

In Stuart Neville's *The Ghosts of Belfast*, a supernatural thriller which has already earned the position of a classic,²⁰ the figures of two children play a crucial role in the plot. First, there is the ghost of a child, who appears with its also-ghostly mother. Innocent victims of a Republican bombing, they are now among the twelve ghosts that haunt the main protagonist, Gerry Fegan, a former Republican hitman, now seeking redemption through bloody reckoning. The child and its mother reappear throughout the novel, including in a pivotal moment at its climax. However, it is a real child, Ellen, spiritually in tune with the ghosts, who eventually brings about the much-desired pardoning for Fegan at the end of the novel. The thriller quality has to do with the fact that Fegan has taken under his protection two vulnerable persons: Ellen and her own mother, Marie.

With the twelve ghosts departed to their place of rest, the sequel, *Collusion*, focuses almost exclusively on Fegan's mission to protect the mother and the daughter. The presence of three extremely dangerous males, mutual antagonists, one expressly hired to kill the two vulnerable females, raises the thrills of pursuit and escape a notch higher. By the end of the novel, Marie and the two assassins are dead, but Lennon, the actual father (albeit estranged from his wife and daughter for six years), has been able to save Ellen's life and now is determined to ensure her safe future. But the battle is far from over. In another novel in the Jack Lennon series, *Stolen Souls*, Lennon is struggling to manage his roles as a single father and protector of his daughter, while solving the case of, presumably, the first Irish serial killer, a religious psychopath who preys on teenage girls.

Children and adolescents have a pronounced position in the plots of Brian McGilloway's novels. *Borderlands*, the first in the DI Benedict Devlin series, depicts an investigation into the murder of a sixteen-year-old girl starting on 21st December 2002. By the time a second murder has been committed, this time of a young man, it is clear that the solution lies in the past and that the events of the present will not make sense unless the detective reopens the twenty-year-old case of the disappearance of a prostitute, Mary Knox. The investigation leads to the place in which Mary (was) disappeared²¹—the Three

²⁰ See analyses in Fiona Coffey, "'The place you don't belong': Stuart Neville's Belfast," in *The Contemporary Irish Detective Novel*, ed. Elizabeth Mannion (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 91–108; Brian Cliffe, *Irish Crime Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 39–44, and Jacek Mydla, "The Fertility of the Supernatural: Stuart Neville's *The Ghosts of Belfast*," *Lublin Studies in Modern Languages and Literature* 43, no. 2 (2019) (Gothic Explorations: Studies in Literature and Film): 51–9.

²¹ The word "to disappear" has a special meaning in this context, as a police inspector explains: "At the time, the IRA has 'disappeared' quite a few people: informers, non-informers, people who spoke out against them in the local shops. Disappeared and never seen again. Provos wouldn't admit it then, but it's coming out now. Tortured them to find out what they'd said, then dumped the bodies on building sites." McGilloway, *Borderlands*, 135.

Rivers Hotel, the name referring to a point “where the rivers Finn and Mourne merge into the Foyle.”²² Here McGilloway stages the final and deathly confrontation between Mary’s daughter, Yvonne, bent on avenging the death of her mother, and Thomas Powell, Jr., son of a wealthy player from the previous era who had had Mary killed to prevent her exposing his fraud.

This resolution makes the plot vaguely reminiscent of the Gothic classic, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), where, too, the story told in the present recounts retributive action for transgressions committed in the past. Little wonder then that at the end of *Borderlands* we hear an echo of the same Biblical motto about the sins of the fathers visited on the children to the third and fourth generation. Says McGilloway’s inspector about Mary’s children and their murders: “In each case, they decided on transferring the punishment for the sins of the father onto the children.” This, incidentally, also basically sums up the plot of a Joe Spain novel, *With our Blessing*, which depicts the abuses of Magdalen Laundries in the Republic of Ireland. A glaring manifestation of ruthless patriarchalism, these institutions served to deal with the issues of illegitimate (i.e., out-of-wedlock) pregnancy and single motherhood by separating the female “offenders” and “sinners” from the “respectable” part of society.