The Graveyard in Literature

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Liminality and Social Critique

Edited by

Aoileann Ní Éigeartaigh

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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This book was written during a series of prolonged global lockdowns. I would like to acknowledge the hard work of all the contributors, who overcame often very challenging personal circumstances and the significant limitations imposed on institutions and libraries to produce such insightful and interesting essays. It has been a pleasure to work with you all over the past year–this book was for me truly a liminal space away from the stresses and unpredictability.

On a personal note, I dedicate this book most especially to Eug, Oisín, Meadhbh, Anna and Elsa, who made every lockdown happy; to my parents, Áine and Micheál, for their unstinting encouragement; to all the ladies in the Kilkenny Book Group, whose insights on liminality, and willingness to question and learn, are always such a source of pleasure; and to my colleagues and students in Dundalk Institute of Technology, who embraced the liminal spaces of Microsoft Teams with such good humour and determination, making the strangest year of online teaching and learning so unexpectedly enjoyable.

I would also like to thank the team at Cambridge Scholars for their patience and support throughout the project. To Rebecca Gladders, who was so helpful both during the initial commissioning stage and as we proceeded towards publication; and to Clementine Joly, who answered every email promptly and helpfully, and with such encouragement and good humour. I thoroughly enjoyed working with you both.

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION[1]

AOILEANN NÍ ÉIGEARTAIGH

The study of liminality and its social function was first mooted by Arnold van Gennep, in his 1906 book *The Rites of Passage.* The word liminal comes from the Latin *limen*, meaning a threshhold. Van Gennep theorizes that as an individual moves through different life stages, ceremonies are held to ease the transition. These ceremonies, often called rites of passage, are organized into three stages each with its own set of rituals: separation from a previous world or state (*preliminal rites*), the transitional stage (*liminal or threshold rites*) and incorporation into the new world (*post-liminal rites*) (van Gennep 1960, 11). Most significant for the purposes of this book are the rituals surrounding death and burial. Van Gennep argues that funeral rites facilitate a temporary and crucial liminal space away from the structures and pressures of reality, wherein the bereaved can come to terms with their loss so that they can be reincorporated into society again afterwards (van Gennep 1960, 147). The termination of the initial period of mourning often coincides with the burial and final incorporation of the deceased into the world of the dead. A secondary function of the funeral rites is to ensure that the dead move on from the world of the living. Van Gennep notes that all societies are nervous of those who cannot be laid to rest and who may thus remain behind to haunt or wreak vengeance (van Gennep 1960, 160). For van Gennep, the liminal space is primarily restorative, allowing for normal life to resume after a temporary period of turbulence and change.

Interestingly, it is not this restorative function that commands most critical interest, but rather the potential for the liminal stage to function as an alternative, disruptive space. Victor Turner is amongst those theorists who focus primarily on the potential for resistance located in the liminal stage of the ritual. The liminal space, for Turner, is defined primarily through its ambiguity. As people are passing from one known state to

[1] The theme of this book was inspired by a lecture I delivered in 2019 to the Irish Association for American Studies, in memory of founding member and dear friend Tony Emmerson. See http://ijas.iaas.ie/issue-8-aoileann-ni-eigeartaigh

another known state, they temporarily find themselves in a space which is not defined and thus not controlled, becoming what he calls: "an unstructured or rudimentarily undifferentiated *communitas*[….]of equal individuals" (Turner 1969, 96). Benefitting from the suspension of normal social structures and hierarchies, these liminal beings become sites of significant resistance to authoritative narratives: "Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention" (Turner 1969, 95). Turner explains that the consensus achieved through liminality is predicated not on the erasure of differences between individuals but rather on the accommodation of difference in a non-hierarchical structure: "Communitas does not merge identities; it liberates them from conformity to general norms" (Turner 1974, 274). The significance of liminality is thus that it facilitates the rejection of the rules and regulations of ordinary society, constructing a space in which prescribed narratives can be challenged and overturned so that alternative perspectives and previously marginalized voices can be accommodated.

Michel Foucault uses the term "heterotopia" to denote spaces that, like the liminal spaces suggested by Turner, can accommodate multiple perspectives which both intersect with and undermine the authority of dominant representations. He defines heterotopia as: "the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" (Foucault 1986, 24). Foucault suggests that the cemetery functions as a particularly effective heterotopic space as it suspends time as a narrative that implies progress and instead allows multiple time periods to coexist in the same space, a quality he calls "heterochrony" (Foucault 1986, 26). A crucial point about Foucault's heterotopia as a critical tool is that it opens up a dialogue between competing perspectives rather than simply swapping one for another. When space rather than time is used as a tool to analyse history, in other words, competing narratives can be allowed to coexist in such a way that they reflect, distort and unsettle each other, thus opening up new critical perspectives.

James Conroy suggests that literary texts play a particularly significant role in challenging the "discursive closure" (Conroy 2004, 5) that constitutes much of what passes for debate in contemporary societies. He argues that all literature is at its core a liminal force, employing metaphorical language, ambiguity and imagination to resist: "all centrist impulses and attempts to control" (Conroy 2004, 149). He defines liminality as the conscious embrace of alternative and challenging perspectives in order to achieve new insights: "the possibility of deliberately displacing our understandings,

beliefs and ideals[….]outside the realm of others, or indeed our own, socio-psychological (and numerical) containment in order to view them afresh" (Conroy 2004, 7). The ideal reader thus occupies an "interstitial" position: "between categories, on the margins, neither at the centre nor on the outside" (Conroy 2004, 8). The chapters in this book examine the various uses of liminality in a wide variety of literary texts, paying particular attention to the ways in which liminal spaces facilitate the construction of alternative perspectives, resisting the imposition of monolithic narratives and constructions of past and present societies by facilitating the exchange of ideas and insights.

Section 1: Liminal Spaces and Social Critique

The chapters in the first section of this book all examine the use of liminality as an interrogative approach to historical narratives and traditions. In the liminal spaces of the cemeteries, monolithic interpretations of history are challenged and undermined. Many of the chapters in this section are set during historical periods of crisis, such as in the aftermath of wars. The authors use the liminal spaces and iconography of their cemetery settings to invite a re-examination of dominant readings of history, allowing the stories and voices of the silenced and marginalized to be heard.

Aoileann Ní Éigeartaigh assesses George Saunders' use of a Civil War cemetery in *Lincoln in the Bardo* (2017) to critique the simplistic, exclusionary narratives favoured in contemporary populist discourse, which are predicated on division and the silencing of alternative perspectives. The cemetery, through its suspension of hegemonic narratives of time, invites its inhabitants to occupy a liminal space in which they can cooperate together, developing empathy for each other's viewpoints, thus suggesting a means of moving America beyond the racial discord that has prevented it from fulfilling its founding promises of social harmony and equality for all.

Matthew Grinder makes a similar argument about the use of graveyards in American literature to facilitate a critique of American exceptionalism. He analyses Sherman Alexie's short story, "Ghost Dance", which challenges hegemonic narratives of history that glorify the settlement of the landscape by white Americans largely through absenting accounts of the violence inflicted on Native Americans. Grinder argues that by critiquing this unbalanced view of history cherished by mainstream Americans, Alexie forces the reader to confront the violent reality of building the nation, inviting them to enter into a dialogue that could lead to the breaking of cycles of racial violence.

Jayson Althofer examines Gothic-inflected graveyard scenes present in Friedrich Engels' *The Condition of the Working-Class in England* (1845), arguing that Engels draws on the image and language of the undead to uncover and challenge lethal components and consequences, chains and crises, of bourgeois hegemony. The critique of capitalism developed by Engels and Karl Marx, he suggests, constitutes an exposé of the legions of workers who have been worked to death and haunt official society. "Gothic Marx", as assessed by Althofer, explores liminal spaces and illuminates liminal bodies to critique the thresholds, boundaries and limits created and contested by class division and conflict in bourgeois society.

Setara Pracha's reading of Daphne Du Maurier's short story "Kiss Me Again, Stranger" (1952) focuses on the use of the graveyard as a trope for interrogating wartime values and behaviour. This liminal space, she argues, enables transitional figures to express an alternative take on nationalist fervour, as they cross the threshold into the domain of the dead: a place they only narrowly avoided occupying themselves. Among the graves, the characters skirt around issues of war and loss, hope and love, as the author interrogates British values, highlighting the dangers of patriotism and self-deception. Responsibility, Pracha suggests, is the underlying theme in the story which plays with the slippery notions of accountability, liability, duty and power, allowing the author to express an undercurrent of anti-war sentiment, giving voice to those directly affected, but nonetheless unrepresented, in the broader cultural narrative.

Annelies Augustyns conducts a literary analysis of diaries and autobiographies written by Jewish residents of Breslau, the former capital of Lower Silesia, during the Nazi regime. With the seizure of power by Hitler, the Jews were deprived of their normal lives, losing their jobs, restricted in their movements, subject to attack on the streets. It was only within the confines of the Jewish cemetery that they managed to find a sense of community and, paradoxically, a mode of "normalcy". In this context, the Jewish cemetery became much more than just a liminal place in the literal definition of the word as a transitory place between life and death. Augustyns focuses on how the cemetery became an important transitory dwelling place where a different reality could be found and alternative perspectives facilitated.

Steve Danziger also assesses the use of literary texts to confront the often unspoken horrors of the Jewish Holocaust, arguing that the profusion of comic books set in graveyards and replete with skeletal imagery constitutes a form of post-Holocaust literature. Replacing the straightforward heroism and war propaganda of popular superhero comic series, the texts examined by Danziger center on themes of violence and retribution. He argues that

the more macabre forms of storytelling gained tremendous momentum in the years after the Nuremberg trials, as the proliferation of atrocity photos caused many to reassess human nature's infinite potential for depravity, let alone how to represent it. He argues that the reverberations from the testimonies presented at Nuremberg, which included horrifying photographs from the concentration camps, can be seen in the unconventional imagery and storylines of the comic books, in which from 1947-1954, thirty companies produced 1371 issues in 110 titles reflecting the dark turn of the American collective unconscious.

Ayesha Latif examines how the burial grounds in the narratives of Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) and Elif Shafak's *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* (2019) reveal larger political and social tensions. The bodies in these graveyards disclose deeply embedded hierarchies and structures of capitalist societies, with a particular focus on the exclusion and thus invisibility of those perceived as deviant. As the queer, the prostitutes and the illegal immigrants depicted in the novels unsettle the structural arrangements, the authorities work to disenfranchise them, banning them from even the fundamental right to a place of burial. However, in the spirit of *communitas* as defined by Victor Turner, many of the characters seize agency from the authorities, cooperating together to celebrate their individuality and burying their dead in a significant symbolic act of resistance to the cultural norms.

Section 2: Heterotopias: The Graveyard and the Family Home

The chapters in the second section of the book examine the interconnected spaces of the graveyard and the family home. Many of the texts analyzed feature ghostly choruses of those who were disenfranchized during their lifetimes and are now refusing to transition to the afterlife, determined instead to remain in the liminal space so that their frustrations and anger can finally be voiced. Fionntán De Brún notes that ghosts are often used in literature to signify dispossession or wrongful disinheritance, the liminal spaces they occupy serving as a warning that: "the past cannot be relinquished but rather, lingers and erupts in the present" (De Brún 2013, 25). Images of entrapment are commonly used to articulate the inscription of characters within dominant ideologies and social practices, but the authors also hint at resistance and transcendence, often through the undermining of the very language and generic structures in which the texts are written.

Aoileann Ní Éigeartaigh reflects on the resonances that link texts by Irish writer Máirtín Ó Cadhain and Mexican writer Juan Rulfo, both of whom are highly critical of the economic and political strategies followed by their respective governments in the aftermath of Civil Wars. They use the spaces of the graveyard as a site of critique, enabling the dead to exploit their ongoing proximity to the world of the living in order to voice their insiders' perspectives on its failings. The characters not only refuse to move on to the afterlife–itself an extremely controversial act in two strongly Catholic countries–but hang around close to their former homes to complain about the leaders that let them down with their economic mismanagement and corruption.

The use of the voices of the dead to challenge authoritative narratives is also the theme of Danielle Pelonquin's chapter which examines the role of the American Dream in constructing a mythology of small-town America predicated on perfection and harmony. She argues that Edgar Lee Masters and Thornton Wilder use their depictions of life in the idyllic American rural town to expose its dark under-belly. Their characters sacrifice their dreams and ambitions to the metanarrative of American progress, realising only after death that loyalty to the community at the expense of one's individuality can only ever lead to entrapment.

Basundhara Chakraborty also explores the role of the rural graveyard in her examination of Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* She argues that the graveyard is one of the most significant motifs in Cather's oeuvre, and is used in *O Pioneers!* to unify many of her trademark themes including the glory of youth, nostalgia, the elegiac mood, love, loyalty, kinship, dreams, hopes and the pioneer spirit. The graveyard in this novel serves as a gulf between life and death, inviting the survivors to remember their deceased loved ones and at the same time realise how worthy a treasure life itself is. It helps the characters to cope with death by serving as a place for reflection and realisation. The peaceful country graveyard thus transcends the immediate and becomes the image of hope and faith.

Christopher Cusack explores the use of the Catholic graveyard in late nineteenth century Irish North American fiction, arguing that it often functions as a space where diasporic identities can be explored, consolidated, interrogated and remodelled. Focusing on four nineteenth-century Irish American and Irish Canadian novels, by John Boyce, Mary Anne Sadlier, Peter McCorry and John Talbot Smith, he analyzes the Catholic graveyards as spaces where cultural memory and identity are reconfigured. They constitute liminal spaces not just between life and death, but also between conceptualisations of "home" and the social and material realities of transatlantic relocation.

Marine Galiné's exploration of Gerald Griffin's "The Brown Man" (1827) suggests a significantly darker literary use of the rural graveyard. She argues that through his depiction of body horror, cannibalism and the grotesque, Griffin aptly transcribes an accurate social reality into a gothic tale. His particular focus is on the repression of women, both in Irish society and in gothic fiction. Galiné argues that the liminality of the graveyard spaces in the story extends to permeate the whole narrative and applies to Griffin's writing itself, folkloric tales being themselves liminal forms of writing. "The Brown Man", she suggests, is a narrative about ambiguity (generic, gendered, social) which gleefully deconstructs readers' expectations in the same way as it deconstructs the apparent stability of female bodies and Irish spaces. From liminal, it becomes liminoid (innovative, experimental) and reformulates old elements in new patterns.

Anne Erickson assesses Neil Gaiman's use of liminality in *The Graveyard Book* to reveal a more inclusive and informed perspective on reality, one that empowers autonomy and responsibility. She examines the liminal spaces in which the novel is set and the liminal figures who occupy them, suggesting that they are used by Gaiman to embody a range of alternative identities and values. Erickson also argues that the novel itself occupies a liminal literary space in its straddling of several different genres, assessing the impact this challenge to conventional categorization has on the experiences of its intended readers and demonstrating the power in liminal genres.

The final chapter in this section examines the persistence of the tropes of the graveyard and the family home in contemporary Irish literature. Focusing on the novels of Sara Baume, John Singleton employs the Heideggerian concept of "thrownness", denoting the arbitrary or inscrutable nature of *Dasein*, to analyse the paralysis that often overcomes the protagonists as they face futures that appear to them to be uncertain and threatening. The past, by contrast, appears fixed and static, comforting in its unchanging certitude. The anguish triggered by their thrownness causes Baume's characters to withdraw from the inhospitable living world, the objectifying gaze of the Other and into secluded domestic spaces. Baume's protagonists believe these spaces are a sanctuary where they can dwell securely, spared from anguish. This removal from the living world, however, sees protagonists interred amongst the remnants of the dead. Such dwellings fail to offer sufficient protection and ultimately serve only to deepen their anguish.

Section 3: Performing Grief: Sites and Spaces of Commemoration

The chapters in the third section of the book focus on the performative aspects of grief, burial and commemoration. Graveyards in the texts become spaces in which grief can be articulated and traumas, both personal and communal, can be confronted and thus overcome. The link between literary and material monuments to the deceased is explored, both in written texts that insist on drawing audiences into liminal spaces so that they become part of the performance of grief, and in the physical spaces of cemeteries in which societies perform their shared values into being.

Aoileann Ní Éigeartaigh analyses Doireann Ni Ghríofa's *A Ghost in the Throat* (2020), which reflects on the author's emotional connection with Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill, author of Ireland's most famous *caoineadh* or lament, *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoighre*, a vibrant and passionate expression of grief composed after the murder of her young husband in 1773. Ní Ghríofra describes herself as haunted by both the anger and heartbreak suffusing the text, as well as the ephemeral presence of its author, whose life and identity have long been forgotten. Determined to honour Eibhlín Dubh's vibrant, passionate voice, she embarks on a project of repossession, pursuing her ghost through the liminal gaps she perceives in both the landscapes she once inhabited and the words she has left behind. By attending closely to the information embedded in the soil, and allowing the complex etymology of language to reveal its secrets, Ní Ghríofa immerses herself in a liminal space within which she hopes an alternative narrative of the past will reveal itself, enriching her own perspectives with its ghostly echoes.

Fiona Fearon considers the long tradition of ghostly figures in Irish theatre, suggesting that the incorporation of the voices of the dead offers a particularly incisive way to challenge dominant narratives and official memory. Focusing primarily on two experimental plays, Pat Kinevane's *Silent* (2011) and *Pals* (2015) performed by theatre company Anu, her chapter assesses the ways in which the voices of the dead have been recognised and incorporated into the narrative through the use of oral history, testimony and performance. A key theme in the chapter is that of commemoration and the choices made about whom and what a society will remember. Focusing on the theatre as a liminal space, in which audiences are suspended between past and present, she suggests that it is the performative aspect of the plays and the capacity of the actors to embody the voices of the dead that gives them the extraordinary power to force audiences to confront sometimes unsettling elements of the past.

Lucia Toman argues that in its contemplations of life after death, George Saunders' *Lincoln in the Bardo* (2017) explores the notion of liminality on both a conceptual and a formal level. Situated at the limits of the known and the knowable part of human life, the story captures the transitional experience of acknowledging and accepting death, whether one's own or that of a loved one. To narrate the unnarratable, she suggests that the novel itself stands at the cusp of fictional and factual narration, suspended between a real-life space and time and an imaginary space of unverifiable ontology. This chapter analyzes the conceptual notion of liminality employed in the novel, tracing the ways in which liminality permeates the storytelling and exploring the limits of narrative (un)reliability.

Kübra Vural Özbey reads William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* through the lens of van Gennep's tripartite structure of rites of passage, arguing that the play thrusts its protagonist into a number of liminal spaces designed to facilitate his transition from adolescence to adulthood, from rightful heir to king. Focusing on a number of symbolic and physical graveyards present in the play, the chapter traces the process by which Hamlet resolves his liminal self and claims his royal power. Özbey argues that the play has an additional restorative agenda in its use of the protagonist's liminality to offer an implicit criticism of Elizabeth I's failure to resolve the succession problem.

Dominic Nah, Gayathrii Nathan and Benjamin Chew examine the expressions of grief and resistance against the bureaucracies of death in Singapore, through a comparative analysis of *Boom* (2008) by Jean Tay, *The Coffin is Too Big for the Hole* (1985) by Kuo Pao Kun and *The Untitled Funeral Play* (2012) by Luke Vijay Somasundram. They suggest that these sites and actions of grieving, burial and reburial can be read as societal microcosms of intergenerational and interreligious tensions, which are further compounded by a bureaucratic interment process that dehumanises and dishonours both the living and the dead. They contextualize the plays within the prevailing dilemma of Singapore's land scarcity and the adoption of pragmatic state policies which limit the time a body can be buried, thus encroaching on bereavement processes. In each play, the audience-reader is placed in a privileged position of comparing competing claims by both bureaucrats and surviving family members presuming to speak on behalf of the dead.

Anxiety about the encroachments of modernizing, urban practices is also the focus of Micheline Hilpert and Amanda C. Estevez's analysis of the American Rural Cemetery Movement of the 1800s. Inspired by the idealization of the rural landscape in the work of the English Romantics, the Movement led to the construction of cemeteries outside the cities, in which the dead could be interred in peaceful settings, which would also offer the

bereaved the space to mourn. In the same way as the Romantic writers captured the transitory and ambiguous nature of life, the rural cemetery functioned as a liminal space, where through immersion in nature people were afforded an opportunity to pause and reflect, to meditate comfortably on their melancholy as they visited the resting place of loved ones.

Róisín McDermott's chapter also focuses on the interconnections between material culture and literature that are visible in the form of changing trends in gravestone iconography. Just like a forgotten book, she argues, a forgotten cemetery, or one that has been worn away and lost through time, holds its own cultural sorrow. Just like the great philosophers and writers through time, who would "read between the lines" to create and challenge ideas, an archaeologist can also attempt to unearth the hidden gems of culture created within a graveyard. However, time and weather are not kind to headstones. While literature can be preserved in libraries, our homes and even museums, preserving the information recorded in headstone inscriptions and motifs is a significant challenge, but one that is necessary if cultural practices and values from the past are not to be forgotten. Her chapter explores headstone motifs and their patterns of use in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Irish graveyards, in order to ascertain what they can reveal about past societies. The chapter also assesses the use of 3D modelling as a means of recording and facilitating the comparison of widely used headstone motifs. The importance of recording these elements of material culture is demonstrated in the subsequent loss through vandalism of some of the headstone motifs photographed during the course of McDermott's research.

Brittany Reid and Taylor McKee also reflect on the significance of grave markings and epitaphs as sites of commemoration. Assessing the fixation the Romantic poets had with their legacies, their chapter provides a critical reading of Romantic graves as posthumous literary texts, enabling the individuals who lie beneath to be both subject and collaborative authors of their famous last words. Romantic burial sites are thus seen as textual objects housed in haunted libraries. The chapter also considers how Romantic gravesites, private internments, present different or competing narratives from what they term "Romantic grave-sights", public memorials erected in tribute to the lives of Romantic authors. Although the grave-sight is built to preserve the author's life and legacy, the result, they suggest, is a haunting apparition that counteracts the intended function of the gravesite as a private, differentiated and, importantly, *final* resting place. The chapter thus not only approaches the subject of graveyards *in* Romantic literature and literary history but extends the conceit to consider Romantic graves and memorials *as* living bodies of work.

The final chapter by Sandra M. Leonard suggests an intriguing connection between the crimes of body-snatching and plagiarism. Leonard argues that this act of bodily appropriation bears a conceptual resemblance to transgressive textual appropriation, particularly plagiarism and piracy, within the nineteenth-century Anglo-American imagination. Although the act of disinterring a corpse and that of copying a passage of text may seem wholly unrelated, or only similar in that they both fall under a larger metaphor of theft, she suggests that both bodysnatching and textual appropriation are conceptually similar in that both infringe upon social boundaries by repurposing the corp(se/us) as object. In both acts, physical body and textual body occupy a liminal space from which enterprising parties have sought to appropriate.

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CONTRIBUTORS

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Annelies Augustyns is a doctoral researcher in literary studies at the University of Antwerp and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. In her research project entitled "Überall Einengung des jüdischen Lebensraums - Städtische Erfahrung in deutsch-jüdischen Selbstzeugnissen aus Breslau im ‚Dritten Reich", she investigates the textual representation of the National Socialist city space and everyday urban experience in German-Jewish autobiographical writing of the city of Breslau (now the Polish Wrocław), which used to be home to the third largest Jewish community in Germany. Her research interests revolve around German-Jewish literature as well as Holocaust literature, Jewish history and culture, autobiographical writing and spatiality. She will be defending her doctoral thesis in Autumn 2021.

Steve Danziger is an adjunct assistant professor of English at the New York City College of Technology. His stories, essays and reviews have appeared in various publications including *Fiction*, *The Wall Street Journal* and the *International Journal of Comic Art*.

Ayesha Latif works as a lecturer and teaches a range of modules in the Department of Humanities at Comsats University in Pakistan. She is currently working on her PhD dissertation on Vernacular Sufi poetry. Her research draws together indigenous, feminist and postcolonial discourses to explore literary articulations of decolonial and feminist resistance. In addition, she is attempting to translate the work of a lesser-known female regional poet, Piro Preman, into English and incorporating the interpretation into her PhD research.

Dr Danielle Peloquin is an adjunct professor at Westcliff College in the College of Education as well as the Instructional Lead Coach at Fusion Education Group. In both venues, she works with and coaches educators on providing an equitable, student-centered learning experience for all students. She holds a Doctorate of Education with a concentration in Curriculum, Teaching and Learning from Northeastern University. Dr Peloquin has taught classes in World Drama, Creative Writing, American Art, Research, College Composition, Communications, Technical Writing, Ethics, Science Fiction, Thriller and Horror, Interpersonal Communication and U.S. Mosaic. She has also developed general education courses at the undergraduate level that utilize an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the complexity of Humanities and Social Sciences in today's culture/society.

Basundhara Chakraborty is currently writing her PhD thesis on eighteenth century British women's travel writing, in the Department of English,

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Dr Christopher Cusack is a researcher and lecturer at Radboud University, The Netherlands, where he received his PhD (with distinction) in 2018 for a thesis on the literary memory of the Great Famine. His current project focuses on local colour in Irish American and German American writing. He is the author of a wide range of articles and chapters on the Famine and the Irish diaspora, and has co-edited three books. He is also the editor of a special issue of *Religion & Literature* on religion and identity in Irish American literature. He frequently reviews books on Irish topics for *The Irish Times* and the *Times Literary Supplement*.

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SECTION 1:

LIMINAL SPACES AND SOCIAL CRITIQUE

CHAPTER 1

"ALL WERE NOW EMBOLDENED": LIMINALITY AND THE RESTORATION OF EMPATHY TO MAKE AMERICA GREAT (AGAIN) IN GEORGE SAUNDERS' *LINCOLN IN THE BARDO* (2017)

AOILEANN NÍ ÉIGEARTAIGH[1]

It is an interesting coincidence that George Saunders' *Lincoln in the Bardo* (2017), a novel set during the bitterly divided American Civil War period, was published just as Donald Trump's campaign for the Presidency brought to the surface a number of issues that deeply polarized America. Saunders often references the Civil War in his short stories, defining it as the unresolved moment in American history, to which much of the tension of contemporary society can be traced (Baskin 2017, 36). Although the Civil War overturned many historical inequalities, most notably in its abolition of slavery, it failed to bring about the kind of harmonious social change needed to propel America beyond the violence that engendered it. Saunders attributes the continuing social, economic and racial divisions in American society at least in part to the determination of the conservative white hegemony to retain full control over the narrative of American history, silencing alternative perspectives. The original foundational myth of adventure has been replaced by what Saunders describes as "that brittle frontier spirit" (Saunders 2016), defensive of its own values and paranoid about any perceived attempt to challenge them. He notes that in spite of the expansive language associated with American ideology, it has in fact always been reluctant to accommodate difference: "From the beginning, America has been of two minds about the Other. One mind says, Be suspicious of it, dominate it, deport it, exploit it, enslave it, kill it as needed. The other mind

[1] This chapter develops an idea I first delivered as part of the 2019 W.A. Emmerson Lecture, subsequently published in the *Irish Journal of American Studies (2019).*