



APPI

Psychoanalysis
& Psychotherapy
in Ireland

Psychoanalysing
Tragedy

APPI ANNUAL CONGRESS

DIT AUNGIER STREET, DUBLIN 2

24.03.2018

Tragedy, Lacan said in 1959, is at the forefront of our experiences as analysts. This explains for Lacan why Freud looked to tragedy (from Oedipus Rex to Hamlet) when considering the essentially tragic dimension of human desire. Lacan himself looked to Hamlet in his sixth seminar to illustrate and bring out as exemplary the conditions which frame the possibility of acting on one's desire, the theme he further draws out in relation to Antigone in his seventh seminar. His radical claim that living the bourgeois dream is not the index of a "successful" analysis challenged commonplace ideas about the objective of psychoanalysis involving getting rid of what is experienced as tragic for the subject for what it opposes to her/his happiness. Happiness, Lacan pointed out, is a political issue, bringing to bear a specific tendency on the field of human relations and the social bond. Tragedy is articulated by Lacan in his seminar of '59-60 with Aristotle, as catharsis, as purification, and the tragic dimension of psychoanalysis therefore involves the notion of a "crossing of the limits that we call fear and pity".

In our time however, tragedy is mostly articulated with spectacles of horror, of atrocity, of violence: spectacles which "go viral" at the touch of a button. Where once subjects could take their bearings by establishing the coordinates of their existence with each other at times of tragedy (e.g., recalling where they were when Kennedy was shot, when Marilyn was found dead, when John Lennon was killed, when the twin towers were struck, etc., etc.), now with the swift swipe of a fingertip a tragedy is replaced by a pop video or the smile of an unknown person's child, or a kitten playing with a toy.

How can psychoanalysts think about tragedy now? Is it still at the forefront of our experiences as analysts? What are the consequences for 21st century citizens of the diminution of catharsis?

The APPI annual congress of 2018 undertakes an exploration of the theme of Psychoanalysis and Tragedy in which we may discover the answers to these, and other questions.

Psychoanalysing
Tragedy

24TH APPI ANNUAL CONGRESS
Keynote Address by Dr Olga Cox Cameron

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Programme

09.45–10.00 Registration and coffee.
Welcome.

10.00–11.30 **Stephanie Devlin**
Tragedy in Psychoanalysis

Ray O'Neill

*“And The Violence Caused Such Silence”: Undead Tragedy and The
Zombies of Ireland’s Past*

11.30–12.00 COFFEE

12.00–13.30 **Olga Cox Cameron – Keynote Address**
The worst is not So long as we can say “this is the worst”

13.30–14.30 LUNCH

14.30–16.15 **Marie Walshe**
“For in this sleep of death, what dreams may come”

Sarah Meehan

As luck would have it. The tragic problematics of chance

Mike Holohan

*“Ideas derived from somewhere or other”: Literary form and the
Construction of Psychoanalytic Theory*

Abstracts

Tragedy in Psychoanalysis

Stephanie Devlin

Both Tragedy and Psychoanalysis are cognizant of man's thirst to experience 'self-hood' and simultaneously, his tendency to shirk away from it. In taking a more phenomenological approach to human affairs, the tragic, cast as a mode of experience, a way of viewing life, possesses of the same searching and interrogative character as the psychoanalytic vision. Put another way, what is tragic does not inhere only in outward appearances and events but in the internal awareness, the questioning and ultimately in the meaning which is imbued and understood by the human subject. The question we need to ask ourselves is; 'does living in today's ultra-modern world affect those basic questions on which the foundation of tragedy is constructed'?

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“And The Violence Caused Such Silence”: Undead Tragedy and The Zombies of Ireland's Past

Ray O'Neill

Building on Sam Gerson's *When The Third is Dead* and Adrienne Harris et al.'s work on *Ghosts and Demons in the Consulting Room*, which are concerned

with what happens culturally and personally when there is no registration of a catastrophe/trauma that has happened/is happening/seems already to be happening, when social, personal and clinical witnessing fails and the registration of historic injuries becomes beyond the capacity of an individual or the collective; this paper explores such discourses in relation to Irish clinical settings and within our own cultural histories and legacies. It is a paper triggered by the sudden tragic death of Dolores O'Riordain, the lead singer of 'The Cranberries' in London on January 15th this year whose cause of death has as yet not been disclosed. Again a deafening, torturous silence surrounds this violence in the death of a talented artist, a mental health advocate, a survivor (and discloser) of childhood sexual abuse, a 'crazy' person, and a peer, given we are both born in 1971. As *Antigone* tells us, the unburied dead, and the too quickly buried/silenced narratives of their deaths are more than a present absence or absent presence of a ghost, they are an undead over-presence that haunts/consumes the Irish Cultural landscape and psyche. What might be within our undead tragic past that destroys bodies and minds through one of the highest rates of alcoholism, addiction and childhood sexual abuse in the EU?

“For in this sleep of death, what dreams may come.”

Marie Walshe

The contemporary tragedy is the appropriation of mental suffering including depression, suicide and self-harm, into the Imaginary.

Freud’s original mis-cognition, catharsis, is supplanting a discourse of desire with a series of testimonies without interrogation.

For my analysand, struggling to put her own signifiers to an un-nameable trauma, the eloquent tragedies of others produce an *SI* that persecutes her for her impotence.

The contemporary ‘recovery’ discourse masquerades as validation and yet is rather an imperative to a modern myth called ‘mental health’ and a narrative bound by knowledge. It remains the privilege of psychoanalysis to offer that in-between space in which nothing can be said and not-knowing tolerated.

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As luck would have it. The tragic problematics of chance

Sarah Meehan

The problematics of chance and its associations with causality has been circled around for centuries by theoreticians in all fields and the singular subject. Chance has a tragic dimension and its opaque presence

in our lives is framed or interpreted by dramatic texts and also within psychoanalytic paradigms. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts* Lacan links the Real with Aristotle’s concept of *tuche* (chance, luck, fortune) and frames it as a trauma “The function of the *tuche*, of the real as encounter—the encounter in so far as it may be missed, in so far as it is essentially the missed encounter—first presented itself in the history of psychoanalysis in a form that was in itself already enough to arouse our attention, that of the trauma” (1964, p.65).

This paper will seek to address the function of the real as *tuche*, as a trauma of what exceeds categorisation within narratives where meaning is overdetermined. How does psychoanalysis deal with the random outlier of chance as a variable that has yet to happen (as possibility) or cannot be represented as having already happened (the missed encounter). This traumatic missed encounter relates to the body of the subject, a body that is subject to both *tuche* as possibility and the tragic trajectory of existence. Desmond Morris (1991) articulates that tragedies such as *Philoctetes* teach us that the body must go down in defeat and this is a truth that is sometimes denied. An encounter with chance subverts the subjects drive for meaning yet also contains within it the possibility of something else, that opacity which sustains desire.

“Ideas derived from somewhere or other”: Literary form and the Construction of Psychoanalytic Theory

Mike Holohan

Freud regularly turned to literature to find a way to make sense of his clinical work and explorations. Oedipus and, for Lacan, Antigone, were no mere stories, but crystallizations – latticeworks of human desire made manifest in a codified structure of relations by way of plot, genre and characterization. Moreover, Freud would borrow from the tragic form, as from so many other discourses, when constructing his psychoanalytic theory. He would use these forms to create a framework by which to make sense of and express (as well as construct) his clinical observations and insights. In this paper, I am interested in thinking about the literary, metaphorical, and other discursive presuppositions by which psychoanalytic theory establishes both itself and its objects. Each of these presuppositions import into psychoanalytic discourse a metaphorical reserve that is not strictly part of the discourse’s conceptual edifice, but which nonetheless exerts a certain kind of force on it.

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Biographies

Dr. Olga Cox Cameron is a psychoanalyst in private practice in Dublin for the past thirty years. She lectured in Psychoanalytic Theory and also in Psychoanalysis and Literature at St. Vincent's University Hospital and Trinity College from 1991 to 2013. She has published numerous articles on these topics in national and international journals. She is the founder of the annual Irish Psychoanalysis and Cinema Festival, now in its 10th year, held earlier this year at DCU. The 2019 Festival will take place at DCU and will have for its theme; *Psychoanalysis on Celluloid; Same Time Next Week?*

Stephanie Devlin is a Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist with a background in Literature and Teaching Adults. She works privately with clients in North Dublin. Working with people of Multi-Cultures and speaking about their experiences has offered her an added perspective on the theme of this year's congress. She is currently writing a book which has been greatly influenced by her experience of psychotherapy.

Michael Holohan is a psychoanalyst in private practice in Munich, Germany. He has an interdisciplinary background in psychoanalysis, literary theory, and philosophy and holds a PhD in History of Consciousness from the University of California Santa Cruz. His dissertation explores the role of rhetoric and figurative language in the construction of psychoanalytic theory. He has taught psychoanalysis and literary theory at Dublin City University and the University of California Santa Cruz. He has presented at national and international conferences and recently published an article in *Lacunae*. Michael earned his MSc in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy from University College Dublin and is a member of APPI.

Sarah Meehan is currently conducting PhD research with the School of Applied Languages and Intercultural studies at DCU. Research topics concern the trauma of the body in a theatrical context (Beckett, Artaud, and Genet) from the perspective of Freudian/Lacanian theory. Other interests include sexuality, identity and the non-normative body. She is a member of the Dublin Lacan Studies group, the Monkstown Group, and has published in *Lacunae*.

Dr Ray O’Neill is an Irish writer and Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist working in private practice in Dublin and Cork, Ireland. He lectures with both Trinity College Dublin and Dublin City University, and is a Research Associate with the Centre for Gender and Women Studies at Trinity College Dublin. As Ireland’s only resident male Agony Aunt, Ray works significantly (and sometimes with significance) with the media in discoursing love, relationships, and desire in the twenty-first century, and co-fronts the RTE television show *Then Comes Marriage*. Current research explores the relationships between desire and contemporary modern technologies; and the individual and collective transmission of trauma across generations, with particular emphasis on the Irish Famine experience. His website is: www.machna.ie

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Marie Walshe is a psychoanalytic psychotherapist with a young people, adults and couples practice in Dublin. A Registered Practitioner Member of the Association for Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis in Ireland [APPI], she has been a training analyst, lecturer, supervisor and tutor to post-graduate programmes in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. She was published previously in the academic journal *The Letter*, and has contributed regularly to various psychoanalytically-informed

seminars on literature and film in Ireland. In addition to her private practice, Marie has worked in primary and post-primary schools as therapist and supervisor for fifteen years.

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COVER IMAGE:

Fulchran-Jean Harriet (1776–1805)
Oedipus at Colonus, 1798.

The painting depicts the ancient mythical Greek king Oedipus with his daughter Antigone. Following Oedipus's self-inflicted blinding and exile from Thebes, Antigone guided him to the city of Colonus. The two grieving figures are shown here in the manner of a pietà, the traditional artistic representation of the Virgin Mary mourning the dead body of Christ, who rests on her knees. Pictures like this of ancient mythological or religious subjects were the most highly prized paintings in France during the short career of Harriet, who was a student of the celebrated artist Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825). The moral and ethical knowledge that their lofty themes generated was a fundamental reason for the importance of such works. Representing the exile of Oedipus in paintings, dramas, and operas became especially popular in France during this time because it related to the contemporaneous return of French citizens exiled during the Revolution of 1789. The story of Oedipus at Colonus first appeared in the tragedy by the ancient Greek writer Sophocles. A modern reinterpretation of this drama which played in Paris in 1797 inspired Harriet's piece.



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