



University of
Salford
MANCHESTER

“That’s not so comfortable for you, is it?” : the spectre of misogyny in The Fall

Magennis, C

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Title | “That’s not so comfortable for you, is it?” : the spectre of misogyny in The Fall |
| Authors | Magennis, C |
| Type | Book Section |
| URL | This version is available at: http://usir.salford.ac.uk/id/eprint/34642/ |
| Published Date | 2016 |

USIR is a digital collection of the research output of the University of Salford. Where copyright permits, full text material held in the repository is made freely available online and can be read, downloaded and copied for non-commercial private study or research purposes. Please check the manuscript for any further copyright restrictions.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: usir@salford.ac.uk.

Chapter Twelve

‘That’s not so comfortable for you, is it?’: The Spectre of Misogyny in *The Fall*¹

Caroline Magennis

You try to dignify what you do, but it’s just misogyny. Age old male violence against women. (Stella Gibson, *The Fall*).

The Fall is a television crime drama filmed and set in Belfast. The first series premiered in May 2013, giving BBC Two their highest ratings for a drama in eight years; the second series was screened in November and December 2014. It was created and written by Allan Cubitt, whose most significant previous work was the crime drama *Prime Suspect 2* (1992), which shares thematic and stylistic correspondences with *The Fall*. The latter is haunted by two spectres that show uncanny correspondences: Paul Spector’s femicide and the legacy of the Troubles. It follows two main narratives: Spector (Jamie Dornan), a serial killer in Belfast, and the Metropolitan Police Officer, DSI Stella Gibson (Gillian Anderson), charged with reviewing the investigation into his first murders. Spector’s chosen victims are young, professional women, whom he first stalks and then murders, usually by strangulation. His shocking crimes are contrasted with depictions of him as loving husband and father, and working as a grief counsellor. Gibson’s public and private roles also alternate and overlap during the drama: while she ceaselessly works to catch Spector she also has sexual intrigue through casual trysts with junior colleagues James Olsen (Ben Peel) and Tom Anderson (Colin Morgan) and deals with inappropriate advances from her former lover, Chief Constable Jim Burns (John Lynch). As the narrative progresses, Spector continues to target and hunt women as Gibson builds her team

and her case. Eventually, when he is disturbed during a murder, his plans unravel, and he must rely on a young woman he has groomed to misdirect Gibson's detectives. The ambiguous ending of the second series left the possibility open for Spector's return, and a third series will air in 2016.

The crime genre is currently undergoing a resurgence in Northern Irish culture. Novels by Claire McGowan, Eoin McNamee, Brian McGilloway, and Adrian McKinty deal with the ambiguity of writing crime in the uneasy political climate following the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. This shift is attested to in the collection *Belfast Noir* (2014), where several authors responded to the landscape of Belfast in short stories which diverged from the usual sectarian murder of the troubles thriller.² The question for these texts, and for *The Fall*, is how to depict non-‘Troubles’ murder in Northern Ireland and whether the crime genre is suitable during the current political phase, which is post-‘Peace’ process but perhaps not post-conflict. The crime writer Brian Gilloway concurs that this is a particularly interesting moment in which to write a Northern Irish detective story: ‘Crime fiction is always about the past: it begins with a dead body and the detective has to go back to work out what happened.... That suits Northern Ireland right now, because whenever a society tries to move to a new identity you need to do a postmortem on the past’.³ It is obvious that political discourse, history-writing, and literature in and about Northern Ireland are engaged in a reconsideration of historical events. This takes on many different facets, whether in the sticking points of the Haass-O’Sullivan talks, the debate over the ‘Decade of Centenaries’ Commemorations or the subject matter of historical fiction.⁴ However, it is clear that the ‘postmortem on the past’ in current political debate is squarely about the legacy of political violence rather than the consequences of domestic violence and sexual abuse in Northern Ireland. Catherine

O'Rourke notes 'the resistance of prevailing traditional justice frameworks to the feminist-informed definition of harm to look beyond the narrow focus on so-called "public" or "political" violence'.⁵ This focus has extended to literary and cultural representations of violence, which overwhelmingly use female bodies as political signifiers rather than engaging with the lived experiences of Northern Irish women.

This chapter will consider how *The Fall* replicates the problematic gender politics of both the crime genre and 'post'-conflict Northern Irish culture but also begins to give voice to that which is usually elided from the trauma and recovery paradigm. Cubitt has stated his feminist intent, and also a desire to engage with the troubled city, but his representations are often haunted by resonances outside of his narrative grasp. If we take Gordon's point that 'spectres occur when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view',⁶ then *The Fall* can be read cautiously as an attempt to discuss misogyny in contemporary Northern Irish culture.

Policing the Haunted City

The setting of the drama, twenty-first century Belfast, is foregrounded throughout and the complexities of the 'post'-conflict city feature heavily. Cubitt has explained that he wants to exploit this tension: 'I think the best police dramas all have a strong sense of place, and it works well for the drama if that city functions as a character in its own right ... *The Fall* is undoubtedly dark, and the fact that some of its characters have their roots in Belfast's dark and troubled history informs their thinking to a large degree'.⁷ *The Fall* engages with the politics of policing in a city haunted with violence right from the first episode. Early scenes show a heavily fortified police station, with a tribute to 'our murdered colleagues' of the RUC, and sites familiar to any open-top

bus tour: painted 'Peace' Walls and the dilapidated Crumlin Road Courthouse, which was a controversial symbol of British legal policy during the Troubles. Signifiers of the conflict are present throughout, particularly in the first series. Throughout the drama, this legacy re-emerges as both Spector and Gibson are threatened for intruding in the lives of these 'hard men'.

The history of violence in Northern Ireland is evident in the first episode when Gibson arrives in Belfast to chair a review into the murder of Alice Parker-Monroe, which is not yet connected to Spector. She is met by Chief Constable Jim Burns, played by John Lynch, who has starred in key Troubles films *Cal* (1984), *In the Name of the Father* (1993), and *Some Mother's Son* (1996). Gibson is surprised to be driven in an armoured car and Burns simply says, 'Welcome to Belfast'. Gibson retorts: 'What, all that my Jesus is better than your Jesus stuff?' 'Policing is political here, Stella'. 'And it isn't at the Met?' Of course, following such incidents as the deaths of Stephen Lawrence and Jean Charles de Menezes, the Metropolitan Police came under heavy fire for institutionalized racism but the politics of policing do have a different emphasis in Northern Ireland. Cubitt depicted the controversies over policing in his second series of *Prime Suspect*. This focused on Jane Tennison, an outsider like Gibson, trying to solve a murder in an Afro-Caribbean community that is hostile towards the Metropolitan Police. In *The Fall*, Burns is largely subject to the will of Morgan Monroe, a Unionist MP, Chair of the Independent Policing Executive (presumably a fictionalisation of the Northern Ireland Policing Board) and ex-father-in-law of Alice Parker-Monroe, a victim of Spector. This depicts a post-Patton PSNI in which policing is still acutely political.

As well as the institutions, the city is also struggling to move on and redefine itself. In the novel *Eureka Street*, set during the first paramilitary ceasefires of 1994,

Robert McLiam Wilson discusses the notoriety that clouds cultural representations of the city: 'Belfast shared the status of the battlefield. The place names of the city and country had taken on the resonance and hard beauty of all history's slaughter venues ... Belfast was only big because Belfast was bad'.⁸ Belfast is currently undergoing competing promotional efforts: some marketing the city's historical specificity while others attempt to rebrand the city as a European capital that has shaken off the past. *The Fall's* narrative of lust-murder, though, fractures the dominant representations of both the notoriety of the city and the glossy tourist re-brand. Articulating this story has the potential to reflect the concerns many women have of navigating an urban environment, even a 'post'-conflict city, due to the fear of being subject to sexual crime. As Ní Aolainn and McWilliams state: 'It is not solely the act of rape but the threat of the act, and its omnipresent reality for many women in societies where exit is sealed off, that enables and sustains male patriarchy'.⁹ This, then, complicates the sectarian boundaries we associate with Belfast's topography. Not just marked by painted gable-ends and 'Peace'-Walls, the city is also a site where women must 'read' the landscape in a different way. While the troubles haunt the representation of Belfast, Spector (surely an obvious play on spectre) is engaged in a parallel process of terrorizing women. As de Pilar Blanco and Preen note: 'Haunting has been classically conceived as attached to a where, from the proverbial haunted house to the ghost town'.¹⁰ We regularly see long shots of Spector's runs through the sights of Belfast which are equally famous as tourist hotspots and representations of the troubles, from the Harland and Wolff cranes to Royal Avenue. However, while Spector can traverse these with ease, transcending sectarian boundaries, what haunts Belfast in *The Fall* is the less tangible ghost of gender politics and violence towards women. In taking these as his subject, Cubitt attempts to address issues which have

not been 'dealt with' owing to the prioritization of the (mostly male) terrorist body in pain during and in the immediate aftermath of the Troubles.

Genre and Gender in the 'new' Northern Ireland

Against the backdrop of a city in transition, Cubitt sets the familiar plotline of the international crime novel genre of a male serial killer who murders young women. Writing in the *Guardian* about 'Women and Violence' Cubitt acknowledges his awareness of the problematic gender relations of representing crime: 'Feminist analysts such as Andrea Dworkin have pointed out that perhaps the most clear representation of patriarchal force – rape – is not a crime of passion, or uncontrollable male sex drive, attraction or victim provocation but a crime of power and control. This is a view Gibson touches on again and again throughout the drama'.¹¹ In this article, Cubitt aims to defend himself against charges that he has replicated the same clichéd young-woman-as-victim narrative which sees the aestheticized female corpse repeatedly used as the main narrative catalyst. Recent BBC Four continental crime darlings, such as *Bron (The Bridge)*, *Forbrydelsen (The Killing)*, and *Engrenages (Spiral, Series One)* have all featured this trope, often employing a female protagonist who is determined to get justice for these victims. Now, it may seem here that Cubitt is trying to have his cake and eat it: having the vicarious thrills of showing sexualized murder (and, in this case, a highly sexualized female detective) yet at the same time disavowing the very genre from which this trope arises. While Cubitt notes that 'there has never been a killer like Paul Spector in Northern Ireland', the series' real tension is generated by the representation of domestic violence, women's shelters and hunted women on one hand, and the way these victimized women's bodies are displayed and framed on the other.

The codes, then, are familiar to many viewers but Cubitt is right that the Northern Irish context has not been used before for a glossy crime drama. The politics of sexual assault are particularly acute in societies which have seen sustained violence, such as Northern Ireland, and it is clear that intimate partner violence and sexual assault in the province are certainly both prevalent and under-researched.¹² Ní Aolain and McWilliams explain that: ‘The experience of women in this jurisdiction illustrates the broader lack of controls placed on an offender’s behaviour, the lack of opportunity for the victim to escape and the intensity and prevalence of the violence in situations of internal armed conflict.’¹³ It is notable that while Spector is obviously the most extreme, the drama depicts misogyny throughout. Aaron Monroe, the cocaine-addled son of a Unionist statesman, describes his ex-wife as dressing ‘like a slut’ before her murder;¹⁴ he also organizes the trafficking of Eastern European sex workers and covers up acts of violence towards them. James Tyler, a former paramilitary who is counselled by Spector is an abusive husband, who threatens to kill all the women in a refuge¹⁵ then turns the gun on himself because he thinks his wife has been unfaithful to him by having an affair with Spector. In another episode, Jim Burns aggressively seeks out sexual contact with Gibson and she clearly informs him: ‘I said no, you ignored me and carried on’.¹⁶ Sexual aggression is thus present throughout the narrative, as Cubitt places Spector on a continuum of male sexual violence rather than as a total exception. Gibson, paraphrasing the Canadian writer Margaret Atwood, tells her lover:

A woman, I forget who, once asked a male friend why men felt threatened by women. He replied that they were afraid that women might laugh at them. When she asked a group of women why women felt threatened by men, they said, ‘We’re afraid they might kill us.’¹⁷

These words underline Cubitt's depiction of the violence done to women. The problem is, however, that the sleek aesthetic of the crime thriller has its own sexual politics. This can lead to a radical critique of existing dynamics of the genre while also, persistently, stylizing the dead female body.

'Age old male violence against women': The Aesthetics of Misogyny

While Spector is placed firmly in a Northern Irish context, Cubitt also foregrounds the aesthetics of misogyny. As Spector attempts to set out his philosophy of murder in the last episode of the first series, Gibson tells him: 'You're weak, impotent. You think you're some kind of artist, but you're not'.¹⁸ This resonates with much of Downing's analysis of the cultural construction of the serial killer in the nineteenth century: 'The notion that both creating art and killing others are means of exercising power is central to this – very masculine – fantasy'.¹⁹ This is a discourse that Cubitt is examining through his portrayal of Spector, with his self-consciously grandiose rationale for his crimes. Gibson can be read as an avenging feminist angel with the power of the law on her side who will stop the misogynist killer. She is adamant that: 'You try to dignify what you do, but it's just misogyny. Age old male violence against women ... I won't let you'.²⁰ Spector denies that his killing is motivated by misogyny when Gibson asks 'Where did your hatred of women come from?'²¹ He claims to be generally misanthropic, loathing humanity, but it is all too clear where his paraphilic energies are directed. In a letter he apologizes to Kaye's father: 'I would never have killed her if I had have known she was pregnant. Babies are innocent.'²² By extension, then, Spector does not view the women as innocent. His port-mortem cleansing rituals certainly reinforce his view that the women were somehow filthy and in need of his redemption.

The sexual politics of the programme are best articulated through its depiction of visual aesthetics. Del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren trace the ‘etymological link [of the spectre] to visibility and vision, to that which is both looked at (as fascinating spectacle) and looking (in the sense of examining)’.²³ Throughout the programme, Spector is presented to us as something to be looked at (in the way Dornan’s body is presented as physically attractive) but also as both the orchestrator of spectacle (for the police and for the audience) and as a voyeur. The first scenes of the programme are domestic, intimate, in private interior spaces: Gibson is in her pyjamas cleaning her bathroom and packing to go to Belfast and the camera cuts immediately to another woman’s bedroom where Spector is stalking his victim, taking a photograph of himself in the bathroom mirror. This photograph will be echoed in images sent to Gibson by a new lover. The act of washing will recur, too, in the programme, for both protagonists. This focus on visual cues in the first series is heightened in the second, which is much more obvious in prioritizing the role of the visual, with mobile phones and laptops in most scenes to constantly foreground both the act of viewing and the implied complicity of the audience in consuming these images. A recording of Spector confronts the viewer’s gaze directly: ‘Why the fuck are you watching this? You sick shit! What the fuck is wrong with you?’ Gibson asks Spector who he was referring to: him, her, or the people who read and watch programmes about serial killers, i.e. the viewer. This slightly clumsy attempt to implicate the spectator in the production of the voyeuristic serial killer narrative may be a way to distance the intentions of the programme makers: they are merely delivering the second series that the public demanded.

However, this is part of the uneasy balance of the drama: how can one critique misogyny while presenting a spectacle for the viewer? This is complicated, as stated,

by the Belfast setting and the gendered politics of the ‘post’-conflict city, where the depiction of bodies is haunted by the way they have been appropriated previously. The symbolic role of women’s bodies in Irish nationalist discourse has been much discussed,²⁴ with women read as embodying national ideology but having limited political agency. However, in this drama, bodies fall outside of their usual meaning in Northern Ireland, opening up the possibility for radical transgression of the depiction in this context. The question must be asked, though, is *The Fall* as radical as Cubitt thinks it is?

‘Let’s not encourage them’. Bodies and Transgression

The body is the locus for power throughout the drama, and Spector invents a careful mythos to justify his desire to dominate and murder women. Throughout the series, his muscularity and strength are also regularly emphasized: we are frequently shown Spector exercising and the police discuss his strength as he is able to lift his victims after he kills them. While, as noted above, the symbolic use of women’s bodies in Irish culture and rhetoric usually expresses national allegiance, the narrative does not construct Spector’s victims as passive political imagoes. Both Spector and these women have a near total absence of sectarian identity markers. The women in *The Fall* are notable for their expression of affluence and agency. It is these very qualities that Gibson suspects made them a target for Spector’s sadism. His victims, Gibson soon notices, form a very specific profile: professional, well-educated women in their early 30s. These would have been the first generation to go to University in ‘post’-conflict Belfast, with a host of new freedoms and liberties that the city offered in the twenty-first century. After the physical barriers to the city centre were removed, new venues and late night shopping led to the once ghost-town becoming a vibrant night-

time capital. Gibson speculates that they are better qualified and employed than he is: ‘He selects victims that he feels inferior to and then dominates and humiliates them’. She describes how this dominance is enacted through the murder: ‘The killer tightened and loosened his grip on her neck over a period of 45 minutes to an hour’. Downing discusses the prevalence of male serial killers who engage in this particular act, describing ‘Lombroso’s patient Vincent Verzeni who, in 1783, made the following confession: “I had a an unspeakable delight in strangling women, experiencing during that act erections and real sexual pleasure ... much greater than that which I experienced while masturbating’.²⁵ The strangulation and bondage are clear markers that for Spector the erotic charge is in domination and his method of ‘hunting’ suggests that he represents an unspoken backlash to women entering public spaces in Northern Ireland.

Sarah Kaye is the victim that the audience gets to know best, but she is also the victim whose naked body is displayed most thoroughly on the mortician’s slab, suggesting a contradiction between seeing Kaye as a well-rounded character, and seeing her as an aestheticized object of sexual violence. Cubitt says of Kaye:

We wait until the end of the first episode before the violence erupts, but by then my hope is that the audience knows Sarah Kaye and sees her as a fully fledged human being – a sister and aunt, someone struggling as a solicitor with a demanding man going through a complex divorce, someone with hopes and dreams and plans for the future.²⁶

Kaye tells a friend about a tribe in a province in China where the people have a matriarchal society with ‘walking marriage’: a woman can invite man into her hut but he has to be gone by daybreak and, apparently, the tribe do not need words for murder or rape. However, while she is celebrating female sexual dominance on a night out,

Spector asserts his control over her domestic space and assembles her lingerie and vibrator on her bed. When Kaye returns, she reports a break in, but the female police officer called to investigate questions her about her alcohol consumptions and if she's sure she didn't arrange the items herself, highlighting issues with how the police handle accusations of sexual crime. The programme also draws attention to the ways in which the media treat female victims of sexual crime. In discussing the press release Gibson objects to the use of the term innocent victim: 'The media loves to divide women into virgins and vamps, angels or whores. Let's not encourage them'. On Annie Brawley's computer, the police discovered a video she made for a dating site where she indicates a preference for BDSM. Gibson does not want this to hamper the investigation: 'I'm not interested in judging, just in finding the killer'. Gibson also indicates some of the political problems inherent in treating women's bodies as objects of scrutiny: when the pathologist, Reed Smith, attempts to gather information from these women, Gibson describes her discomfort with examining Brawley while she was comatose: 'Examining dead bodies is one thing, examining living bodies is something else'.

Woman subject, man object? Sexing the Detective

Against this pervasive systemic misogyny, Stella Gibson from the Metropolitan Police is determined to restore 'order'. She is forthright, analytical and immaculately groomed, drawing comparisons in the press with Jane Tennison from *Prime Suspect*. However, unlike *Prime Suspect*, which began in 1991, Gibson's authority is never challenged by her subordinates and she is praised for her calm handling of a suicide in the police station. Despite this professionalism, the print media were fascinated by her combination of steely hauteur and feminine tailoring. *The Guardian* describes Gibson

as having ‘the tart one-liners, the non-existent home life, the crisp-white-shirts-as-metaphor-for-obsessive-fastidiousness’.²⁷ Her distinctive look was much remarked upon by the press, with articles titled ‘Now everyone wants a silk shirt to look as cool as TV’s sexy sleuth’²⁸ and ‘How to work the Gillian Anderson power blouse’,²⁹ marking her out as a style icon and sex symbol, cultural positions marked by ambiguous power.

Both *The Fall* and the first series of *Prime Suspect* juxtapose the female detective with the female victims of a sadistic serial killer and there is some critical work on the corporeal dynamics of the earlier programme. *Prime Suspect* ‘exposes “the hierarchical relations of power” while simultaneously dissecting both the physical and narrative body of the text’.³⁰ Both Sydney-Smith and Nunn and Biresi focus on the female detective’s encounter (in *Prime Suspect*, and *Silent Witness*, respectively) with the abject, using Julia Kristeva’s formation in *Powers of Horror*. Gibson’s body is foregrounded throughout, in parallel with the victims, exploiting the frisson of having a female detective investigating such troublingly misogynistic crimes. Nunn and Biresi, discussing *Silent Witness*, note that: ‘As a woman she is also a symbolic form standing in for a gap in our imaginary; she encounters, witnesses, and understands death and its synonyms: the unknowable, the void, and so on, on our behalf’.³¹ In this cultural language, the female detective’s role will always be dual, as both administrator of the clean and proper rituals of death and expeller of the abject but also, due to her gender, potentially subject to the same fate as the women on whom our post-mortem gaze falls.

As previously noted, the recent vogue for ‘Nordic Noir’ has seen a number of very distinctive female protagonists come to prominence (Sarah Lund in *The Killing*; Saga Norén in *The Bridge*; Lisbeth Salander in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*; and

Jenny Hultin in *Arne Dahl*). Cubitt notes the legacy of Tennison in these characterizations:

I noticed with interest that Swedish crime writer Arne Dahl – whose drama series named after him has aired on BBC4 – recently suggested that no-nonsense characters such as Sarah Lund in *The Killing* owe much to British detectives like DCI Jane Tennison. When it came to the creation of Stella Gibson, I wanted her to build on that tradition.³²

As well as being portrayed as cool and business-like, Gibson is also depicted as a sexually confident and powerful woman, with agency over her choice of partner. Her former lover tells her ‘Do you have any idea the effect you have on men?’ and reminds her he would have left his wife for her. Her blouse button accidentally pops open at press conference as if she cannot contain her sexuality, which is never far from her workplace. She instigates a one-night stand with a younger male police colleague, James Olsen, and is disappointed when he seeks further contact by sending her photographs of his shirtless body by mobile phone.

When Olsen is murdered, a colleague who questions Gibson about their sexual encounters emphasizes that Olsen has left a widow and children behind. His pointed questioning appears to try to make Gibson feel guilty about sleeping with a married man but she is unrepentant: ‘Man fucks woman. Subject: man, verb: fucks, object: woman. That’s ok. Women fucks man? Woman subject, man object. That’s not so comfortable for you, is it?’ Throughout, Gibson’s agency is contrasted with the forced passivity of Spector’s victims. Cubitt is absolutely clear that Gibson’s sexuality is an important part of her character: ‘Under patriarchy, women's sexuality is often only permitted a limited expression. Gibson insists she has a right to an autonomous sexuality.... For me, Gibson's femininity was central’.³³ Cubitt is, again, trying to

both avow feminism while still displaying Gibson's body throughout: she is both explicitly presented there to be consumed by the audience while her 'sexual autonomy' is expressed, much like the duality of the media reception, which praised Gibson as a strong role for Anderson, while simultaneously emphasising Anderson as a sex object. During this male fantasy of sexual liberation, we are rarely able to forget the parallel narrative of Spector's murderous sexual fulfilment. Olsen and Gibson's sexual encounter is intercut with Spector carefully washing and grooming Sarah Kaye. Gibson is agentic during the sexual encounter, favouring a woman-on-top position, but afterwards she is shown lying on the bed and this scene is intercut with Spector arranging the victim's dead body on a bed. Cubitt's editing choices here worryingly suggest a correspondence between Gibson's consensual sex and the disempowered rape victim. Cubitt sets up another parallel, however, in which Gibson acts as advocate, speaking for Spector's silenced victims. She tries to offer Annie Brawley, a victim of Spector, ways of coping after her assault, noting both 'Once upon a time this worked for me', suggesting she has also been the victim of trauma, and 'Some people find writing useful', a version of the 'talking cure'. Of course, Gibson has a practical motivation for these suggestions: rather than merely aiding Brawley's recovery, she is trying to find useful clues for her investigation and, indeed, Brawley's botched murder marks a turning point in the narrative.

A Will to Power? Spector's Philosophy of Murder

While Gibson's use of rational scientific and critical inquiry to catch Spector is foregrounded, he has a system to justify his crimes. He views them as aesthetically driven and outside of conventional morality, which we see repeatedly through his literary references to Nietzsche and pronouncements to Gibson. Throughout the

drama, Cubitt employs many literary and philosophical references which show his awareness of the conventions of the development of the cultural depiction of the male serial killer. This history is outlined by Lisa Downing in *The Subject of Murder*. She notes how cultural conceptions of the murderer:

Progress[...] philosophically via the Nietzschean concept of the “Superman”, which becomes a key figure on the murder-as-exceptional-subject discourse ... he asserts the need for “disinterested malice” and claims that the subject who can fully transcend the common understanding of good and evil need no longer be bound by moral limits which, in his understanding, are nothing but a matter of convention and conformity.³⁴

At times, Spector’s cod philosophy sounds like a particularly angsty undergraduate philosophy essay. In his letter to Sarah Kaye’s father, he quotes Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra*: ‘One must have chaos in oneself to give birth to a dancing star’. In a telephone conversation, Spector tells Gibson: ‘We’re very alike, you and me.... Both driven by a will to power’. He uses the Nietzschean language of transcending morality when talking to Gibson: ‘You’re bound by conventional notions of what’s right and wrong, and I’m free’. Spector’s proclamations demonstrate Cubitt’s engagement with the cultural construction of the serial killer including the models where justifications of being ‘above morality’ can be given for the most heinous acts. Whereas multiple murderers during the Troubles aligned themselves with the collective struggle for national self-determination, the lust-murderer thrives on his singularity and focus on the gratification of the ego. Through this pompous rhetoric Spector attempts to construct himself as an artist, not a misogynist. However, to make someone your aesthetic focus is still to sexually objectify them and use women’s bodies instrumentally, a charge which might also be applied to Cubitt.

‘He moves around, on his own, in darkness’: The Non-Sectarian Killer

While Spector attempts to systematize his murder, his place in Northern Irish society is much more difficult to read. He is asked about his unusual name and says ‘It’s Russian, Jewish’³⁵ (from his adoptive parents) and evades the question when he is asked to align himself with the Protestant or Catholic community. His wife, Sally-Anne, discusses her discomfort that she married a rootless man, without family or friends. Gibson notes the difficulty of catching the killer as he ‘moves around, on his own, in darkness’. One of the most chilling things Spector says to Gibson is ‘You have no idea who I am and you never will’. In Northern Ireland, a person without roots, a person who can’t be added to one side or the other, who cannot be read, may be the most troubling subject of all. Spector cannot be ‘placed’. In the second series, we are informed that his mother committed suicide and his father is in jail in Canada. When he volunteers to give information to the police, he is asked why there are no antecedents for him in Belfast and he informs the officer, tersely, that he was in various care homes, visibly flinching. Purcell and Arrigo note that ‘paraphilic behaviours have their roots in early childhood development ... studies indicate that individuals who engage in such conduct experience traumatic events early in their lives, usually in the form of childhood sexual assault and/or physical abuse’ and we are left to speculate about the monstrous effect of Spector’s childhood.³⁶ This admission brings to mind numerous scandals of failures of care in Northern Ireland, including Kincora Boys’ Home and the homes investigated by the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry. In an interview with Gibson, Spector claims he repulsed a predatory priest by not washing but this statement is undermined by the same disgraced cleric noting with some pleasure that the young man ‘was a very pretty

boy'. Burns details the abuse perpetrated in this home, stating that 'one of your victims believed he was touched by the hand of God'. These references underline Cubitt's attempt to address the sidelining of issues of violence against the vulnerable in Northern Ireland due to the prioritizing of the direct victims of the Troubles in public conversations about trauma and in historical research.³⁷

The Uncanny Father

In several key characters, uncanny parallels are drawn between the characters' private and public lives. Gibson and Smith talk of the psychological 'doubling' that allows them to compartmentalize their private lives and difficult jobs. This compartmentalisation is probably most evident in Spector's ability to transition between family man, bereavement counsellor and sadistic murderer but these apparently different roles are shown to have uncanny correspondences. His acts of cleansing his victims are contrasted with him washing his daughter's hair. He also gives her a victim's necklace as a gift. For Spector, the material tokens are part of his paraphilia as he is deeply interested in the minutiae of his victims' lives. As Dornan remarked: 'I guess that makes it all more unpleasant because you see that he is human and can show love'.³⁸ However, the cracks in his veneer soon open up as Spector's daughter becomes troubled, draws disturbing images of a princess who had stabbed herself to death, and has night terrors. She alludes to the fact that there are images of naked women that she has seen, presumably from Spector's scrapbook of trophies or the mannequin he poses. At the programme's outset, he is able to compartmentalize his serial killing and family life, but as the series continues these boundaries become blurred until the distinctions cannot hold and he has to leave the family home. The family man who is actually a misogynistic serial killer is particularly troubling in the

Northern Irish context. As Fitzpatrick notes, when discussing domestic violence in contemporary Northern Irish drama:

The family – which repeatedly appears in Northern Irish drama as a metaphor for the state – is situated firmly as a patriarchal unit in both the fictional and actual worlds, with the father at the head, his position confirmed by local religious practice as well as political rhetoric and popular constructions of gender.³⁹

This myth of the patriarchal family as a protective core of Northern Irish society is repeatedly undermined by the drama's representation of abusive homes and absent fathers. Cubitt writes: 'The men who commit these crimes are seldom ravening beasts with blood on their fangs. As Gibson says, we are looking for someone's husband, brother, father and son. An uncomfortable thought for us all'.⁴⁰ *The Fall*, then, disrupts the Northern Irish family as a unit of care and security and instead presents an abused child, forgotten during the Troubles, now as an adult enacting ritualistic violence.

Conclusion

While the experience of the sectarian violence of the Troubles is undoubtedly deserving of political attention and cultural depiction, so too is the intimate partner violence, rape and child abuse which terrorized women and children during the course of the Troubles. To parse Derrida: archives are haunted by what they exclude, in this case, the spectre of misogyny, obscured till now by Northern Ireland's cultural preoccupation with exorcising Troubles trauma. Spector represents, then, a horrifying spectacle of the legacy of these unspoken and unreported acts, what lies beneath the veneer of the 'new' Northern Ireland. As Downing has it: 'To borrow a term from

Jacques Lacan, the murderer may be best understood as an example of “extimacy”, that is, as the kernel of otherness that is interior to – at the heart of – our own culture, intimate but necessarily disavowed in order to maintain a semblance of decency’.⁴¹

The Fall, as deeply imperfect and problematic as it is, is an attempt to complicate the relationship between the complicit observer and the aestheticized corpse. While not always entirely progressive or successful, the discussions it has raised about the relationship between power and gender in the ‘new’ Northern Ireland are worth having. One only hopes that when the Northern Irish female body in pain speaks again, it will be with her own voice.

¹ The author would like to thank Alexander Beaumont, and the staff of York St John University, for the opportunity to present this as work in progress at their *Talking Literature, Talking Theory* Seminar Series and for their thoughtful questions.

² For more on this, see Aaron Kelly, *The Thriller and Northern Ireland Since 1969* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005).

³ Gareth Rubin, "Ulster Noir' Draws On Northern Ireland's Dark History Of Conflict'. *The Observer*, 11 May 2014. Accessed 11 May 2014.

⁴ I have explored the role of the past in contemporary Northern Irish culture in ‘Re-Writing Protestant History in the Novels of Glenn Patterson’, *Irish Studies Review* 23.3 (2015), 348-360.

⁵ Quoted in Lisa Fitzpatrick, ‘Performing Gender, Performing Violence on the Northern Irish Stage: “Spittin’ Blood In A Belfast Sink”’, *Contemporary Theatre Review* 23.3 (2013), 302-13 (p.312).

-
- ⁶ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p.xvi.
- ⁷ Gareth Rubin, “‘Ulster Noir’ Draws on Northern Ireland’s Dark History of Conflict’, *The Observer*, 10 May 2014. Accessed 11 May 2014.
- ⁸ Robert McLiam Wilson, *Eureka Street* (London: Vintage, 1997), p.14.
- ⁹ Fionnuala Ní Aolain and Monica McWilliams, “‘There is a war going on you know’’: Addressing the Complexity of Violence Against Women in Conflicted and Post Conflict Societies’, *Transitional Justice Review* 1.2 (2013), n. pag. Accessed 11 Sept. 2015.
- ¹⁰ María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren, ‘Possession: Spectral Place / Introduction’, *The Spectralities Reader* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), Kindle Edition, n. pag.
- ¹¹ Allan Cubitt, ‘The Fall’s Writer Allan Cubitt on Women and Violence in TV Drama’, *The Guardian*, 7 June 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2013/jun/07/the-fall-allan-cubitt-women-violence> Accessed 11 Aug. 2014.
- ¹² The role of paramilitaries actors in sexual assault prosecution is explored in Fionnuala Ní Aoláin and Catherine O’Rourke, ‘Gendered Justice and the Non-State Actor’, in *Contested Transitions: Dilemmas of Transitional Justice in Colombia and Comparative Experience*, ed. by Michael Reed and Amanda Lyons (Bogota: International Centre for Transitional Justice, 2013), n. pag
- ¹³ Ní Aolain and McWilliams, ‘There is a war going on’, n. pag.
- ¹⁴ *The Fall*, Series 1, Episode 2. BBC, 2013.
- ¹⁵ *The Fall*, Series 2, Episode 6. BBC, 2014.
- ¹⁶ *The Fall*, Series 2, Episode 3. BBC, 2014.
- ¹⁷ *The Fall*, Series 2, Episode 6. BBC, 2014.

¹⁸ *The Fall*, Series 1, Episode 5. BBC, 2013.

¹⁹ Lisa Downing, *The Subject of Murder* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), Kindle Edition, n. pag.

²⁰ *The Fall*, Series 1, Episode 5. BBC, 2013.

²¹ *The Fall*, Series 1, Episode 5. BBC, 2013.

²² *The Fall*, Series 1, Episode 5. BBC, 2013.

²³ del Pilar Blanco and Peeren, 'Possession: Spectral Place / Introduction', n. pag.

²⁴ Discussing theatre, Lisa Fitzpatrick notes that: 'Representations of sexual violence in Northern Irish theatre are framed by a complex set of cultural, political and social circumstances and attitudes to gender, gender behaviour, and interpersonal violence, shaped and intensified by decades of civic violence'. See 'Performing Gender, Performing Violence on the Northern Irish Stage', p.304.

²⁵ Lisa Downing, 'Chapter Three: The Beast in Man', in *The Subject of Murder*, n. pag.

²⁶ Cubitt, 'The Fall's Writer Allan Cubitt'.

²⁷ Sarah Dempster, 'The Fall is One of the Best BBC Dramas in Years', *The Guardian*, 11 May 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2013/may/11/the-fall-gillian-anderson> Accessed 14 Sept. 2015.

²⁸ Tracy McVeigh, 'Now Everyone Wants a Silk Shirt to Look as Cool as TV's Sexy Sleuth', *The Guardian*, 8 June 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2013/jun/08/silk-shirt-fashion-the-fall> Accessed 14 Sept. 2015.

²⁹ Karen Dacre, 'How to Work the Gillian Anderson Power Blouse', *Evening Standard*, 10 June 2013. <http://www.standard.co.uk/fashion/how-to-work-the-gillian-anderson-power-blouse-8651814.html> Accessed 14 Sept. 2015.

³⁰ Susan Sydney-Smith, 'Endless Interrogation', *Feminist Media Studies* 7.2 (2007), 190.

³¹ Heather Nunn and Anita Biressi, 'Silent Witness: Detection, Femininity, and the Post-Mortem Body', *Feminist Media Studies* 3.2 (2003), 193-206.

³² Cubitt, 'The Fall's Writer Allan Cubitt'.

³³ Cubitt, 'The Fall's Writer Allan Cubitt'.

³⁴ Downing, 'Introduction', *The Subject of Murder*, n. pag.

³⁵ This surname is also shared, of course, by the music producer Phil Spector who was jailed for nineteen years for murdering actress Lana Clarkson. In this trial, his threatening behaviours towards women were variously noted.

³⁶ Catherine E. Purcell and Bruce A. Arrigo, *The Psychology of Lust Murder* (Amsterdam: Academic Press, 2006), p.12

³⁷ The extent of these abuses is detailed in a report by Helsinki Watch, later Human Rights Watch. See Lois Whitman, *Children in Northern Ireland* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1992). Whitman details abuses of children by the security forces and paramilitaries, as well as the RUC's failures to engage in 'normal policing' of these issues. Amnesty International have also made 'Institutional and clerical abuse' in Northern Ireland one of their priorities, and campaigned alongside victims to have the Northern Ireland Executive set up the inquiry with Justice Anthony Hart.

³⁸ Benji Williams, 'Jamie Dornan: "I'd like to stop tying women up"', *The Guardian*, 21 April 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2014/apr/21/jamie-dornan-interview-the-fall-fifty-shades-grey> Accessed 11 Sept. 2015.

³⁹ Lisa Fitzpatrick, 'Performing Gender, Performing Violence on the Northern Irish Stage', p.303.

⁴⁰ Cubitt, 'The Fall's Writer Allan Cubitt'.

⁴¹ Downing, 'Introduction', *The Subject of Murder*, n. pag.