



CHAPTER 12

The House and the Hallucination in Tana French's New Irish Gothic

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*A game's a game, but what's a hallucination? You begin by laughing,
then it gets in you and you can't laugh it off.*
— Elizabeth Bowen

*The texture of [Uncle Silas] is never entirely distinguishable from its
material, the world in which it takes place.*
— W. J. McCormack

Stepping back from the absorbing crime plots of her individual novels, we might perceive Tana French's oeuvre as taking readers on a noir tour of Dublin-area housing. Following the rotating first-person narrators, all detectives from the fictional Dublin Murder Squad, readers move from the established suburban housing developments of *In the Woods* (2007) through the historically infused Anglo-Irish Big House of *The Likeness* (2008), working-class, urban, row houses of *Faithful Place* (2010), and post-Celtic Tiger "ghost estate" of *Broken Harbour* (2012) to the boarding-school faux-domesticity of *The Secret Place* (2014) and the Victorian terrace cottage row of *The Trespasser* (2016). While several of these locations qualify directly as candidates for what Bernice Murphy

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identifies as the subgenre of suburban gothic,¹ all of the novels have notably gothic elements in their police-procedural frames, and the emphasis on their domestic features places them squarely in the realm of domestic noir.

In a recent *Times Literary Supplement* (TLS) review, Ian Sansom identifies several central features of women's crime novels from the 1940s and 1950s: these works address "not just the threat but also the impossibility of self-destruction; the violence inherent not just in marital but in all family relationships; an appreciation not just of the underworld but of the everyday uncanny, too; and the possibilities of social as well as sexual transgression".² Without invoking the label *domestic noir*, Sansom goes on to note that "much of the most interesting popular fiction of the past couple of decades [...] explores exactly this territory and has often depicted scenes and scenarios that envisage a violent return to life with women as both victims *and* perpetrators". Tana French is among the authors Sansom names as producers of this work, and his catalogue serves as a useful working definition of domestic noir. Analysing French's deployment of these motifs illuminates her contributions to the developing subgenre; adding the specifically Irish frame and forebears important to her novels enriches the analysis.

In domestic noir, women are in danger; they are also dangerous. They are victims; they are also perpetrators. They are acted upon; they are also actors. Sansom's precise formulation of this duality as "a violent return to life with women as both victims *and* perpetrators" has particular resonance for three of French's novels where a female character is central: *The Likeness*, *Broken Harbour*, and *The Trespasser*. The violent return to life is particularly evident in *The Likeness* and *Broken Harbour*, but a shared emphasis on acting—creating and re-creating a role—and a concomitant blurring of fantasy and reality, is found in all three. Emphasis on specifically Irish housing conditions overlaps with the doubling and mirroring of traditional gothic, and the domestic nature of the violence makes these three novels central to this chapter. The particular focus here is the relation of domestic spaces in French's novels to earlier constructions of Irish gothic by Sheridan Le Fanu and Elizabeth Bowen. My central argument is that French flips several of the conventional attributes of Irish gothic, and she does so in ways that signal the upending of Irish literary history into the contemporary; in her novels, recognizable tropes of the Irish gothic are transformed into the violence of contemporary domestic noir.

FRENCH IN CONTEXT: THE IRISH GOTHIC

Sansom's description above signals plainly the tendency towards genre overlap, combination, and re(combination) that marks the domestic noir. Indeed, Sansom's repeated "not just [...] but also" could serve as the newly emerging genre's catchphrase. The territory of domestic noir is fed by many sources, the gothic being one of the more important tributaries. For Tana French's noir housing tour, some context on specifically Irish gothic forebears is pertinent. David Punter suggests that with the distinctive Scots-Irish strand of gothic fiction, it is helpful to "use different terms, principally the monument and the ruin" which are particularly relevant for Scotland and Ireland where "national aspirations are thwarted by conquest or by settlement."³ History, in such a context, is "constantly under threat of erasure" (p. 105). This relation to history pertains to apprehension of time; the history itself makes land- and home-ownership especially freighted with meaning. In the Irish context, Punter explains, the myth concerning the fallen grandeur of past civilizations "undermines the entire sense of memory and interpretation on which history is based" (p. 120). While these insights contribute to better understanding of this branch of the gothic, Punter's formulation about Scots and Irish gothic elides an interesting historical difference in relation to nineteenth-century Scottish and Irish authors. When Punter discusses the Irish gothic from Maturin forward through the nineteenth century, these writers are Anglo-Irish. However complex their attitudes and relation to Ireland may be, it is as Anglo-Irish that they record the tremors as power—and land—transitions in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Ireland, not as part of the older Catholic majority. One of the striking features of Tana French's Ireland is the relative lack of historical awareness—on social and individual levels—and the absence of formal religious ties and practices.⁴ Characters in several books describe rampant consumerism as the nearest thing to religion the society has, and while Catholicism has long provided fodder for gothic tropes, it carries so little weight here it barely even features.⁵ "Dublin is modern to the point of hysteria",⁶ Cassie Maddox observes, and French makes clear some of the consequences of this relative rootlessness.

The gothic works of Sheridan Le Fanu (1814–1873) and Elizabeth Bowen (1899–1973) are of particular interest as Irish literary predecessors for French, with their treatment of house and self, and house and time, tropes that French flips into contemporary domestic noir. Guillermo Del

Toro emphasizes Le Fanu's individuality as gothic author, connecting that distinctiveness specifically to his Irishness:

The tenuous but precise ways in which Le Fanu builds up the supernatural elements is akin to the pervasive effects of mildew on a solid wall. It is not by force but by accumulation that he demolishes disbelief and tears down the barrier that separates us from fear. The relentless but delicate construction of atmosphere and dread that Le Fanu creates comes partly from a calculated and precise style of writing and partly from the lifelong relationship he has with the darkest folktales of his native Ireland.⁷

Del Toro's diagnosis of Le Fanu's methods is noteworthy, and chimes with those offered by noted Irish scholar W.J. McCormack and Elizabeth Bowen herself. I want to insist on not overlooking the specifically Irish gothic forebears of French's fiction, as too often their Irishness is elided. Del Toro offers the remarks quoted above on Le Fanu as editor for the Penguin Horror series, for example, but in the same volume, Laura Miller's introduction to Shirley Jackson's *Haunting of Hill House* casually dismisses any connection that Le Fanu might have to Jackson's novel about "a lonely, imaginative young woman in a big isolated house", on the basis that Le Fanu wrote "traditional English ghost stories".⁸ (Among other things, Miller has evidently not read *Uncle Silas*.) Another illustration of this tendency to minimize the Irish is how, in a useful resource like the Palgrave *Teaching the Gothic* volume, among a dozen chapters, nine of which focus on specific topics, Ireland does not merit a chapter.⁹ There is American gothic, and both Imperial and Postcolonial, but the index makes clear how little Ireland fits into the scheme. Neither Elizabeth Bowen nor William Carleton are to be found, and page references to Robert Charles Maturin and Sheridan Le Fanu direct readers to chapters focusing on Romantic gothic, Victorian gothic, and American gothic, while Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray* is placed in the theory chapter and the sexuality chapter. Certainly these Irish writers contribute to broad understandings of period, theory, and sexuality, but foregrounding their common literary and historical heritage brings into focus not just Punter's monuments and ruins, but precursors of the main foci of this chapter.

Elizabeth Bowen's 1946 introduction to *Uncle Silas* pays tribute to Le Fanu as an author both rooted in his Anglo-Irish inheritance and ahead of his time. "For the psychological background of *Uncle Silas* it was necessary for him to invent nothing", she writes; "rather, he was at once exploit-

ing in art and exploring for its more terrible implications what would have been the norm of his heredity".¹⁰ She also observes correctly that "the status of the psychological thriller is, to-day, high. *Uncle Silas* was in advance of, not behind, its time: it is not the last, belated Gothic romance but the first (or among the first) of the psychological thrillers" (p. 6). The post-war valuation of the psychological thriller to which Bowen refers is resurgent, and it is particularly successful in the hands of women writers.

The stories Bowen published as *The Demon Lover and Other Stories*, written as she worked on the larger project of *The Heat of the Day*, are inextricably connected to their wartime London setting but, just as Bowen says of Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas* that it is "an Irish story transposed to an English setting" (p. 4), we may consider Bowen's own Anglo-Irishness as informing her relation to the gothic. Her work also reflects an important shift in time, not simply in the sense of moving forward a hundred years closer to our time, but also in a present-time orientation for haunting. As W.J. McCormack argues, "Le Fanu's characters were usually haunted by the past, but some at least of Bowen's will be haunted in the present tense—and by it."¹¹ McCormack identifies a significant change in the Irish gothic, and French's work is the beneficiary of it. The contrast from constant awareness of the past—whether focused as a haunting or, just as likely, as a deliberate glorification of past ideologies and events—to a rootless present and frightening future contributes to the fears exposed by French's domestic noir. In *The Likeness*, the character of John Naylor represents one view, what we might call the traditional view in the gothic and in Irish literature: his obsession with the historical wrongs of the family in the Big House leads to a campaign of theft and vandalism and culminates in a historical throwback to the War of Independence, the complete destruction of the house through arson. The contemporary inhabitants of Whitethorn House offer a second, opposing viewpoint. They are interested in the house's history, but narrowly focused on it as a house and disconnected in vital ways from its larger history.¹² We see this, for example, when Daniel says of the old photograph album Lexie found, "'This house has enough history for a whole village; it shouldn't be lost. Look at this one: the cherry trees, just planted'" (p. 225). The group around Daniel March has constituted themselves as a family (fatally flawed), and "no pasts" is one of their most powerful credos. What Whitethorn House demonstrates clearly, however, is that when both symbolic and material value become too associated with the past you have one kind of trouble—Naylor's old-fashioned threat—but when the present becomes unmoored

you invite a different kind of trouble, such as the materialist future vision of cousin Ned. If Naylor's attitude prioritizes the past, and the Whitethorn family emphasizes the present, Ned represents the dread hand of the future. Ned wants to see Whitethorn House turned into "a golf club or a spa hotel" because "that's where the serious long-term profit is, specially if I can get a helipad put in. Otherwise, we're talking major luxury apartments" (p. 469). *Broken Harbour's* narrator, Mick Kennedy, asserts that he is "a big believer in development [...]. I'd rather see an apartment block any day, all charged up with people who go out to work every morning and keep this country buzzing."¹³ The consequences of this view of history and real estate is also explored by French; tellingly, however, Kennedy makes one exception, names one place that should never change, and that is because of his personal childhood experience of Broken Harbour. His attitude is fairly typical of one found in most of French's books, where readers find characters not committed to complete denial of the past but who define the past as their personal pasts, setting a limit on the time frame that can be included in the past (e.g. one's own lifetime) and minimizing larger socio-political forces to zero in on personal impact.

McCormack links history to fictional character in Bowen's work in terms that also resonate significantly in French's novels. In the introduction to *Dissolute Characters: Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen*, McCormack argues that:

nineteenth-century Ireland went through a series of traumatic processes of modernization which have been denied and repressed in their aftermath. In Bowen's work a political transformation, by which the land of her birth changes from a metropolitan colony to semi-independent nation-state, is acutely apprehended in the operations of fictional character. Notions of character, generally based on assumptions of male bourgeois rectitude and power, inevitably implicate notions of participatory citizenship which in turn raise questions about the ideological nature of the state and the operations of civil society. (p. ix)

The "traumatic processes of modernization" in the nineteenth century are processed in Le Fanu's gothic tales, whether these are set in Ireland or, at the request of his publisher, transported to England. Bowen's work during the war years reflects her engagement with the "modernization" of Ireland and also, perhaps, of blitzed London. Both authors use the house—the complicated and unpredictably dangerous domestic space—and the self as

focal points for, to borrow Bowen's own verbs, "exploiting and exploring" the gothic during periods of upheaval and reassessment. In French's fictional world, I would argue, Ireland's abrupt rush forward into the twenty-first century via the Celtic Tiger boom and subsequent bust provide a similar forcing ground for a contemporary engagement with Irish houses and selves under pressure.

THE HOUSE

The house, loosely defined, is the nexus for gothic plots and people. In French's real-estate tour, everything flows through it, both literally and metaphorically. Acting is a major concept in French's exploration of character psychology, and it also has relevance here as the houses become stages. The murder scenes, including actors, settings, and props, scream domesticity, and the role-playing female characters at the centre of the violence are—paradoxically—dangerous victims. The descriptions of the central crimes in *The Likeness*, *Broken Harbour*, and *The Trespasser* emphasize the homely and quotidian, the confusion of the participants, and the shocking contrast between scene and action. In the carefully maintained modern kitchen of the Spain family, "Pat was still on the kitchen floor. The knife was right there beside him. I picked it up and he turned around and I stuck it into his chest. He stood up and he went, 'What ...?' He was staring at his chest and he looked so amazed, like he couldn't work out what had happened" (p. 494). A kitchen knife also features in the attack in *The Likeness*, and French offers another less-than-efficient stabber: the entire group is crossing paths in the kitchen after dinner as part of the group is doing the washing-up. There is a sudden confrontation and then, "the next thing I remember,' Justin said, very quietly, 'is the back door slamming and this knife lying in the middle of the kitchen floor. With *blood* on it. I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe this was actually happening'" (p. 593). The knife was "'just one of those manky old steak knives with the wooden handles'" (p. 612). In *The Trespasser*, domestic scene and homey weapon are even more intimate: a fist and a hearthstone. A punch strong enough to fracture Aislinn's jawbone and break teeth; the injury that killed her was on the back of her skull, "a sharp right-angled edge, consistent with the fireplace surround on which the victim was found".¹⁴ There are two scenarios suggested by the medical evidence, either a punch that sends her crashing onto the hearth, or a push followed by a punch of her head after it has hit the fireplace surround. In all of these crime scenes, the

woman at the centre of the violence is abruptly revealed to be not whom she seemed to be; at home, literally, but no longer playing the correct role.

These domestic scenes take place in houses with very different exteriors. French weaves these houses together skilfully, however, into a net of domestic noir. Whitethorn House, built in 1734, is presented from the dream prologue (reminiscent of the opening of Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*) in terms that capture the gothic duality. During her first day alone in it, Cassie says "that house had the effortlessly off-kilter feel of a something out of a storybook—I kept expecting to fall down a secret staircase, or come out of a room into a completely new corridor that only existed on alternate Mondays" (p. 190). These images of the house recur throughout the novel: "The first thing I thought when I stepped into Whitethorn House: *I've been here before*" (p. 162); Daniel "watched Lexie die, sooner than allow a siege on his spellbound castle" (p. 658). Aislinn Murray's place in Viking Gardens, "a scruffy cul-de-sac [of] Victorian terraced cottages fronting straight onto patched-up pavements" (p. 12) would seem at first glance to have no connection to either the Wicklow remnant Big House of the Daniel March "family" or the northern new suburban McMansion of the Spain family. Murray's house decor "looks like it was bought through some Decorate Your Home app where you plug in your budget and your favorite colors and the whole thing arrives in a van the next day" (p. 14). It is a smaller-scale version of the Spain family's magazine-ready house, where not just the public spaces but the private ones are conventionally, generically perfect. The Spain children's bedrooms—Man U football for the son, pink frills for the daughter—are carefully staged, and the parents' room, "picture perfect [...] done up in flowery pink and cream and gold to look olde-fashionede [sic]" (p. 30), suggest nothing so much as an aping of the Whitethorn House style staged with an artificial polish the original would never achieve.

That the danger is *in* the house is nothing new, either in the tradition of the Big House novel or to the gothic-becoming-domestic-noir genre. But the importance of the house here is more than a valuable asset—though it is that—or a dangerous space filled with secrets that haunt its residents. Daniel March lays out these realities for Cassie, in terms that link Whitethorn House back to the historical situation of the Anglo-Irish Big House but also suggest how young couples like the Spains in *Broken Harbour* end up sacrificing too much to get on the "property ladder". Daniel offers as a foundational principle that "once you own your home, free and clear, what is there left for anyone—landlords, employers, banks—

to threaten you with? What hold does anyone have over you?" (p. 503). He bases this belief primarily on his characterization of contemporary Irish society: "'Have you ever considered,' he inquired, 'the sheer level of fear in this country? [...] We have one of the highest debt-to-income ratios in the world'" (p. 501). When Cassie is slightly sceptical, he gives her a lesson in Irish history in which he argues that the English turning the Irish into mere tenantry made "everything else" an inevitable consequence. He does not remind her of the famine cottage in which Lexie's body is found, though readers will not have forgotten it.

It *is* about land, in other words, as rooted in the Irish historical context, but the characters inhabit a new relation to it. This is also why it matters that the narrators' relation to the central housing scene, both literally and metaphorically, emphasizes the gothic tendencies towards doubling, mirroring, fracturing. At the novel's end, Whitethorn House is burned to the ground. Ocean View, Brianstown, is a dead development (the actual ones that exist in Ireland, marooned by economic fluctuations, are suggestively called "ghost estates"). Kennedy, towards the end of *Broken Harbour*, says Ocean View "looked like Pompeii, like some archaeological discovery preserved to let tourists wander through it [...] until it collapsed to dust, until anthills grew up in the middle of kitchen floors and ivy twined around light fixtures" (p. 517). Is there a direct line between Ocean View and the famine cottages evoked in *The Likeness*? Is the Spains' house a famine cottage of the future? If so, French has flipped the historical vision of both Big House and peasant cottage into something with distinctively twenty-first-century sinister qualities. Rather than focusing on the ivy or the house walls, readers are invited to see personal, family violence in kitchens and sitting rooms.

THE HALLUCINATION: SELF

Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik's examination of the female gothic has relevance for discussions of domestic noir. Particularly helpful is their formulation, drawing on the example of Barbara Comyns, that works of female gothic "portray a woman's ability to hold on to economic independence, her own space, and her own identity as in constant tension with the need to love and be loved [...] Perhaps this threat of obliteration of the female self—whether through psychological abuse, physical incarceration, or actual murder—is something which informs all works we might describe as female gothic."¹⁵ To these means of obliteration, French adds a couple

more through her novels' presentation of self-directed effacement of the female self and/or a manufactured replacement of the authentic self with a new role. In "Authority and Irish Cultural Memory in *Faithful Place* and *Broken Harbour*", Maureen Reddy points out that both the detective and the perpetrator/victim in *Broken Harbour* are "deeply committed to the notion that both the material and psychological realities of life are within one's own control".¹⁶ This is shown to be a dangerous notion, leading Jenny Spain to self-destruction. Significantly, however, self-destruction turns out to be harder than anticipated. Having murdered both of her children and her husband, Jenny falls back on a stereotypically feminine excuse, here used in the dark context of her failure to kill herself: "I sat down beside him and I stuck the knife in my chest and then in my stomach, but it didn't *work* [...] I wasn't *strong* enough!" (p. 495).

French's depiction of her narrator-detectives always invokes the deliberate assumption of a role; not only are they playing detective for their audiences, they are aware of their performances. All of her detectives discuss the rationale for choices in clothes, cars, and demeanours; their interactions with colleagues, suspects, and victims' families are all presented as deliberately planned. Christine Jackson demonstrates how "French projects an acting perspective onto the page, using a technique that visualizes a character from an actor's point of view. The perspective establishes three contexts: the actor's experience of being watched, the actor watching others, and the person who acts by watching the self."¹⁷ This dynamic is particularly evident in French's portrayals of the detectives, but theatrical constructions feature in many aspects of her novels, including making a notable contribution to the characterization of the women at the centre of her domestic noir. Acting is important but, as in the theatre, it is only one part of the project. As the domestic murder scenes alluded to earlier suggest, when using theatrical concepts to analyse the self(s) under pressure, French includes script, scene, props, and audience. So, for example, in *The Trespasser*, Aislinn Murray's friend Lucy Riordan is the technical manager at a theatre. Riordan describes her friend's plan in theatrical terms when she says "all of a sudden, without knowing how I got there, I was in the middle of some play she was putting on" (p. 347). Antoinette Conway, not a theatre professional like Riordan but one of French's acting-savvy detectives, knows that "McCann—same as every Murder D; same as me—he's the one who writes the scripts. He wouldn't have liked opening his eyes one day and finding himself in the middle of someone else's play"

(p. 347). Scripts, acting, stage management; these have applications outside the theatre, and potentially dangerous consequences.

Broken Harbour's Jenny Spain is eventually revealed to have been playing a role. The danger arises when she takes her role as leading lady too seriously, well beyond the colloquial sense of "playing a role". When the family's circumstances change, she is unwilling to give up the props and staging of affluence; fatally, she also assumes everyone else prioritizes the show rather than the actors/people enacting/living it. Keeping in character through job loss, social constriction, even her husband's psychosis, leads to a murder-suicide solution. How can you leave the role? Only by dying. As she describes all of this drama to Kennedy from her hospital bed, he offers this curious characterization of her:

Probably Richie would have seen a spoilt middle-class princess whose sense of herself was too shallow to survive without pesto salad and designer shoes. I saw a frail, doomed gallantry that broke my heart. I saw a girl who thought she had built a fortress against the wild sea, braced at the door with all her pathetic weapons, fighting her heart out while the water seeped past her.
(p. 467)

These clichéd roles, essentially contrasting extremes of "good princess" and "bad princess", reflect Kennedy's own over-investment in the values and desires he shares with Jenny Spain. There are other roles available, but Jenny refuses them; Kennedy's devaluing of the other options perhaps suggests why she did not consider them.

Role-playing young women get a slightly different turn in *The Trespasser*. Here, Aislinn Murray is not stuck in a role from which she cannot perceive an escape; rather, she has fabricated a role specifically designed to ensnare her victim. Upon first sighting, she looks to Antoinette Conway "like Dead Barbie", and a "few books about crime in Ireland—missing persons, gangland crime, murder" strike Conway as ironic (p. 19), one of the few odd notes in the cottage's prefabricated confection. The true-crime books, however, turn out to be research for Murray's current role (p. 345). The contempt Conway felt for Murray's made-to-order Barbie-ness (a model similar to Jenny Spain's) becomes respect when she learns that the apparent unreality of the woman and her domestic setting was tied to a crime role she created with all the dedication of a method actor. Murray's preparations for the role included body change—weight loss and sculpting—plus professional consultation for clothes, hair, and makeup. Even though

her friend Lucy says she “came out looking like she’d been cloned in some creepy factory off the M50”, Conway begins “growing some respect [...] She was training, taking her time and doing whatever it took” (p. 343). Murray’s theatrical project, on the verge of success, instead abruptly turns fatal. The would-be femme fatale is herself killed, with scene, motive, and lead actors all suitable for domestic noir. That the femme fatale is a generic thin blonde with a spray-on tan, rather than the exotic beauty of the mid-twentieth century noir, is perhaps another comment on contemporary society.

Not only does Conway respect Murray for her dedication to her chosen role, the similarities between the two characters emphasize the confusions of self that are characteristic of domestic noir. The two women share certain similarities in situation—the lost fathers—and they even live in the same neighbourhood. Conway recognizes their psychological similarities as well: “I was doing exactly the same thing as Aislinn: getting lost so deep inside the story in my head, I couldn’t see past its walls to the outside world. I feel those walls shift and start to waver, with a rumble that shakes my bones from the inside out” (p. 426). It is not a coincidence, in my view, that the two French novels with female narrators feature a heightened level of identification between victim and detective, and place great emphasis on roles, acting, and multiplicity of selves. It is in those books that the detectives can come “as close to recognition as the hidden mirrors of the novel admit”, as McCormack says of Bowen’s wartime novel *The Heat of the Day*.¹⁸

Cassie Maddox in *The Likeness* is a professional. Not just a detective, but one with experience in undercover. Her status as professional player of roles shows how far we have come from Maud Ruthyn in Le Fanu’s *Uncle Silas*. When Cassie goes undercover at Whitethorn House, she struggles to resist the lure of the role. She re-enacts psychological struggles familiar from older texts, but the professionalism is new. *The Likeness* takes the theatrical metaphors to new levels. The novel’s central premise invites readers to a suspension of disbelief concerning identity, and what follows from that premise is first-rate domestic noir. In contrast to texts like *Gone Girl*, readers are invited into the mystery from the beginning, and we know the status and motivations of the components of the central female character: Cassie Maddox, Cassie as Lexie Madison, and the dead girl Grace Corrigan as Lexie Madison. On the one hand, Cassie refers to her current inhabitation of the role—Cassie playing Lexie in Grace’s interpre-

tation—as something mechanical, “Lexie Madison 3.0” (p. 120). As Cassie-as-Lexie pursues her investigation, however, the novel is filled with language that suggests Lexie is real. She is a Frankenstein-like creation:

Frank and I had done this. We made Lexie Madison bone by bone and fibre by fibre, we baptised her and for a few months we gave her a face and a body, and when we threw her away she wanted more. She spent four years spinning herself back, out of dark earth and night winds, and then she called us here to see what we had done.¹⁹

For Cassie to make statements such as “she had let me make her into what I was longing to see” (p. 472) reflects a deep confusion about reality and identity, about self.

Elizabeth Bowen, introducing the collection of her wartime stories *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* to a US audience, introduces the other keyword of my title when she notes that the stories reveal “a rising tide of hallucination”. However, she explains, “the hallucinations in the stories are not a peril; nor are the stories studies of mental peril. The hallucinations are an unconscious, instinctive, saving resort on the part of the characters: life, mechanized by the controls of wartime, and emotionally torn and impoverished by changes, had to complete itself in some other way.”²⁰ In French’s fiction, we see that process at work, but now there is mental peril in the twenty-first-century process of completion. “It was me” is Cassie’s shocked recognition when she sees the dead woman, but “she was impossible: a high-fever hallucination, a screaming crack straight across all the laws of nature” (p. 26). Yet following out her doppelganger, going undercover as an already-murdered victim, Cassie is a professional. There is peril now, yes, but there are also new tools for women to cope with it, and it is not coincidental that the two women detective-narrators have comparatively happy endings after the cases are resolved. “The past, in all these cases, discharges its load of feeling into the anesthetized and bewildered present. It is the ‘I’ that is sought—and retrieved, at the cost of no little pain”, Elizabeth Bowen wrote in 1945 (p. 51). French’s psychologically fractured women detectives achieve their “I” with some pain, indeed, but they move past the boundaries of earlier Irish literary selves. Cassie upends the psychologically fragile damsel role when she thinks about how the other woman playing the same role “*may have lived here for longer, but I’m getting paid for it*” (p. 194).

CONCLUSION

Like the Irish true-crime books that sound an alarm bell in Aislinn Murray's conventional domestic interior, the Tuam babies scandal engulfing Irish news as this volume goes to print suggests the queasy reality of the gothic-infused fictional genre and the pertinence of Tana French's exploration of a specifically Irish domestic noir. We can see the parallels in the language needed to address the belated recognition that during the mid-twentieth century nearly 800 babies and toddlers died, their bodies simply discarded, in the mother and baby home in Tuam, County Galway, run by the *Bon Secours* nuns.²¹ The Irish President, Michael Higgins, said the work of independent historian Catherine Corless was "blowing open the blocked doors of a hidden Ireland", and the Taoiseach Enda Kenny referred to it as not just a physical gravesite but also "a social and cultural sepulchre". University College Dublin's Lindsay Earner-Byrne noted the story is not "hidden history" but rather "just the history we haven't been willing to acknowledge". Earner-Byrne also pointed out that while the story was initially broken by Corless, a local historian, the 2017 media furore came several years later and, significantly, only after it was "relayed back to us from international media". The *Irish Times* editorial on the Tuam babies, with a suitably gothic title of "Past and present: a dark pattern we must not repeat", bundles the Tuam case with a pair of current events involving children, mothers, and domestic violence. The editorial asserts that these three cases together "strip away a layer of illusion" that allows Irish people to say such things belong to the past: "we can no longer assure ourselves that all the horror is in the past and that we live in an entirely new Ireland". If this isn't Tana French territory, I don't know what is.

While the news focuses, quite properly, on the mothers and babies at the heart of the Tuam Home tragedy, in the context of domestic noir it is worth noting the history of the property itself. The buildings that formed the Home were originally built in 1841 as a workhouse under the auspices of the Irish Poor Laws. The buildings were commandeered by troops in response to the 1916 Easter Rising and subsequently used as military barracks through the War of Independence and subsequent Civil War. In 1925, the nuns of *Bon Secours* took over the site and began running the Home. After its closure in the early 1960s, the buildings were torn down and in the 1970s housing was built on the property. Such property would seem ripe for gothic haunting. The narrative of its occupation captures something of each of the high-pressure Irish historical periods Le Fanu,

Bowen, and French respond to in their work, and each re-purposing of the property represents a quasi-domestic space with high potential for danger. One would like to believe the contemporary houses on that land are safe, but French's high-tension exploration of Irish domestic spaces and selves under pressure may cause her readers to worry. The linchpin of the working definition of domestic noir I built on Ian Samson's *TLS* review, the "violent return to life with women as both victims *and* perpetrators", is encapsulated by the Tuam babies scandal with its nuns, mothers, and babies violently re-emerging into public consciousness. Tana French's new Irish gothic, building on the legacy left her by Sheridan Le Fanu and Elizabeth Bowen, embodies a specifically Irish domestic noir with considerable explanatory power. It is not merely the suspenseful plots that keep her readers awake.

NOTES

1. Bernice M. Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). Some discussion of this territory is also found in Charles L. Crow's *American Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009).
2. Sansom, Ian, "Only death is consistent: The nuanced world of post-war female suspense fiction", review of *Women Crime Writers: Eight Suspense Novels of the 1940s and 50s*, ed. Sarah Weinman, *TLS*, 11 November 2016 (no. 5928), pp. 14–15. It also worth pointing out that the book under review uses two classifying terms for its contents: "crime" and "suspense". The domestic noir draws on many different modes and genres.
3. "Scottish and Irish Gothic", in *Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 105–23 (p. 105).
4. For twentieth and twenty-first-century Irish historical context directly pertinent to French's work, see Rosemary Erickson Johnsen, "Twenty-First-Century Mothers in Tana French's Crime Fiction", *Clues* 32.1 (2014), 61–70 and Maureen T. Reddy, "Authority and Irish Cultural Memory in *Faithful Place* and *Broken Harbor*", *Clues* 32.1 (2014), 92–102.
5. There is a curious moment in *Broken Harbour*, however, in which religious practice re-emerges in an upside-down way: after killing her two children and her husband, Jenny Spain finds it is not as easy to kill herself as she had anticipated. On the floor, afraid the police and an ambulance will arrive to save her, in her terror at not dying she turns, unexpectedly, to prayer: "I prayed. I knew I didn't have any right to, but I did anyway. I thought maybe God would strike me dead for it, but that was what I was praying

- for anyway. I prayed to the Virgin Mary; I thought maybe she might understand. I said the Hail Mary—I couldn't remember half the words, it was so long since I'd said it, but I said the bits I could remember" (pp. 495–96). This may not be the traditional gothic approach to Catholicism, but its inversion of doctrine is striking nonetheless: Spain prays for death at her own hand and expects the Virgin Mary to understand her slaughtering her family. This is the kind of “perversity” that old-school gothic writers like Matthew Lewis and Ann Radcliffe would make much of.
6. Tana French, *The Likeness* (London: Hodder, 2013), p. 251. Subsequent references to this edition will be made in the text.
 7. “Haunted Castles, Dark Mirrors: On the Penguin Horror Series”, in *The Haunting of Hill House*, by Shirley Jackson (NY: Penguin, 2013), pp. xi–xxxii (p. xx).
 8. “Introduction”, in *The Haunting of Hill House*, by Shirley Jackson (NY: Penguin, 2013), pp. xxxiii–l. (p. xxxiv).
 9. Anna Powell and Andrew Smith, eds., *Teaching the Gothic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).
 10. “Prefaces: *Uncle Silas*”, in *Collected Impressions* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950), pp. 3–17 (p. 4).
 11. *Dissolute Characters: Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 209.
 12. As Lucie Armitt notes, “the Gothic may take as its focus one family, but its consequences always apply to society at large”. This is true whether or not Daniel March perceives himself as a contemporary updating of a gothic villain and his inherited house as a gothic trope. *Twentieth-Century Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), p. 80.
 13. Tana French, *Broken Harbour* (Dublin: Hachette Books Ireland, 2013), p. 13. Subsequent references to this edition will be made in the text.
 14. Tana French, *The Trespasser* (New York: Viking, 2016), p. 183. Subsequent references to this edition will be made in the text.
 15. “Female Gothic”, in *Teaching the Gothic*, ed. Anna Powell and Andrew Smith (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 107–20 (p. 114).
 16. See Endnote 3 (p. 86).
 17. “Vision and Blind Spots: Characterization in Tana French’s *Broken Harbour*”, *Clues* 32.1 (2014), 40–50 (pp. 40–41).
 18. *Dissolute Characters*, p. 226.
 19. p. 28. This has its counterpart in a natural (if rather creepy) image of regeneration: when she is at the famine cottage, meeting Ned, Cassie observes that “there were things growing beside me out of the earth where she had bled, a pale clump of bluebells, a tiny sapling that looked like a hawthorn: things made of her” (p. 471).

20. "Prefaces: *The Demon Lover*" [The American Edition], in *Collected Impressions* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1950), pp. 47–52 (p. 49).
21. My sources for the citations on the Tuam scandal are "President Pays Tribute to Work of Historian in Tuam Babies Case", 8 March 2017, www.irishtimes.com; Shane Harrison, "Tuam Mother and Baby Home 'Chamber of Horrors'—Irish PM", 7 March 2017, www.bbc.com; Fred Barbash, "The 'Mother and Baby Home' at Tuam, Ireland, Where Friends Just 'Disappeared, One After the Other'", 13 March 2017, www.washingtonpost.com; "Tuam Babies", 11 March 2017, www.rte.ie/radio1/marian-finucane/programmes; and "Past and Present: A Dark Pattern We Must Not Repeat", 11 March 2017, www.irishtimes.com. These sources are listed here in the order in which they are quoted in the conclusion.

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