

<https://doi.org/10.18778/2353-6098.6.05>

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**Supernatural Beings and Their Appropriation of Knowledge and Power  
in *The Seafarer* by Conor McPherson and *Woman and Scarecrow*  
by Marina Carr**

**Abstract**

This article is a comparative analysis of *Woman and Scarecrow* by Marina Carr and *The Seafarer* by Conor McPherson from a hauntological perspective. It aims at discussing the influence of supernatural beings on mortal protagonists as well as addressing the configurations of power and knowledge formed between the characters. *Woman and Scarecrow* follows the final moments of a dying woman accompanied by the mysterious figure of Scarecrow, who is hidden from other characters. The verbal exchanges between Scarecrow and Woman will be interpreted as a manifestation of the apparent power possessed by the former, the ambiguous supernatural figure, over the latter, a human being, in terms of appropriating the knowledge about the woman's past. In McPherson's *The Seafarer*, a mysterious relationship develops between Sharky and Mr. Lockhart, who knows about Sharky's past, too. This paper will demonstrate both similarities and differences in the way in which Carr and McPherson make use of supernatural beings that manipulate human characters in the most crucial moments of their lives and will situate the two plays within the recent rise of interest in spectrality in Irish drama.

**Keywords:** Carr, Marina, McPherson, Conor, supernatural, power, knowledge, manipulation, appropriation, *The Seafarer*, *Woman and Scarecrow*

It can safely be argued that plays by Marina Carr and Conor McPherson belong to the already established canon of contemporary Irish drama and have frequently been commented on in mainstream discussions of Irish dramaturgy (see, for example, Murray 2000: 35–38; Watt 2000: 131). In this comparative study, Carr's *Woman and Scarecrow* and McPherson's *The Seafarer* will be explored. The main objective is to compare the functions of supernatural figures in Carr's and McPherson's plays and to determine how the relation between knowledge and power develops there. The behaviour of the plays' human characters on the stage is affected when they are confronted with their spectral tormentors. The supernatural beings know, or pretend to know, more than they actually do, and can do more than the others, thus reflecting attributes of ghostly figures and the influence they exert on human characters (see Davis 2005: 377).



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*Woman and Scarecrow* and *The Seafarer* contribute to the development of what Christopher Morash and Shaun Richards, in the concluding part of their book, call “spectral spaces” in Irish theatre (see Morash and Richards 2013: 175–179). Addressing the hauntological aspects of Irish dramaturgy at the end of the twentieth century, the authors of *Mapping Irish Theatre: Theories of Space and Place* define spectral spaces in terms of “a ‘theatre of the calamity of yesterday,’” borrowing Samuel Beckett’s expression, “haunted by a past that nevertheless provided only the most shifting and insecure basis for Being in the present, through the persistence of fallible, and often involuntary, memory” (Morash and Richards 2013: 178). The tradition of spectrality reaches back to earlier times: Morash and Richards argue that the dilemma expressed in “the ‘calamity of yesterday’ [...] would haunt Beckett’s own theatre throughout the subsequent decades: the recognition of a self that is non-identical with past selves, but is nonetheless unable to escape memories of a past that ultimately attach themselves to places, and to bodies in place” (2013: 178). Morash and Richards also link the recent development of “spectral spaces” to “the fluorescence of space,” with “fluorescence [...] understood to be the light emitted by a dying particle” (2013: 117). The “fluorescence of space” refers to the haunting self-awareness of both the end and the new beginning in Irish theatre in the last two decades of the twentieth century (see 2013: 117). The new beginning continues into the twenty-first century and the examples found in *Mapping Irish Theatre: Theories of Space and Place* include *Terminus* (2007) by Mark O’Rowe and the performance of *The Boys of Foley Street* (2012) by ANU Productions (Morash and Richards 2013: 179).

By depicting the ambiguous influences of supernatural figures on human characters, *Woman and Scarecrow* and *The Seafarer* inherit the tradition of spectrality in Irish drama which has been developing since the end of the twentieth century. As Morash observes in another study, the aspect shared by such works as *The Weir* by McConnor, *The Mai* and *On Raftery’s Hill* by Carr, *Faith Healer* by Brien Friel or *The Steward of Christendom* by Sebastian Barry, among other works (Morash 2010: 267), is that “the Irish theatre in the closing decades of the twentieth century has been increasingly filled with monologues delivered to spectres of the past” (Morash 2004: 267). Carr and McPherson have played a significant role in this spectral development: the former’s plays “revolve around characters for whom a world of ghosts is more compelling than the reality around them” (Morash 2004: 267); in the latter’s *The Weir* “all that the characters [...] can share is the recognition that each is alone with a story of ghostly contact” (Morash 2004: 267).

It is hardly possible to disagree with Morash and Richards that the spectrality is still thriving with ghostly figures on the stage. Carr’s *Ariel* includes the occurrence of the ghost of the daughter killed by her own father in his pursuit of power. McPherson’s *Shining City* focuses on the counselling sessions given to a husband who believes that he has been visited by his dead wife. Among other recent renditions of the dramatic supernatural worth noting is the deathly messenger found in Mark O’Rowe’s *Terminus*,<sup>1</sup> mentioned by Morash and Richards in “Spectral spaces” (cf. Morash and Richards 2013: 179), and the ambiguous visit of the dead young man paid to his older companion in Sebastian Barry’s *Tales of Ballycumber*. *Woman and Scarecrow* and *The Seafarer* are not addressed by Morash and Richards in the context of spectrality; it appears that there have been no comparative studies so far dealing with the two texts.<sup>2</sup> The plays focus on intimate encounters between mortal and supernatural characters, thus contributing to the tradition

<sup>1</sup> Carr’s *Ariel* and O’Rowe’s *Terminus*, similarly to *The Seafarer*, deal with a Faustian motif (see Lonergan 2013: 179).

<sup>2</sup> However, *Woman and Scarecrow* is listed among Irish dramas with their premieres outside Ireland in Patrick Lonergan’s discussion of *The Seafarer* in “Irish Theatre and Globalisation: A Faustian Pact?” Lonergan uses the Faustian theme found in McPherson’s play to comment on the complexity of global issues addressed in this and other dramatic texts.

begun at the end of the twentieth century and confirming Morash and Richards' observations on the individual levels of the realities depicted in the works.

In *Woman and Scarecrow* and *The Seafarer* supernatural, or at least strange and uncanny, beings have a tremendous influence on how the human characters behave and on how dramatic irony develops. Scarecrow and Mr. Lockhart manipulate the knowledge about the events Woman and Sharky would like not to have happened, hidden memories and shameful past experiences.<sup>3</sup> In both plays, supernatural elements are linked with ambiguity, a feature attributed to spectral beings – both spectres and spirits – by Jacques Derrida<sup>4</sup>:

[...] but as for what they have in common, one does not know what it *is*, what it is presently. *It is* something that one does not know, precisely, and one does not know if precisely it *is*, if it exists, if it responds to a name and corresponds to an essence. One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge. At least no longer to that which one thinks knows by the name of knowledge. One does not know if it is living or if it is dead. (Derrida 1994: 6, italics in the original)

The ontological status of Scarecrow in Carr's play is subject to debate. It should be made clear that this spectral being has been interpreted in various ways, and not always necessarily in terms of the supernatural, which shows ambiguity pertaining to this figure. By way of illustration, David Gordon holds that the mysterious character "may or may not be a morphine hallucination" (2018); Deb Miller describes Scarecrow as Woman's "antithetical alter ego" (2018). As regards Mr. Lockhart in McPherson's play, he is treated as the Devil, "Satan in human form" or "the devil incarnate" (Lonergan 2013: 177). At the end of both plays, the supernatural figures confound the human characters on the stage as well as readers and spectators. This illuminates an instability of knowledge and meaning stressed in hauntological readings inspired by *Spectres of Marx* by Derrida and the contribution by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok (Davis 2005: 376; see Lorek-Jezińska 2013: 21). As Colin Davis explains, "[h]auntology supplants its near-homonym ontology, replacing the priority of being and presence with the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive" (Davis 2005: 373).<sup>5</sup> Scarecrow and Mr. Lockhart can be said to represent such ghost-like figures, transgressing borders between the apparently opposite realms of existence and non-existence.

*Woman and Scarecrow*, staged in 2006 and included in the second volume of Carr's *Plays* (2009), mainly consists of a deathbed dialogue between the title characters. Their verbal exchanges, delivered on the stage and accompanied by other minor voices, can be interpreted within the dynamics of the assumed power of Scarecrow, who appropriates knowledge and manipulates Woman's perception of her past experiences. Such an approach can be used to relate Carr's work to McPherson's *The Seafarer* (also staged in 2006), in which a corresponding dialogue, or a game, is played out between Sharky and Mr. Lockhart, of which the other

<sup>3</sup> Miller treats the relationship between Woman and Scarecrow in terms of "the protagonist's ongoing battle between her lamentable life choices and her critical inner voice" (2018).

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of this aspect of spectrality, see Lorek-Jezińska 2013: 17.

<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that hauntological approaches have recently been adapted to interpret the biographies of the leading Irish authors and their canonical works. By way of illustration, quoting the same passage from the text by Davis and referring to Derrida's contribution to hauntology, Eva Roa White argues that James Joyce "inhabits hauntology itself in that he is the obsessive spectre that keeps appearing in the present, a trace of the old Dublin that cannot be shaken off, as it exists both in the past and present through what Derrida calls 'disarticulated, dislocated' time" (White 2018: 25). As regards Joyce's works, they manifest similar aspects "in that they too haunt the new Dublin, not only through events such as Bloomsday [...], but also as traces in the majority of literature about Dublin" (White 2018: 25–26).

characters on and off the stage are ignorant. Sharky and Woman are both depicted in the most crucial moments of their earthly existence – the fight over their souls. However, both are also involved in literal and symbolic struggle over their lives. Their experiences are appropriated by supernatural characters, who have access to mortal characters' memories, make them re-examine their apparently individual and private pasts and reconsider their systems of values (cf. Hill 2019: 157). Appropriating knowledge implies manipulating the truth about another person's past by a supernatural character and his or her certainty that such ability gives control over a human character's behaviour and the decisions to be made. In both plays, there are also apparently minor characters who are not aware of the dramatic conflict between the protagonists and their supernatural tormentors. Scarecrow and Mr. Lockhart, who show their power over Woman and Sharky, respectively, are at the same time responsible for creating and shaping, or just manipulating, those minor characters' perceptions of the invisible conflicts. The supernatural figures also show their power over the main characters by revealing segments of knowledge about them and insinuating that they know more than that.

The importance of the supernatural characters and their influence on the mortal protagonists are definitely linked to the relation between power and knowledge, which both belong to Scarecrow and Mr. Lockhart but which are not given to them in absolute terms. Even with such limited attributes, the spectral figures, through manipulation and in a calculated manner, build the dramatic conflict and negotiate the relationships between the characters. Yet, the dramatic significance of the spectral figures is ambiguous. On the one hand, as a source of superior knowledge, the characters of Scarecrow and Mr. Lockhart make Woman and Sharky dependent on them; on the other hand, this dependence upon the supernatural beings makes the humans learn more about themselves and accept the past. This corresponds with the function of spectral beings in hauntological criticism, which "is part of an endeavour to keep raising the stakes of literary study, to make it a place where we can interrogate our relation to the dead, examine the elusive identities of the living, and explore the boundaries between the thought and the unthought" (Davis 2005: 379; see Lorek-Jezińska 2013: 21, 40).

The spectral encounter in *Woman and Scarecrow* is preceded by a short description of the stage design – "A bed. A chair. A wardrobe. A CD player" – and of the characters: Woman, Scarecrow, Him, Auntie Ah, and the "Thing in the Wardrobe" (Carr 2009: 151). The play opens with a dialogue between Woman, lying in bed and being on the point of dying, and Scarecrow, the mysterious figure whom Woman knows. Scarecrow seems to know all the answers to the questions and doubts that Woman expresses and that concern her former decisions, lost opportunities and the possibility of changing the course of events and saving her from the clutches of death hidden in the wardrobe (cf. Miller 2018):

Woman lies in bed gaunt and ill. Scarecrow watches her.

Woman: I ran west to die.

Scarecrow: You ran south and you didn't run, you crawled.

Woman: I ran west. West. Why would I go south?

Scarecrow: You got lost.

Woman: I thought you were the navigator.

...

Woman: I started out west. I'd like to finish there.

Scarecrow: When you could've gone west you refused.

Woman: No, listen to me. If I could get across the Shannon once more maybe the air would perform some kind of miracle ... I might live.

Scarecrow: You think crossing the Shannon is all it takes? Once, perhaps, long ago, that would have been the thing to do. (Carr 2009: 153)

In the conversation between Woman and Scarecrow, we see the moment Woman dies, which is symbolically compared to crossing the Shannon River (cf. Trench 2010: 78) and depicted as moments of futile metaphysical negotiations as Woman wrongly believes she can still be saved and live for the sake of her children. The metaphysical aspect of a deathbed experience, commonly expected by readers and frequently encountered in literary works, is eclipsed by the verbal play and double meaning in the early utterances, as further implied in the following exchange, in which the two characters seem to be teasing each other about the past and making and denying reciprocal accusations (cf. Miller 2018). The verbal scuffles seem both incongruent and comical, bearing in mind the gravity of the dramatic situation:

Woman: I take it you don't want to come back.  
 Scarecrow: That's not what I said.  
 Woman: You don't want to come back with me ... you don't want to go on with me.  
 Scarecrow: That possibility does not arise.  
 Woman: Well, I wouldn't turn down another sojourn here with you or without you.  
 Scarecrow: I don't believe you.  
 Woman: It's the encroaching annihilation is doing it ... I've changed.  
 Scarecrow: You haven't changed since your holy communion.  
 Woman: You don't know the first thing about me.  
 Scarecrow: I know when you're lying. I was there before you and I'll be there after. Lie away. I'm through with you. I'm just going through the motions. I'll find someone else.  
 Woman: Who? Who will you find?  
 Scarecrow: Someone with possibility this time. Someone who hasn't surrendered before they're out of nappies. (Carr 2009: 165)

Woman tries to prove that she is the one that has prior access to knowledge about herself, but such attempts are made in vain. Scarecrow turns out to be a superior being controlling Woman's life story, her experiences, feelings and relationships.<sup>6</sup> It can be argued that Scarecrow possesses the knowledge of the woman's existence in the world and seems to be playing with her recollections and their interpretations and manipulating the dying person's fears, anxieties and faults.<sup>7</sup> The most important moment showing Scarecrow's power is the scene in which she fights against the figure of death hidden in the wardrobe so as to defer the moment of Woman's death: "The door of the wardrobe creaks open. Scarecrow steps out, covered in blood and bruises. Nightdress torn. Shaken from encounter" (Carr 2009: 196). Scarecrow seems to have won extra time for Woman to live and can apparently be treated as the figure that is more important than death itself. Still, the nearness of death on the stage, whose appearance is another crucial function of supernatural elements in the play, is suggested in the descriptions of the figure hidden in the wardrobe. By way of illustration, at the end of the first act, "[t]he wardrobe door creaks open. Woman and Scarecrow turn to look. A wing droops from the wardrobe, then a clawed foot hovers, then lights down" (Carr 2009: 190). Death is approaching Woman and will finally take over her life. Scarecrow tries to win extra time

<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Miller notices a crucial role played by Scarecrow (though with reference to one specific performance of the play) and related to the supernatural being's "frankly questioning the Woman's decisions, accusing her of being motivated by spite and revenge, and unwavering in assuring her of the inevitability of her own mortality" (2018).

<sup>7</sup> In this aspect, the symbolic control of Woman by Scarecrow in Carr's play does not affect the construction of one's identity in a negative way – as a woman's entrapment by "the symbolic order," understood within the context of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory and Julia Kristeva's reconsideration of it, does, which is argued in Rhona Trench's study (see 2010). Along the same lines, the argument presented in this article does not undermine that put forth by Hill and concerning "self-authoring" (see 2019: 157; cf. Miller 2018).

for her human companion, but the moment of crossing the boundary between life and death cannot be postponed in eternity.

Although Woman is generally aware of Scarecrow's control over her memory, knowledge, and self-awareness, in some parts of the dialogue there are seeming reversals of roles and Woman is able to confound Scarecrow with the truth she discloses, sometimes in a mocking way, as she addresses Scarecrow about Him: "You needn't sound so final about it. And my dreams were all of infidelity. Strange that, and I thought I loved him by my dreams, all of escape, flying, bedding strangers. Why was that, Miss Know-All?" (Carr 2009: 197). Woman endeavours to show that some explanations and judgements voiced to her in private by Scarecrow are not always as accurate as they might seem. These verbal skirmishes are not significant bearing in mind Scarecrow's function of preparing Woman for the moment of death; however, they prove that the mortal character does not always blindly accept the spectral being's superiority.

Struggle over the human being's life brings Carr's work close to McPherson's *The Seafarer*, in which a corresponding dialogue is played out between Sharky and Mr. Lockhart, of which other characters, though not the audience, are ignorant. The blurb on the cover of one of the editions of the play gives some insight into the plot:

It is Christmas Eve in North Dublin. Mid-life Sharky Harkin, erstwhile fisherman/van driver/chauffeur, finds himself reluctantly hosting old friends at the dingy house that he shares with his brother who has recently gone blind. A lot of booze and card playing carry the men into Christmas Day, when Sharky must face the grim promise he made decades ago to one of these old friends. (McPherson 2007: back cover)

The passage introduces the context, outlines the plotline, and creates a sense of mystery. In contrast to Carr's Woman and Scarecrow, the mystery is not explicitly formulated at the outset of the play, but in the middle of it. The mysterious visitor appears in *The Seafarer* at the end of the first act; however, implicitly, the presence of the supernatural is anticipated earlier, even before the characters are introduced onto the stage in the opening directions, in the description of Binn Eadair, or Howth Head, as a place of "myths and legends" (McPherson 2007: 5). This aspect is one of the differences between the two plays as to how the supernatural beings enter the world depicted and how their function and power develop in the plot. Still, Mr. Lockhart, like Scarecrow in Carr's play, is a superior being who shows Sharky, a human character, his supernatural knowledge concerning the man's life in the past. Mr. Lockhart also suggests that he knows what awaits Sharky in the future. Yet the power assumed by Mr. Lockhart and the prior knowledge he apparently has and uses for manipulating others actually fail him: the spectral character is surprisingly ignorant of who the real winner of the poker game will be and his control thus turns out to be illusory.

Although Act One of McPherson's play is titled "The Devil at Binn Eadair," the first scene does not deliver on the promise of the title. It is an onstage re-enactment of the party held the previous night, and gradual sobering of the two characters, Richard and Ivan, after a period of intoxication. Richard's brother, Sharky, is the only character who restrains himself from alcoholic beverages, as he has been fighting his addiction to alcohol. The verbal exchanges between the two brothers indicate that their relationship is rather strained, with unresolved problems aplenty. Towards the end of the same scene, one of the brothers, accompanied by their friend wanting to go home, decides to leave the house and buy alcohol and something to eat. When they are back, it turns out that they have invited yet another friend, Nicky, much to Sharky's disappointment (cf. Jordan 2019: 129).

The potential tension between Sharky and Nicky is suggested in the conversation between the two brothers:

Sharky: You told him to call in on us ...  
 Richard: Be sure, that's what you say! That's what everybody says!  
 Sharky: You told him to call in to play cards!  
 Richard: That's ... that's just what you say! Anyway – so what?!

...

Sharky: You don't fucking say that to fellas like Nicky, Dick. He'll be in on top of us before you know it!  
 Richard: No he won't! He was plastered! He was down in the Brookwood Inn of all places! How the hell is he gonna rock up here? In a taxi? I don't think so! Hey, is there 'ere a Christmas drink going a begging around here?  
 Sharky: Yeah, well I saw him the other day, and he was driving *my* car, Richard.  
 (McPherson 2007: 32; emphasis in the original)

In this verbal exchange, it becomes obvious that Sharky is reluctant to see Nicky, whom he treats as the source of his misfortune. However, the man does not realise that his brother will be only accompanying yet another character, Mr. Lockhart, who, as a supernatural figure, is invited to the house to torment Sharky about their shared past experience and the debt which only one of them is supposed to pay back.

The arrival of Mr. Lockhart, an unknown and mysterious figure, is apparently not strange to the remaining characters and to the spectators and readers of the play. The visitor is a polite person who keeps some distance between himself and the remaining characters, which gives him an air of aloofness and superiority manifested in the official manner he uses to address the others (cf. Jordan 2019: 130). However, he is willing to join a card game, which is going to be the major activity performed throughout Christmas Eve. As Richard proposes, “Why can't a game of cards be just for fun?” (McPherson 2007: 33). Now all the characters are ready to play the game, but only two of them realise what is at stake. The real importance of the game is revealed when Sharky and Mr. Lockhart meet for the first time in the house: “Sharky and Lockhart are alone. Sharky shakes his head at Lockhart” (McPherson 2007: 47). It is a decisive episode, as Sharky and Mr. Lockhart are left alone during their intimate verbal exchange, in which the other, supernatural, nature of the strange visitor is revealed:

Lockhart: Yeah, I've seen you. On your wandering ways. I've seen you going down Wicklow Street, and halfway up Dame Street, down Suffolk Street, Grafton Street, Dawson Street, round and round, back up, back down, am I right? (Pause) I've seen all those hopeless thoughts, buried there, in your stupid scrunched-up face.  
 Sharky: What are you talking about?  
 Lockhart: Oh come on, Sharky! You don't remember me?  
 Sharky: No, I ... I do. But where did we ...?  
 Lockhart: We met in the Bridewell [police station], Sharky. (McPherson 2007: 47–48)

What is strange in this scene is that Mr. Lockhart does not find it difficult to make Sharky realise that they once met, and Sharky does not even deny knowing the strange guest, which shows his ambiguous attitude to this supernatural visitor. Mr. Lockhart's description of Sharky's wanderings, which should be unknown to the strange visitor, brings the play close to Carr's *Woman and Scarecrow*, in which the supernatural character is able to recount events from Woman's life which she seemingly kept secret from others (cf. Sihra 2018: 191). It turns out that Mr. Lockhart is Sharky's acquaintance from the past and, twenty-five years ago, he helped him to avoid punishment for a crime (McPherson 2007: 49), which we learn from the dialogue:

Sharky: What do you mean “after what I did?”  
 Lockhart: ... His name was Laurence Joyce. He was sixty-one. He was vagrant. ... You beat him up in the back of O'Dowd's public house in the early hours of the twenty-fourth of December 1981. You killed him. ... I let you out. I set you free. (McPherson 2007: 49)

Whether Sharky actually knows what he did and is just pretending otherwise at the beginning cannot be determined, yet Mr. Lockhart helps him to remember things:

Lockhart: Come on, you remember that moment when the guards opened the door, in the morning? And told you to get your stuff and get lost? ... I organized that. Because you won that hand of poker we were playing. (McPherson 2007: 50)

As can be predicted, Mr. Lockhart has returned to play another life-or-death game with Sharky:

Lockhart: ... I've come here for your soul this Christmas, and I've been looking for you all fucking day! We made a deal. We played cards for your freedom and you promised me – you promised me – the chance to play you again. So don't start fucking me around now. ... Because we're gonna play for your soul and I'm gonna win, and you're coming through the old hole in the wall tonight, Sharky. (McPherson 2007: 51)

The most obvious interpretation of the two encounters between Mr. Lockhart and Sharky, and one frequently proposed by critics, is the symbolic pact in which the former appears as the devil who signed a contract with the latter, a Faustian figure.<sup>8</sup> Mr. Lockhart's discourse and diction change when this supernatural character speaks to Sharky in private. The speech does not resemble the gentleman's language used before: now it is vulgar and contains swear words, which might serve to show the real function of Mr. Lockhart in the play and to stress his relationship with Sharky through a change of style,<sup>9</sup> different from that used in the presence of others. Mr. Lockhart sets the invisible task to Sharky so that he can pay back his debt and regain his freedom. Sharky thus sees beyond the reality and physicality surrounding the characters on the stage, who do not realise what the game is really about. He is the only figure who is granted access to, and accepts, the metaphysical dimension, the intimate encounter with the evil visitor. Although Mr. Lockhart can be perceived by other characters, they remain unaware of the otherworldly dimensions of his actions and the power he purports to wield. By contrast, in *Woman and Scarecrow*, the mysterious figure, the female personification of the passage to death, remains invisible to both Auntie Ah and Him, the husband. Scarecrow possesses the knowledge about Woman's decisions and the motivations behind them (cf. Miller 2018); the gradual exposure of details influences the way the mortal protagonist changes and evolves on the stage. Still, one can argue that Scarecrow does not really know details of Woman's life experience but simply invents and manipulates them, using her supernatural power over the human character, depending on the changing situation and Woman's answers, which leads to a lot of tensions and conflicts between the married couple or the woman and her aunt (cf. Miller 2018).

The struggle over the interpretation of the past is presented in the arguments between the two figures in Carr's play, and Scarecrow appears, or simply pretends, to be right: "Your backward

<sup>8</sup> Lonergan makes a noteworthy comment regarding the Faustian theme in *The Seafarer*: "McPherson's characterisation of Sharky slightly inverts the story of Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, who sold his soul in exchange for twenty-four years on Earth with Mephistopheles as his servant. Both Faustus and Sharky enjoy roughly the same period of time enjoying an undeserved and ultimately damaging freedom, but McPherson begins his play where Marlowe's ends – at the moment when the debt must finally be repaid" (Lonergan 20013: 178). He also offers an apt interpretation of the Faustian motif in terms of the current situation of the Irish nation: "The story of Faust has broad resonances, but one of its major features is that it often appears in societies that are facing a crisis of valuation, in which something that should be free from the economic suddenly becomes commoditised" (2013: 179). Following McPherson's statement on his play, Lonergan argues that the crisis of values experienced in Ireland is related to its economic growth and the affluence achieved, inevitably accompanied by the fear of a new recession (Lonergan 2013: 179–80).

<sup>9</sup> Lonergan singles out the expression "the hole in the wall" (2013: 178), understood also as a cash machine, and, in general, notices the "economic language" used throughout the play to show the "recent social development" reflected in the Faustian pact (2013: 179).

twisted little heart was tied, always tied to him [your husband] who made little of your every opportunity he could” (Carr 2009: 168). To further prove the point, Scarecrow is able to use the knowledge regarding other characters from Woman’s life: “Remember what Auntie Ah said. . . . Then I’ll tell you. ‘I’d rather see your white body float the Shannon than for you to marry that man’” (Carr 2009: 168). The confidence with which Scarecrow demonstrates her knowledge and control makes Woman uncertain about her own life and relationships with others. As she says, “Well you can just take that smug eternal look off your face or look away. Look away. Don’t look at me like that as if you know something. If you know something tell me” (Carr 2009: 170). Scarecrow reveals details of Woman’s life, inflicting more and more psychological suffering on her and, at the same time, leading to more and more self-awareness on her part, which suggests ambiguity in judging the functions attributed to this spectral being. In *The Seafarer*, Sharky is psychologically tormented by Mr. Lockhart, too. The other characters are unaware of what is occurring, but the readers are in tune to what is happening, and, thus, dramatic tension is building up, based on partial dramatic irony.

In Carr’s play, the journey into death cannot be stopped and Woman is not able to return to the world of the living. Scarecrow seems to be her companion: someone who is supposed to accompany Woman and help her reach her destination. However, as simple as such a process might seem, it is permeated with challenges as to who knows what and how knowledge is distributed among the characters, which, to some extent, might even undermine the superiority of Scarecrow, as a spectral figure, over Woman, a mortal character. Yet, at the most crucial point regarding the importance of the supernatural being present in Carr’s play, when the husband leaves the stage and death comes out of the wardrobe to take Woman with her, Scarecrow becomes less of a deathbed companion and changes into Death itself or himself, thus revealing a new significant aspect of this supernatural being:

And exit Him. Woman lies there. Hold a minute. Wardrobe door creaks open. Enter Death from the wardrobe, regal, terrifying, one black wing, cobalt beak, clawed feet, taloned fingers. Stands looking at woman, shakes itself down. Woman stares at him. (Carr 2009: 220)

Woman is frightened and she seeks assistance from Scarecrow, which is no longer possible, as revealed in the following verbal exchange:

Woman (calls weakly): Scarecrow ... I’m begging you. He’s here ... I can’t do this on my own.  
 Scarecrow: You don’t have to, my dear.  
 Woman: Scarecrow ... is that you ... But I thought ...  
 Scarecrow: That I was your slave ... that you were in charge? Not so. I’ve a few forms to fill out, so just bear with me a second.  
 Plucks a feather from her wing. Takes out parchment, unrolls it. (Carr 2009: 220)

Scarecrow’s change of role confounds both Woman and the audience, as so far she has acted as the superior being with total control of Woman’s life experience. The supernatural figure once more proves the human’s inferiority as regards knowledge and shows her ultimate power over her life (cf. Hill 2019: 157). Woman is wrong again as to the function of Scarecrow in their mutual relationship.

Further activities performed on the stage are even more disturbing as “Scarecrow takes Woman’s hand, pierces vein in her wrist, a fountain of blood shoots out. Scarecrow dips quill into Woman’s wrist. A cry of pain from Woman” (Carr 2009: 221). Moreover, she just treats the woman’s death in terms of procedures and shows no emotions (cf. Miller 2018): “I know, my chicken, I know it’s never easy becoming the past tense. Okay. It says here you had no brains to

burn?” (Carr 2009: 221). After all the procedures are completed, as “the paperwork must be in order” (Carr 2009: 221), “the next breath isn’t coming” and the “woman dies in Scarecrow’s arms” (Carr 2009: 225) in the absence of Him and Auntie Ah, who are unable to see Scarecrow even at the end of the play. The supernatural being proves her ultimate superiority over all the mortal characters. Throughout the play she remains invisible to those who accompany Woman and, at the end of the play, the moment of death becomes a private transaction between her and Woman, as other characters are absent.

In contrast, Mr. Lockhart is visible to all the characters present on the stage; however, he shares a secret with only one of them but hints at sharing a similar secret with another one. He possesses the knowledge about Sharky’s past and the deal made between them. He knows how to use this knowledge to manipulate and intimidate his victim both in private, in a most direct way, and when accompanied by the others, by means of ambiguous comments and oblique statements. In both cases he considers himself a powerful figure with superior knowledge and control over human beings in general, as manifested in one of his speeches delivered to Sharky: “I hate these stupid insect bodies you have. [...] What are human beings? Two balloons – that’s your lungs – and an annoying little whistle at the top where air comes out – that’s your voice. [...] You’re nothing! Me? I live in the stars above St. Anne’s Park! [...] I’m the very power that keeps us apart” (McPherson 2007: 80). This speech shows Mr. Lockhart’s belief in his power and superiority over people in explicit terms<sup>10</sup>; yet, he is able to suggest it, implicitly and indirectly, when entering into conversations with other characters and asking about the past in an intimidating manner and insinuating his prior knowledge of it. Scarecrow in Carr’s play does not enter into any dialogues with Aunt Ah and the husband, but only completes and comments on the information delivered by them on the stage; Mr. Lockhart in *The Seafarer* is willing to involve Richard and his friends in the process of tormenting Sharky. Still, he remains ignorant of their actual role in changing the expected course of events and saving Sharky from death.

However, at the end of the play, it is exposed that Mr. Lockhart’s knowledge, in contrast to that demonstrated by Scarecrow, is limited and he has only been trying to orchestrate and control Sharky’s downfall or to frighten him. The stakes are high and Mr. Lockhart seems to have won the poker game. Yet it is Ivan, not able to see the cards properly at first, who has saved Sharky from death by defeating Mr. Lockhart (cf. Jordan 2019: 133). The win is treated like a miracle. Suddenly, the knowledge regarding Sharky’s life and sins of the past becomes useless and can no longer be used as a source of control and power. Mr. Lockhart has to leave the stage in search of other debtors who have to pay him back. This resolution is one aspect which distinguishes *Woman and Scarecrow* from *The Seafarer*; others include, for example, the structure of dramatic irony, different dynamics of power and knowledge, and distinct patterns of manipulation used by the supernatural characters. Still, what links the plays is the processual disclosure of the knowledge possessed by supernatural characters and the ignorance of others.

The plays are also connected in terms of the instability as to who knows what: the observations made by Scarecrow are not always necessarily credible and Mr. Lockhart’s knowledge of Sharky’s crime and behaviour afterwards is only one version of the story, and no other version is voiced on the stage. Yet the use of knowledge by the supernatural characters, in both plays, makes it possible to influence, or subjugate, the others and to show the power, even if not ultimate, held by the spectral

<sup>10</sup> However, as Lonergan notices, there are aspects in which Mr. Lockhart, as the figure of Devil, and Sharky, as a human, are equal: “There are clear parallels between Sharky’s situation and Lockhart’s – both men have fallen from a state of grace, and both are tortured not just by the harshness of their circumstances, but also by the memory of what they have lost” (Lonergan 2013: 178).

figures over the humans: Scarecrow makes Woman aware of the aspects of her life experience that she would prefer not to remember (cf. Miller 2018) and Mr. Lockhart leads Sharky into accepting his guilt without questioning the validity of the story about him. Finally, Auntie Ah and Him are unaware of the presence of Scarecrow and of the game between this supernatural being and Woman. Similarly, the game in *The Seafarer* is played out by all the characters on the stage; yet only Sharky and Mr. Lockhart deal for the ultimate prize. Strangely enough, it is one of these unaware men that makes Sharky win his life over and show the superiority of God's love of humanity. Paradoxically, as Mr. Lockhart suggests, "Somebody up there likes you, Shark. You've got it all" (McPherson 2007: 103); and such a suggestion may be found in the stage directions as well: "Lockhart leaves. The light under the Sacred Heart blinks on. The first rays of dawn are seeping into the room. The front door slams" (McPherson 2007: 104). Sharky is saved and offered the opportunity to begin his life anew. What is worth noting is that such a conclusion has already been hinted at in one of Mr. Lockhart's monologues quoted before: "He loves you insects ... (Lost and distant) Figure that one out" (McPherson 2007: 80). This statement is crucial in understanding Mr. Lockhart's knowledge and power, and the way he uses them to manipulate such characters as Sharky. It can be argued that he realises that human characters might escape him; still, he makes Sharky believe that, in the end, it is Hell that awaits him after the card game is over. The supernatural character does not win; yet, the moment of revealing to whom the victory belongs is deferred. Mr. Lockhart does not question the new result and accepts it; at the same time, he acknowledges the loss of Sharky's soul and his own control over others, contrary to Woman's predicament of death in Carr's drama: she "(throws herself on Scarecrow) Oh Scarecrow... the next breath isn't coming. [...] And she dies in Scarecrow's arms" (Carr 2009: 225).

As a conclusion, it should be emphasised that both plays contain a lot of ambiguities, not only with reference to the scope of knowledge bestowed on Carr's and McPherson's supernatural characters but also in terms of the instability of such notions as truth, falsehood, negation. Within this uncertainty and the ambiguity of ghostly encounters on the stage *The Seafarer* and *Woman and Scarecrow*, on individual levels of the worlds depicted, contribute to the portrayal of spectral beings and spaces described by Morash and Richards. Mr. Lockhart and Scarecrow haunt Sharky and Woman in their private realities and in the intimate context of their families and acquaintances. The relationship between Scarecrow and Woman is different from that between Mr. Lockhart and Sharky. In Carr's play, the characters have known each other for a long time and the moment of Woman's death is their prolonged farewell (cf. Miller 2018). In McPherson's work, it is Mr. Lockhart who knows details of Sharky's life, but the mortal character can hardly recognise him. Nevertheless, in both dramatic situations the function of spectrality is to blur the boundary between the present and the past, and to make the latter part of the former. Similarly, the two plays show how the supernatural beings are neither present nor absent, taking into account the way in which they appear to the main characters, as well as others in the plays.

In terms of the relation between intimate spectral encounters and a more general context of spectrality, *The Seafarer* and *Woman and Scarecrow* are based on various European cultural and literary traditions of depicting a deal with the devil and death personified (cf. Miller 2018). Still, they prove the importance of intimate spectral encounters in the development of contemporary Irish drama, situated within discourses of revision, reconsideration, questioning and undermining the existing structures of power and sources of knowledge (see, for example, Singleton 2004: 258–70). This undermining occurs in the configuration of these characters and suggests the volatile ontological and epistemological status of the spectral beings. Such figures as Scarecrow and Mr. Lockhart serve to show how the dramatic position of supernatural beings changes in the plays and

how the relation between power and knowledge can be used to manipulate others. Nevertheless, this manipulation is not always successful, as the case of Mr. Lockhart demonstrates: the final word does not belong to the spectral figure and he cannot in fact decide about human life and death.

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