, since, while he exhibits tentative belief in God, he is adamant that he does not believe in Hell (Gray [1981] 2007, p. 143). Still, both Vanolo and Falconer concur that depictions of Hell bear unceasing import for contemporary Western imaginaries; it is still pregnant with medieval meanings of 'punitive justice', yet fluctuates alongside history and adopts 'physical and moral topographies [that] are constantly developing and changing' (Falconer 2005, p. 18).

Although, as suggested above, the notion of the Afterlife in the following discussion relies on an eschatological understanding of the post-living world, yet the analysis of Hell-like experiences in the selected works will necessarily align itself with secularised modern renditions of Hell, and with a two-fold rationale. Firstly, according to traditional strands of Christian doctrine, seeking to explore the Afterlife as a material place with specific and idiosyncratic markings of terrain, architecture, and locality is incompatible with eschatological principles. Namely, Jonathan L. Kvanvig (2008) denounces a rendition of Hell as well as Heaven as places of residence 'in the geographic way in which we think of residence in, say, Texas or California' as one that 'simply does not fall into the category of an eschatological doctrine at all' (p. 419). On the contrary, the aim of my paper is in close alignment with Vanolo's search for a disembodied 'geography of the Afterlife' (Kvanvig 2008, p. 193). Secondly, Rachel Falconer's incisive study of *Hell in Contemporary Literature: Western Descent Narratives Since 1945* (2005) ascertains that not only is modernity distinctively marked by secularity, but also the aftermath of the Second World War and the Holocaust atrocities has made it impossible to conceptualise the modern human condition according to a metaphysical paradigm different to the one of Hell (pp. 26, 28).[2] The literary fiction at issue here was produced in the socio-historical milieux of the late 20th century, and the existential concerns that Falconer observes reverberate throughout it, too. In addition, both novels examined below exhibit attunement to the expansion of nuanced psychological

and psychiatric scholarship and practice centring on mental disturbance and psychotic fragmentation in particular, thus lending yet another metaphorical layer to the literary refraction of images of hell.

Literature has employed some of the widest-ranging and most imaginative arsenals in artistic and cultural production to construct worlds of postmortality, in particular, the underworld. Here I will examine the configurations of two such instances as rendered in urban novels, that is, novels in which a city does not feature as a mere setting but rather as a presence that consistently and meaningfully affects the development of the plot and characters. Moreover, the novels I have selected are populated by protagonists who experience madness, in one example as a single episode or in conjunction with other psychological distress, or in the other as paranoid schizophrenia. The rationale behind the selection is two-fold: firstly, the city as a manmade artefact, and in particular as an emblem of modernity, secularism, and capitalist/postcapitalist expansion throughout the 20th and arguably in the 21st century as well, has given rise to literary responses ranging from fascination to abhorrence. A spate of literary figures has vilified it as a site of social alienation and spiritual aridity, epitomising the soulless and desensitising capitalist machine. High modernist pillar T. S. Eliot harnessed such reactions to the city as an Inferno into the spectral image of the anonymous London millions crossing London Bridge in his poem *The Waste Land* ([1922] 2000):

> Unreal City,
>
> Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
>
> A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
>
> I had not thought death had undone so many. (Eliot [1922] 2000, p. 7, lines 60–63)

Therefore, cities in literature have oft been breeding grounds for angst and desolation, domains from which to seek flight and salvation rather than locations in which to seek affirmation of life. Secondly, the two urban novels in my selection lend themselves to being read as katabatic narratives, or journeys of descent into the netherworld, literary forms that Falconer has upgraded to a tool of canvassing a panoply of modern Western cultural production. In classical myths of descent (or in Latin: *descensus ad inferos*), as well as Dante's *Inferno,* such narratives revolve around a passage through Hell whereby ultimately the hero 'com[es] to know the self, regain[s] something or someone lost, or acquir[es] superhuman powers or knowledge' (Falconer 2005, p. 3). In fact, Falconer keenly notes that the Western imagination is replete with the notions of a self-being constituted by dint of having survived an encounter with Hell as the absolute Other, and returned to tell the tale. Nevertheless, she notes that the katabatic stories penned in the decades following the Second World War, to which the two selected novels here, Alasdair Gray's ([1981] 2007) epic *Lanark* and Patric McGrath's (1990) Neogothic tale *Spider*, also belong, are distinctive for they are set in such spatial and historical surroundings that are characterised as infernal, to begin with. What is more, under katabatic narratives, Falconer also lists life writing of mental disorders, in particular, such that document experiences of madness.[3] To a greater or lesser extent, all of the above features are observable in *Lanark* and *Spider*.

4. *Lanark*

To begin with, Gray's first novel *Lanark: A Life in Four Books* was published in 1981 after a 20-year composition process and has since grown into a heavyweight of Scottish literature and instrumental in the inscription of Glasgow onto the world map of literary urban greats. Stretching over four books and two narrative lines and oscillating between realism and 'science fiction-*cum*-fantasy' (Witschi 1991, p. 68), *Lanark*'s titular four books follow a non-linear order—three, one, two, four—wherein the realist narrative line of Book One and Two is nestled within the fantastical one of Books Three and Four. The realist half of the novel follows the conventions of a *Bildungsroman* depicting young and ambitious artist Duncan Thaw through the streets, nooks, and crannies of 1950s Glasgow as he seeks outlets for his artistic ingenuity in an urban community 'essentially hostile to art' (Witschi

[1991](), p. 60). The Glasgow that surrounds him is a post-Second World War wasteland framed by tenement houses, leaden skies, labyrinthine streets, and, in his view, curtailed artistic freedom. Frustrated with the drab and dispirited urban and cultural environment, Thaw's aspirations towards epic grandeur and transcendence achieved through artistic mastery eventually prove a bitter failure. Exacerbated by his personal afflictions with psychosomatic maladies, such as asthma and eczema, as well as crippling anxieties and an inability to forge connections with the women he fancies, Thaw undertakes a journey up north to the Scottish coast, where he submerges in the waves of the sea, descending into 'annihilating sweetness' ([Gray [1981] 2007](), p. 354).

Thaw's waterway entry into the Afterlife leads him to his fantastic postliving avatar, Lanark. As opposed to Thaw, whose maps of the city and of his identity expand and grow more convoluted as his trials deepen, Lanark's identity begins with a topographical and existential blank slate—he can attach no occupation or aspiration to his name, his memory is composed of haphazard temporal landmarks, and the city's name is neither known nor important. He later learns it is Unthank, which is lidded with a cold, sunless, black sky, a colour only slightly gloomier than Glasgow's 'pallid neutral' ([Gray [1981] 2007](), p. 156). To the same extent that Glasgow imposes itself as a 'huge labyrinth', dystopian Unthank is a place of absolute disorientation, where fog prevents any path-finding and sunlight has long abandoned the skies. Robbed of the ability to register the movements of the sun on the horizon or the hands around the dial of a clock, as all clocks have been removed, the citizens of Unthank are suspended in an eternal present, unable to measure time either by the elements or by technological means. Moreover, Unthank's inhabitants suffer from outlandish psychosomatic ailments which, when terminal, cause them to disappear without notice into bizarre mouths, body fragments that open and rupture space during electricity blackouts. At every turn, it seems, Lanark's attempts at getting his bearings are thwarted, and his panic grows.

Lanark, the novel, however, problematises the katabatic journey by portraying multiple descents ever deeper into the underworld, each time disguised as Lanark, the protagonist's frantic attempts to escape ever more infernal environments. Caught in an existential quandary not dissimilar to his pre-ego Duncan Thaw, Lanark seeks exit from Unthank. For this, he must climb a steep slope up the Unthank cemetery, or the city's Necropolis, the place that 'had once swallowed men the natural way' (ibid., p. 46). From the summit of the graveyard, he is granted exit through another descent, this time through a vast disembodied Hell-mouth and a gruelling passage through a spastic gullet that overwhelms his senses and traumatises his body:

> The sides began to tighten and loosen, and the descent became a series of freezing drops from one scalding grip to another ... He opened his mouth to scream and a mixture of wool and cloth squeezed into it ... He was suffocating. He urinated ... Most senses abandoned him now. Thought and memory, stench, heat and direction dissolved and he knew nothing but pressure and duration. Cities seemed piled on him with a weight which doubled every second ... all time, space and mind would end unless he moved but it had been aeons since he could have stirred toe or eyelid. And then he felt like an infinite worm in infinite darkness, straining and straining and failing to disgorge a lump which was choking him to death. ([Gray [1981] 2007](), pp. 48–49)

The descent brings Lanark into the Institute, a maze-like scientific institution populated by medical staff that soon reveals that it serves as a crematorium of sorts, utilising its most diseased citizens for fuel, food, and energy and priding itself on its self-sustenance. An initial view out of its windows reveals vistas of resplendent sunshine and landscapes of greenery, as well as of thriving cities, tenement houses, and habitable space. However, even this sunlit scenery defies the logic of verticality and his downward journey. As it overwhelms his senses, it too is unveiled as unreal, and a mere collage of images refracted onto a screen. In truth, the Institute is 'a system of galleries under a mountain' (ibid., p. 58), the sides of which hold Unthank and several other cities. The ensuing flight from the

Institute brings Lanark to the Council, a political assembly of regional representatives in collusion with profit-hungry corporations and oligarchs, exerting power over the cities above ground, presided by a single authoritarian figure, Lord Monboddo. Thus, the hellish Afterlife of *Lanark* resonates closely with the structure of Dante's Inferno, adopting the shape of a funnel.

A particularly striking feature of *Lanark*'s katabasis, though, is the persistence of mental and physical, or indeed psychosomatic ailments that not only trouble the characters in their (post-)lifetime but precipitate each descent journey. Thus, in Duncan Thaw's experience, eczema, gravely exacerbated in states of distress, amounts to an assault on his sexual prowess, as being mistaken for a sexually transmitted infection, it prevents him from his first sexual experience. Similarly, asthma attacks his very capacity to keep his body alive and in harmony with his environment; it poses an ever-present and unpredictable threat akin to a lurking predator. Consequently, when he refers to himself as a 'neurotic virgin', this description does not merely evince adolescent self-deprecation but a profound mental anguish. In a chapter aptly titled 'Underworlds', his fragile health is tantamount to life in the frozen circle of Hell: 'Now he saw that Hell was the one truth and pain the one fact which nullified all others. Sufficient health was like thin ice on an infinite sea of pain. Love, work, art, science, and law were dangerous games played on the ice; all homes and cities were built on it. The ice was frail' (Gray [1981] 2007, p. 160). Furthermore, his critical point of descent by drowning is precipitated by a plunge into madness, as he hallucinates himself soaring above his body and above Glasgow, dissociated and disembodied, guided by a crow and words that 'came to him out of thin air' (ibid., p. 346). The hallucinating episode culminates in an attempt to rape and/or murder his girlfriend, Marjorie Laidlaw. His hallucination anticipates his downfall as he imagines the city rising above him in concentric, spiralling circles and himself at its bottom: 'The city was forcing itself into the sky on every side. Factory, university, gasometer, slagbing, ridges of tenements, parks loaded with trees ascended until he looked up at a horizon like the rim of a bowl with himself at the bottom' (ibid., p. 348).

The lives of Unthank's citizens are similarly precariously balanced against a host of illnesses that are engendered in their psychological vulnerabilities and have a corporeal manifestation. The illness that Lanark suffers from too is 'dragonhide', whereby the body develops a cold protective shell of dragon scales and thorns. The illness results from an over-protection of affective warmth for oneself and coldness towards the world. What is more, faced with its inexorable progress, Lanark withdraws into his lodgings in sleep or mental stupor, in a state most closely resembling depression. The dragonhide's counterpoise is found in the 'mouths' disease, which presents with mouth-like apertures at random sites of the body, from which disembodied voices of others speak, and is the outcome of a lack of a sense of self and over-reliance on external counsel. The sight of this affliction prompts Lanark to identify his surroundings and exclaim: 'Oh, this is hell!' (Gray [1981] 2007, p. 45). Added to these are 'twittering rigour', described elsewhere as 'dogmatism, . . . devotion to high principles', and its counterpoise, 'leeches', typified by 'parasitical behaviour, no principle at all' (Falconer 2005, p. 178). The only cure, Lanark discovers, for the diseases is the return of sunlight. When deemed at their terminal stage, the sufferers are swallowed by the Hell-mouths operated by the Institute, where their remains are converted into fuel to sustain the governing apparatus of the Unthank underworld.

Lanark's multifarious katabatic journey, however, from one hell into another, ultimately leads him back to the point of departure. As Rachel Falconer notes, rather than a heroic transcendence of the infernal world, Lanark achieves reconciliation and returns to Unthank a wizened man, as the cityscape is radically changed by an apocalyptic series of earthquakes (Falconer 2005, p. 191). By then, he has fathered a son, and the flow of time, albeit compressed and accelerated, has brought him to the end of his journey. Perched on the same Necropolis from which he descended, he receives the announcement of his imminent death. The scene conjures up the Old Testament parable of the burning bush, whereby Lanark is the secular Moses receiving the knowledge of his finitude next to a

'laurel bush' as the ultimate affirmation of his presence, of 'having-been-here'. By circling back to the beginning, which is also his end, Lanark/Thaw has succeeded in the seemingly impossible task of sustaining an existence between two realms: that of the historiographical 'here' and the fantastical 'there'. By tracing two interlaced narratives, *Lanark* conjures a comprehensive spatiality of the inferno, locating it underground but also on the ground and uphill, upsetting in this way the conventional verticality of the Afterlife domains.

Moreover, the announcement of his end coincides with a sense of restoration and renewal, as the life-affirming sunlight floods the city and transforms the landscape so long bereft of blue skies: 'The darkness overheard [sic] shifted and broke in the wind becoming clouds with blue air between. He looked sideways and saw the sun coming up golden behind a laurel bush, light blinking, space dancing among the shifting leaves' (Gray [1981] 2007, p. 558). The space of Glasgow/Unthank is liberated from under the lid of leaden skies into a dance of light and shadow. The liberated space Lanark perceives unites with the liberation of time, as continuity and a possibility of redemption arise from the notion that Lanark's family lives on. The closing confessional farewell articulates the same diachronic-synchronic marriage embodied in the palimpsestic representation of a city's (and a life's) landscape: 'I STARTED MAKING MAPS WHEN I WAS SMALL SHOWING PLACE, RESOURCES, WHERE THE ENEMY AND WHERE LOVE LAY. I DID NOT KNOW TIME ADDS TO LAND. EVENTS DRIFT CONTINUALLY DOWN, EFFACING LANDMARKS, RAISING THE LEVEL, LIKE SNOW' (ibid., p. 560).

5. *Spider*

Patrick McGrath's novel *Spider* is by a decade Lanark's junior (published in 1990), and like that of its predecessor, presents us with two sides of a single narrative and an identity that, like that of Thaw/Lanark's, strives at a coherent, sustainable whole. However, unlike the previous, the structure of the narrative cannot be said to 'break planes' and migrate its world from a realist earthly to a fantastical otherworldly or underworldly realm. Rather, it remains within the same (vaguely) realist domain, all the while depicting a labile reality filtered through a consciousness in a precarious, splitting state. In this way, the city emerges as a conglomerate of its physical materiality, found in its structures and objects, on the one hand, and the mind's percepts, affects, and impressions, on the other. These, as we will see, operate in unison to produce, in the most intensive instances of mental dissolution, a conflation of the worlds of the living and the dead.

Spider is a Neo-Gothic parable of murder and madness that entangles the lives of the Cleg family and obsesses the eponymous Spider, that is, Dennis Cleg, the novel's protagonist-narrator. Namely, throughout the narrative, Dennis/Spider painstakingly attempts to re-construct a plausible and palatable narrative of his troubled past in his childhood home in the dilapidated working-class neighbourhood of Kitchener Street in London's East End. The novel's present takes place in the 1950s, while Dennis' reminiscences refer to his childhood of twenty years past, that is, the 1930s. The interval of two decades Dennis spends sheltered in the Ganderhill mental asylum. He recounts a protean narrative that changes shape along with his mental state and grasp of his objective reality, leaps back and forth between the novelistic present and past, and only in the middle does it divulge Dennis' affliction with schizophrenia. In the narrative's most elementary variant, he is the twelve-year-old issue of an irascible plumber and a complacent, loving housewife living in the bleak and foggy East End of London. In the first half of the narrative, his father colludes with his mistress to murder Dennis' mother by suffocation with gas and bury her in a hole in his potato allotment. Thus, the mother's disappearance troubles him sorely and is the centre around which Dennis' reconstruction of his past during his post-asylum time and the attempted construction of his identity revolve. As he is sent back to re-integrate into the urban social fabric of post-war London, he lodges with fellow mentally diseased patients, whom he terms 'dead souls', in a half-way house run by a Mrs. Wilkinson. His piecing together fragments of his memory is closely linked with his revisiting streets and sites in and around his East End neighbourhood and especially the site of his childhood

home. The confrontation with the past renders Dennis ever more loosely anchored in his self and body, and auditory, visual, and corporeal hallucinations abound. His sobering re-encounter with his childhood home unearths the unspeakable truth that the perpetrator of his mother's murder was none other than himself.

Dennis' descent into an infernal underworld, I propose, commences with and proceeds through the disappearance of his mother and his deluded belief that she has been supplanted by a prostitute, who is his father's accomplice in murder. Thus, Dennis' afterlife, it may be said, predicated by his mental 'not-thereness', follows not his own death but rather that of his mother. As his mother's suffocation takes place in the kitchen of their family home, the space of the house and by extension, the potato allotment in which she is purportedly interred, adopt something of the meaning of a Necropolis. Dennis spends the majority of his childhood perched, like Lanark, on the top floor of the house and observes its contamination with a vile and malicious presence. In a bid to defy his father's authority as well as to shield himself from the hellish experience of corporal punishment, Dennis develops a mechanism of internal splitting, which is, on the one hand, modelled according to the spatial configuration of his home, and on the other, displays a correspondence of moral virtue/depravity and positioning along a vertical axis. This mechanism he terms his 'two-head system' and the process of dissociation that underlies it he terms 'uncoupling':

> I developed in time my two-head system. The front of my head was what I used with other people in the house, the back of my head was for when I was alone … I grew expert at moving from back to front and back again, and it seemed to make life easier … So when I was downstairs I would speak and eat and move and *to their eyes* be me, and only I knew that "I" wasn't there … I was in the back, that was where Spider lived, up the front was Dennis.

> Life became easier for me after that. I didn't mind being a bad boy, because I knew of course that it was *Dennis* who was a bad boy. ([McGrath 1990](), p. 98, emphasis original)

The dissociation of Spider, the narrative "I", from Dennis, the naughty boy who is punished by thrashing, affords him with "space" within which to move and to move away from the stinging pain of punishment. By way of dissociating, Spider/Dennis effects a spatialisation of his distraught psyche by dint of which he can oscillate between back and front, presence and absence, at will. His architecture of "two heads" as two distinct chambers for his alters is in service of his distorted perception of reality, which has compelled him to construct a "façade" of normality. His affected speech, movement, and mannerisms morph into a performance aimed at deluding his perceived persecutors and ensnaring them into his own web of "true" and "mistaken" presences and absences. In this way, through a grievous mental affliction, Spider/Dennis ascribes physical spatial markings to abstract mental space, thereby establishing a veritable dynamics of "thereness" by means of which to navigate an infernal existence.

Later on, after transferring to Mrs. Wilkinson's halfway house, Dennis reports inhabiting a blurry, spectral world, or Maiese's *ghostly* world, in which spatio-temporal relationships are severed and sensory perceptions provide distorted images of the environment, drained of any materiality:

> The light was never clear, I seemed always to be in shadow … , as though a permanent twilight had gathered in those rooms and rendered all forms and faces indistinct, and their voices too grew hollow, grew deep, they boomed and echoed from out of the shadows that clung to them and the air, the dusk, through which I moved was thick with thought patterns not my own. ([McGrath 1990](), p. 137)

Much like Lanark's Hell-mouth, speaking with a voice that overpowers the senses, echoes and booms coming from disembodied shadows populate the inferno of Dennis' madness.

Most poignant, however, is the depiction of Dennis' hell following the confrontation with the truth of his matricide and the anticipation of his own tragic end. The unweaving of his memory and identity back to the Kitchener Street address delivers a two-fold rude

awakening as Spider/Dennis confronts not the family house but a crater in its stead. The hole in the allotment ground that, in Spider's version of reality, had kept the physical remains of his mother expands here to swallow the entirety of the Cleg home and family and obliterate their tragic history leaving no material traces of their presence. Consequently, the shock, guilt, and desolation that overcome him after this discovery cause him to associate the city, the spaces that surround him, as well as those within him, with inanimateness and death. Thus, the bleak streets of London's East End, whose 'rain and mist and darkness' in the past often invoked in him a feeling of identification and 'at-homeness' (McGrath 1990, pp. 46, 67), now fail to console him as London is stripped of its customary cover of cloud and fog and surfaces take on an opaque aspect: '[E]verything is losing color, becoming bleached and dry. The weather is part of it: a string of these cold, clear days when the light is so strong and bright that my eye has no warm pockets of color or shadow or dampness into which it can slip for safety . . . [T]he streets and walls and windows all look hard, like metal' (ibid., p. 214). His visceral hallucinations, experienced previously as the replacement of his internal organs with a worm in his lungs and his body as an empty shell housing spider eggs, now take on sinister overtones: 'The presence of my body of the worm and the spiders . . . has brought home to me that I am a dead man' (ibid., p. 218). Moreover, to his mind, his body has grown so disfigured that it no longer fits the dimensions of this world: 'See how huge my hands are, disproportionately huge, and my face long and yellow with the skin flaking off in a shower like the scales of a cod under the fishmonger's knife!' (ibid., p. 213). In a final journey along the memories of his life, he locates the gravitational centre of his psychotic breakdown, his mother's death, and concludes that his entire existence since has been drained of life:

> [I] cannot escape the constant, pervasive, almost paralyzing sense that everything around me is turning silent and empty and *dead* . . . Was there a moment of death, . . . ? I don't think so. I think it's been gradual, a slow death that began the day I stood beneath the Ganderhill clock . . . though it occurs to me . . . that it began the night my mother died, and that since then I've just been burning down, smoldering to ash and dust inside myself. (McGrath 1990, pp. 211–12)

Unlike Thaw/Lanark's existence that expands to encompass both 'here' and 'there', Spider/Dennis' tortured, suspended survival is left shackled to his suffering until the very end. He perceives himself as a decomposing body long before his actual physical death, which splices together with that of his mother, attesting to his vicariously living out his mother's Afterlife throughout the novel. The description of his viscera as 'ash and dust' alludes to the familiar Christian phrase heard at an interment during a funeral service. However, in his case, the order is reversed; the body has turned to ashes from the inside out, internalising a Hell that is death-in-life. In a similar vein, it harks back to the proliferation of holes and craters elaborated above, whereby Spider's insides are identified with the earth in a burial ground, thus conferring once again physical spatial attributes to his corporeal entity. Thus, for Spider/Dennis, the infernal landscape may not shift planes, yet it besieges and infiltrates him, pervading every mote of his material and mental space.

To be sure, the affliction of psychosis for both Lanark/Thaw and Spider/Dennis is associated with, and oftentimes propelled by, intense physical distress, regardless of whether real (part of consensus reality, such as asthma and eczema, or dragonhide in Lanark's allegorical reality) or imagined (part of a delusional belief, such as Spider's infestation with worms and spiders). What is more, for both of them, experiences of madness are demonstrably emplaced, as interaction with, movement through, and sensory perception of various built urban environments vitally shape and inform the content of their psychical fragmentation as well as provide schemata for navigating their respective infernos. It is at the points of the densest convergence of the themes of physical and psychic anguish with urban embedding that each of the novels offers unique approaches to the query of the qualities of the place that would accommodate an existence split between the 'here' and 'there' of life and death, reason and folly, Hell and hope. Nonetheless, this they accomplish to radically different effect. Thus, while Spider's elaborate dynamics of

'thereness' serve to shelter his "true" identity, it does not grant him an exit from his deathly surroundings or a path towards integration of mental and physical presence. Therefore, the conclusion of his life brings about no ontological transformation other than that it solidifies his already half-animated existence. On the other hand, Thaw/Lanark's layered infernal worlds are expansive and variable, yet the scheme of interconnections straddling the distance between 'here' and 'there' allows for a death that affirms a restituted life, ending at a securely determined 'here', at the Necropolis hill, where the changing terrain signals a transformed ontology that excludes, or at the very least, renders Hell irrelevant.

Notes

[1] A note is warranted here on yet another ramification of the phrase 'not all there'. Namely, in colloquial situations of our social reality, the not-thereness of a person is an external observation, a judgement passed by another perceiving consciousness. By identifying the insane person as "absent from" a certain, bodily or spatial, locality, the phrase may betoken ostracisation or non-belonging to a social group marked in contradistinction by "presence of mind", rationality, or mental stability. Hence, not being all there may also be taken to denote an existence severed from the social body and a quintessential Other, relegated to an "unmarked", ex-centric domain, which thus resonates closely with the "otherness" of the realm of the dead, or the netherworld.

[2] Falconer registers a similar statement regarding the symmetries between modern secularity and infernal representations in *Lanark*'s "Epilogue" (Falconer 2005, p. 26).

[3] Notably, Falconer studies autopathographies and memoirs of mental illness as representatives of katabatic narratives, some of which thematise psychotic/schizophrenic disorders. Additionally, she also probes Gray's *Lanark* as a narrative of the infernal ramifications of capitalism. My account of madness and Hell in *Lanark*, on the other hand, is distinct from both of the above in that, firstly, despite the autobiographical elements of the Thaw story, *Lanark* is a fictional narrative, and secondly, the thematisation of developing insanity, journeying through netherworlds, and moving in infernal urbanities warrants a separate reading.

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