

Başlık/ Title: "Leave me alone!": Liminal Reverberations of Memory and Trauma in Marina Carr's *Portia Coughlan*

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Yazar: Sena Baltaoğlu*

“Leave me alonel”: Marina Carr’ın *Portia Coughlan* Oyununda Bellek ve Travmanın Liminal Yansımaları

Özet: Marina Carr’ın *Portia Coughlan* (1996) adlı oyunu bellek ve travma sınırları kapsamında İrlanda kültürü ve kadınlarının detaylı bir temsilidir. Oyun, İrlandalı kadın kimliği konusunu ele almakla birlikte aynı zamanda geçmiş ve günümüz, kültür ve birey arasındaki liminal sınırları belirsizleştiren hayalet figürlerini kullanarak kültürel belleğin incelenmesine olanak sağlar. Portia, anılarından ve kültürel kısıtlamalarından bağımsız olmaya ihtiyaç duyan asi bir kadın olarak tasvir edilmektedir. Bu makalede, Jacques Derrida’nın hontoloji ve Dominick LaCapra’nın travma teorileri kapsamında, Portia karakterinin kendi kimliğini tekrardan kazanma çabalarına odaklanılarak bellek ve travmanın liminal yansımaları analiz edilecek ve bu teoriler ışığında, *Portia Coughlan* oyununda kültürel ve bireysel travmanın spektral karakterlerle nasıl temsil edildiği incelenecektir. Derrida yaşam ve ölüm arasındaki sınıra odaklanır ve hayaletleri bu sınırdaki konumlandırır. Ona göre hontoloji zamanla iç içedir ve belleğin bir parçasıdır. LaCapra travmatik anıların zamansallık yarattığını ve böylece geçmiş ve günümüz arasındaki sınırları ortadan kaldırdığını öne sürer. Portia geçmiş ve günümüz arasındaki sınırdaki sıkışık kalmış bir karakterdir. Geleneksel cinsiyet rollerini reddetmesi, ikiz kardeşi Gabriel’in hayaletiyle konuşması ve sonunda intihar etmesi Portia’nın travmatik olarak kültürel sınırlarından ne kadar uzaklaştığını gösterir. Sonuç olarak, *Portia Coughlan*, İrlanda cinsiyet kimliği ve travmatik anıların işleniş bakımından eşiklik, bellek ve sınır teorileri kapsamında önemli bir yere sahiptir.

Anahtar sözcükler: İrlandalılık, bellek, travma, cinsiyet kimliği, eşiklik, hontoloji

“Leave me alonel”: Liminal Reverberations of Memory and Trauma in Marina Carr's *Portia Coughlan*

Abstract: Marina Carr's *Portia Coughlan* (1996) is one of the elaborative representations of Irish culture and women within the boundaries of memory and trauma. It not only discusses the subject of Irish female identity but also offers an exploration of cultural memory employing ghostly agents obscuring the liminal boundaries between the past and the present, culture and individual. Portia is depicted as a rebellious character who wishes to be independent of cultural restrictions and ghostly memories. In this paper, I aim to analyse the liminal reflections of memory and trauma by focusing on Portia's struggles for reclaiming her identity within the scope of Jacques Derrida's theory of hauntology and Dominick LaCapra's trauma theory. In the light of these theories, I aim to explore how cultural and individual trauma is represented through spectral characters in *Portia Coughlan*. Derrida concentrates on the boundary between life and death and positions spectres in this purgatory. For him, haunting is intertwined with time and is a part of memory. LaCapra suggests that traumatic memory creates temporality and eliminates the boundaries between the past and the present. Portia is an in-between character trapped in the purgatory between the past and the present. Her rejection of traditional gender roles, such as her reluctance for domestic and familial issues, talking with her dead twin Gabriel, and her eventual suicide display how she is traumatically dissociated from her cultural

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¹ This is a preliminary research paper from my master's thesis entitled "Memory, Irishness and Spectrality: A Hauntological Approach to Trauma in Marina Carr's *The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan*, *By the Bog of Cats*...".

boundaries. Therefore, *Portia Coughlan* has a significant place within the scope of liminal, memory, and border theories in terms of its employment of Irish gender identity and traumatic memories.

Key words: Irishness, memory, trauma, gender identity, liminality, hauntology

Introduction

Marina Carr's *Portia Coughlan* (1996) is a comprehensive delineation of the twentieth-century Irish cultural memory and identity via the psychological portrait of a female protagonist, Portia Coughlan, who is haunted by her dead twin brother Gabriel. Gabriel's ghost is functional in the play in consideration of Portia's traumatic memories and her alienation. On the cultural dimension, Portia independently rejects traditional gender roles and unconsciously inherits trans-generational memory and trauma. Ghosts are integral parts of memory and trauma in terms of haunting people and playing an important part in their identity formation. Being (in)visible and obscure agents, ghosts are the liminal reflections of both individual and trans-generational traumatic memories. Jacques Derrida's theory of hauntology provides an insight into Portia's liminal state of being and Gabriel's haunting. Derrida establishes his theory on the boundaries between absence and presence, life and death, being and non-being, present and past. Dominick LaCapra's trauma theory also elucidates Portia's dissociation in the sense of being trapped between past and present and being stuck in trauma. Although she is traumatically dissociated from her cultural boundaries, her suicide is a final attempt to reclaim her independence and freedom as a woman. Thus, this paper aims to analyse how Portia's borderline identity is represented through her liminality within the scope of LaCapra and Derrida's theories.

Memory is an inseparable part of Irish culture and has a significant role in Irish drama. It is closely related to the haunting of the past upon the present and the future. Having fragments both in the past and the present, memory has an important role in the formation of identities. Ron Eyerman suggests that "memory provides individuals and collectives with a cognitive map" and "is central to individual and collective identity."² Memory is a fundamental tenet that affects the identities of individuals or collectivities. Anthony Roche claims that "the past is always living as a potential to be resurrected in the endless present of the theatre."³ Roche draws attention to the idea that the past always (re)appears like a revenant that bring back memories and constantly haunts the present. Furthermore, Emilie Pine argues that "ghosts represent not only the past returned to haunt us but given their effect on the present [and] are best understood as fragments of

² Ron Eyerman, *Memory, Trauma, Identity*, (Switzerland: Macmillan, 2019), 24.

³ Cited in Emilie Pine, *Politics of Irish Memory: Performing Remembrance in Contemporary Irish Culture* (London: Macmillan, 2011), 154.

memory.⁴ Ghosts are omnitemporal because they are not only the representatives of the past, being essential part of individual and cultural memory, but also the spectral agents obscuring the present.

As part of cultural memory and collective identity, traditional gender roles imposed by patriarchy are significant factors that have shaped female identity for centuries. Patriarchal pressures, which are the ghosts of a male-dominant society, continued to haunt women in the twentieth century. Melissa Sihra states that "[t]he monotheistic patriarchal meta-narrative valorized the heterosexual family unit and glorified the role of motherhood."⁵ Those patriarchal ideologies regarded women as wives and mothers who are traditionally supposed to represent private sphere. However, Jenny Beale claims that there was a swift change in the socio-cultural roles of women who began to become "strong and assertive individuals."⁶ In this sense, they started to become more individualist, more active, more demanding, and more conscious, and gradually put a claim on their own rights through feminist movements that highlighted the motto "[t]he personal is political."⁷ What belonged to women's personal and social lives became political issues, and women began to raise their voices against patriarchy. Thus, the women who were trapped between ongoing traditional pressures and modernisation movements struggled against gender inequality in search of individuality.

A Spectral Approach to Memory and Trauma

Considering cultural memory and its ghostly impacts on the formation of female identity, Dominick LaCapra's trauma theory comes into the forefront in terms of illuminating how trauma builds a bridge between the past and the present and distorts individual or collective identities. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Dominick LaCapra forges a link between history and trauma by defining history as an "exchange [...] with the past and with others inquiring into that past."⁸ The past has impacts on the continuation of historical processes, and these impacts may be traumatic and spread over generations. However, he also emphasises that "history is not only an

⁴ Pine, 154.

⁵ Melissa Sihra, "Introduction: Figures at the Window," in *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation* (New York: Macmillan, 2007), 2.

⁶ Jenny Beale, *Women in Ireland: Voices of Change* (London: Macmillan, 1986), 7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁸ Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2014), xii.

exchange or 'dialogue' with the past" but also related to "reconstruction"⁹ The past not only affects the present in a simple way but also dramatically reshapes it in terms of altering the perception of individuals. From these points of view, trauma can be defined as "[a] crisis and catastrophe that disorients and harms the collectivity or the individual."¹⁰ Tragic events that "disorient" the sense of individuality are the main reasons of trauma and affect identity formation by reconstructing the fragments of the past in the present. Drawing attention to the spectral aspect of trauma, LaCapra refers to "the after-effects-the hauntingly possessive ghosts-of traumatic events,"¹¹ which means that trauma has belated effects haunting the individuals. To some extent, individual trauma is based upon liminal and spectral grounds in terms of creating a purgatory in which the past haunts the present. In this purgatory, individuals suffer from borderline psychology that stems from the fluctuation between the past and the present.

Based on the liminal and spectral aspects of memory and trauma, Derrida's concept of hauntology, coined in *Specters of Marx*, also highlights the role of the past through haunting on the present and the future. Referring to the state of otherness and the liminal line between being and non-being, hauntology means "being-with specters" as "a politics of memory, of inheritance, of generations."¹² Haunted by ghostly agents, individuals are not only exposed to personal but also trans-generational memories. The threshold between the past and the present creates temporality and disrupts individuals' perception of time. A spectre is "an unnameable thing" which is "invisible"¹³ and cannot be named or categorised properly because it is neither alive nor dead, neither present nor absent. Derrida also states that "a specter is always a revenant," which means that it always returns to haunt and "begins by *coming back*"¹⁴. Its exact time of arrival and departure cannot be determined because it does not exist in a linear timescale. Being in a non-linear time zone, individual or cultural memories have no borders; they bring ghostly agents from the past into the present. As Derrida claims, "memories no longer recognise such borders ... they pass through walls, these *revenants*; ... ; trick consciousness and skip generations."¹⁵ Inherited

⁹ Ibid., xii.

¹⁰ Ibid., xii.

¹¹ Ibid., xxxi.

¹² Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), xviii.

¹³ Ibid., 5.

¹⁴ Ibid., 11.

¹⁵ Ibid., 36.

from generation to generation, memories not only turn into individual ghosts but also cultural "revenants" by influencing collective consciousness. Therefore, hauntology is a theory of haunting in terms of bringing about border-crossing memories and affecting not only individual but also cultural identities.

Liminal Portrait of Portia Coughlan

In the light of LaCapra and Derrida's arguments, landscape is a significant factor in Irish literature in terms of liminality since it depicts the psychological and cultural portraits of in-between individuals and plays a role in constructing the sense of borderline identity. Irish landscape delineated in *Portia Coughlan* is functional in the sense of reflecting Portia's liminal state of dissociation and alterity. It not only bears traces of both individual and cultural memory but also prints marks on the identities. Set in the Belmont Valley in the Midlands, the play embodies Irish rural mindset blended with traditional characteristics and provides a cultural and historical background for the protagonist's psychology. As Jennifer Parrott states, the Midlands landscape represented by Marina Carr is multilayered: "[T]he top layer contains the protagonists' dwellings, experiences, struggles, and identities, but underneath this top layer lie their histories—the bodies, stories, struggles and identities of their ancestors."¹⁶ Hereby, the Belmont River is a liminal and traumatic reverberation of both individual and cultural identity in *Portia Coughlan* in terms of transferring memories to the next generations.

Portia's storytelling, as a means of inheriting Irish folklore, and her profound connection to the Belmont River foreshadow her rupture from domestic and cultural impositions, and her eventual suicide. Melissa Sihra indicates that using water image represents "the possibility of challenging and redefining the socially prescribed borders of patriarchy."¹⁷ In this sense, Portia's connection with the Belmont River, as a cultural landscape, can be construed as a desire to escape from the boundaries of Irish patriarchy. For instance, in Act One Scene Six, Portia asks Fintan, the barman in the High Chaparal, the story of the Belmont River, and Fintan responds that it is "about some auld river God be the name of Bel and a mad hoor of a witch as

¹⁶ Jennifer Parrott, "Ghostly Faces and Liminal Spaces: Landscape, Gender, and Identity in the Plays of Marina Carr." (PhD diss., Southern Illinois University, 2010), 62.

¹⁷ Sihra, 13.

was doin' all sorts of evil round here."¹⁸ Fintan's story about the river focuses on stereotypical views about women such as "mad," "hoor," "witch," and evil doer, which demonstrates that Fintan had an inherited patriarchal mindset. In reply to Fintan, Portia tells that "the people around here impaled [a girl] on a stake and left her to die. And Bel heard her cries and came down the Belmont Valley and taken her away from here and the river was born."¹⁹ Portia's version of the story illuminates the reason why she always comes to the banks of the river: Thanks to her connection with her dead twin brother, she frees herself from all socially ascribed roles and domestic responsibilities. Portia expresses that "I think they do say right for this place must surely be the dungeon of the fallen world."²⁰ She thinks of this place as a prison and is ready to escape from it by breaking away her connection with Irish culture. Her rejection is an attempt to reconstruct cultural roles for female and to extend the borders of personal liberty.

As a female character, Portia has two culturally ascribed positions that determine her borderline identity: A wife, and a mother. She is a character who struggles for her own individuality and is between traditional norms and modern trends. LaCapra ascertains that traumatized people cannot meet "the demands and responsibilities of social life."²¹ For example, Portia is indifferent to her husband and three children and cannot establish a sincere relationship with them because she only wants to be together with Gabriel. Her obsessive desire to reunite with Gabriel demonstrates that Portia is trapped within the traumatic relationship with her dead twin brother. Their traumatic relationship "deconstructs the maintenance of traditional female roles in that her identity entwined with her dead brother dissolves her ties with Raphael and her children."²² Their relationship is traumatic because they do not have a normal fraternity: They have incestuous tendencies that have negative impacts on their identity formation. Due to this unusual and obsessive connection between twins, Portia cannot meet the conventional expectations of womanhood and motherhood. For instance, she takes care of neither the house nor the children. When Raphael complains about Portia's careless attitude towards her children, she admits the fact that she "can't love

¹⁸ Marina Carr, "Portia Coughlan." in *Marina Carr: Plays One*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 219.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*," 219.

²⁰ *Ibid.*," 219.

²¹ LaCapra, 23.

²² Kübra Vural, "Violent Mothers in Marina Carr's Plays: *The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan*, *By the Bog of Cats*..." (Master's thesis, Hacettepe University, 2015), 92.

them" because she is "just not able."²³ Portia's unnatural attitude towards her own children and her alienation from her family indicate that she has a disrupted identity. She reverses traditional roles and warns Raphael to take care of the children because she believes that she does not inherit the sense of motherhood. She resists cultural prescriptions and is gradually driven to a liminal space which is spiritual and untraditional.

On the one hand, LaCapra suggests that, in order to meet social expectations, traumatised people must undergo a process of "working through" which enables them to "articulate or rearticulate affect and representation."²⁴ Through this process, they will be able to continue their own social lives, express themselves, and be purified from their traumatic memories. Portia's memories related to Gabriel and cultural restrictions prevent her from adjusting herself to her present life. For instance, in Act Three Scene One, Portia reacts against Raphael in an outrageous way and expresses her feelings about her children. She only wants to be alone and escape from familial responsibilities, articulating that "Will ya just stop! Leave me alone! Told ya I can't ... Ya think I don't wish I could be a natural mother, mindin' me children, playin' with them, doin' all the things a mother is supposed to do!"²⁵ As a self-assertive woman, Portia tries to work through her trauma and openly rejects her maternal duties and social pressures on how a mother should act in the house. Portia's resistance to her husband shows that she seeks a solution to discharge her traumatic feelings. On the other hand, individuals who cannot break the deadlock and repetitively "act out" the past, are unconsciously tend to "remain within trauma."²⁶ For example, Portia unnaturally feels that "givin' [her children] a bath is a place where [she] could drown them,"²⁷ which indicates that she has tendencies to repeat her traumatic memories and remains within it. She fears that she could drown her own children, which reminds her Gabriel's drowning. Although Portia tries to work through her past, she tends to act out her traumatic memories related to Gabriel's drowning. Being drowned in this aporia, she cannot adapt herself to the world in which she lives and has difficulties in breaking her liminal bonds with the otherworld. Not adapting herself to the real world and familial responsibilities, Portia oscillates

²³ Carr, 221.

²⁴ LaCapra, 42.

²⁵ Carr, 233.

²⁶ LaCapra, 23.

²⁷ Carr, 233.

between traditional gender roles and her own individual drives, and she eventually drowns in the middle of liminality.

Coining the term "*spectrality effect*," Derrida suggests that "spectrality" crosses the borders between "the present" and "absence" implying that "a specter" does not appear in "a linear succession of a before and an after," yet it haunts people belatedly and continues to exist not only in the past but also in the present.²⁸ Hence, spectres linger within the borders of the past, the present, and the future by distorting people's perception of time. They are neither present nor absent; yet they challenge to cross the established borders. In *Portia Coughlan*, Gabriel appears as a spectral agent who is a representative of Portia's memory and trauma. He is a ghostly figure that is neither absent nor present since only Portia is aware of his presence and voice. In the stage direction of Act One Scene One, it is reported that "[a]s soon as [Raphael] speaks Gabriel's voice fades."²⁹ His voice "fades" because he belongs to the other world. He reveals himself only to Portia on the account of being her alter ego. In Act One Scene Five, Gabriel reappears and "*wanders by the Belmont River singing*" while "*Portia is in her living room, eyes closed, leaning against the door listening*."³⁰ Portia does not move even if the doorbell rings. Her motionlessness and listening to Gabriel's ghostly voice her eyes closed demonstrate that she is like hypnotised by her alter ego and transcendently connected to him. She loses her connection with daily life and is driven to alterity, like Gabriel's himself. Finally, in Act Three Scene One, "*the sound of Gabriel's voice*" wakes Portia, then "[i]t grows fainter."³¹ This stage direction also is an evidence of how Gabriel is a haunting agent who troubles Portia even in her sleep. When Portia enters the state of awareness, his voice becomes "*fainter*," which indicates that he is a liminal character in pursuit of pulling her toward trauma.

Portia's dissociation not only stem from individual trauma but also trans-generational and cultural memories. Apart from cultural configurations ascribed to women, there are also mnemonic and haunting legacies that affect identities and push them to a liminal state of identity confusion. The major character of the play, Portia Coughlan, is haunted by her familial and rural Irish history and lives as an outsider in the Scully family due to her incestuous relationship with Gabriel. In Act Three Scene Four, in the High Chaparral, Maggie May tells Stacia, Portia's friend, that Marianne and Sly's

²⁸ Derrida, 48.

²⁹ Carr, 193.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 209.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 232.

relationship is also incestuous: "Marianne and Sly is brother and sister. Same father, different mothers, born within a month of one another."³² In her conversation with Stacia, Maggie implies that this incestuous relationship is hereditary in the Scully family and is inherited by both Portia and Gabriel. Maggie also draws attention to Gabriel's death: "Young Gabriel Scully was insane from too much inbreedin' and I'd near swear he walked into the Belmont River be accident. Aither that or his antennae were too high; couldn't take the asphyxiation of the house."³³ It is understood that Portia and Gabriel have unconsciously and inherently suffered from this traumatic "inbreedin'" and have been affected psychologically.

As LaCapra suggests, history and trauma are repetitive. Incestuous relationship between Marianne and Sly is repeated and inherited by Portia and Gabriel. For instance, Marianne visits Portia in Act Three Scene Five. In their fierce conversation, Portia hysterically attacks her mother and asks why she did not leave her and Gabriel and interfered with their games, and Marianne tells the truth that their games were "unnatural."³⁴ In Act Three Scene Seven, a quarrel between Raphael and Portia occurs and Portia confesses the fact that she and Gabriel had an unnatural relationship:

I never told anyone this before-ya see, me and Gabriel made love all the time down be the Belmont River among the swale, from the age of five-That's as far back as I can remember anyways-But I think we were doin' it before we were born.³⁵

This confession is a deliberate sign of an incestuous relationship between Portia and Gabriel, which is repetitive in the history of the Scully family. Portia's confession is a way of articulating herself in order to come to terms with her traumatic memories. From the age of five to fifteen, Gabriel and Portia had an unnatural relationship, which has left traumatic marks on their identities. The reference to "doin' it before [they] were born" points how they are everlastingly inter-dependent to each other. The Belmont River stands for their past secret relationship and later becomes their future haunt. Her desire to meet Gabriel in the Belmont River turns to be a way of working through her past to recover her injured identity.

In addition to trans-generational trauma and memory, *Portia Coughlan* delineates cultural memory and prejudices against a subculture. According to Noelle Mann, Irish travellers or tinkers belong to "a uniquely complex

³² *Ibid.*, 244.

³³ *Ibid.*, 245.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 248.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 253-4.

liminal space, located between the boundaries of Irish and ethnic minority identity."³⁶ Because of belonging to a minority group, tinkers have borderline identities, which lead them to identity confusion in their lives. They are considered "culturally distinct" from the settlers because they have distinctive "histories, language, and traditions."³⁷ Their idiosyncratic lifestyles and conventions turn them into betwixt and between individuals. In *Portia Coughlan*, Sly's mother and Portia's grandmother, Blaize Scully, blatantly scorns the Joyce family, including Marianne and the twins. Blaize does not show any respect or love even for her grandchildren because of their kindredship with the Joyce family. Portia and Gabriel carry trans-generational and cultural loads because they are assumed to be gypsies and tinkers. In Act One Scene Five, Blaize expresses her thoughts about Marianne and the twins in an explicit way. She looks down on the Joyce family and her grandchildren:

Blaize I warned ya and I told ya, Sly to keep away from the Joyces of Blacklion. Tinkers, the lot of them.

Marianne We were never tinkers and well ya know it!

Blaize Oh, yes, yees were! Came into this area three generations ago with nothin' goin' for yees barrin' flamin' red hair and fat arses. And the County Council buildin' yees houses from out hard-earnt monies. We don't know where ye came from, the histories of yeer blood. I warned ya, Sly! Do you think you'd listen? There's a devil in that Joyce blood, was in Gabriel, and it's in Portia too. God protect us from the black-eyed gypsy tribe with their black blood and their black souls!³⁸

This quarrel between Marianne and Blaize demonstrates how tinkers and gypsies are regarded as people from low culture and how they are stigmatised as having "black blood" and "black souls". Because of not having their own houses and a rich history, Blaize labels the Joyces and the twins as tinkers who belong to nowhere. This kind of "transgenerational phantomlike forces that haunt later generations" create permanent impacts on identities.³⁹ Both Portia and Gabriel are the inheritors of tinker blood and must hold a threshold role throughout their lives, like their mother Marianne. In Act Two Scene Two, after the death of Portia, Blaize raises her glass to her in a

³⁶ Noelle Mann, "'Tinkers', 'Itinerants', 'Travellers': Liminality and Irish Traveller Identity," in *Landscapes of Liminality: Between Space and Place*, edited by D. Downey, 177-194 (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 177.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 178.

³⁸ Carr, 215.

³⁹ LaCapra, 14.

toast and comments that Gabriel and Portia are "poor haunted monsters" and "changelin's" because they are the children of Marianne who has tinker blood. In the eyes of Blaize, Portia is an outsider who does not feel a sense of belonging. Blaize describes twins as "changelin" and does not accept them as a part of the Scully family. She emphasizes that they are "haunted monsters", which refers to the idea that they are cursed by their ethnic culture and trans-generational memory.

Portia lingers between life and death, absence and presence, the past and the present from a Derridean perspective. This borderline psychology pushes Portia to a state of alterity. As Derrida argues, presence is accompanied by absence "in the coming-and-going, between what goes and what comes, in the middle of what leaves and what arrives, at the articulation between what absents itself and what presents itself."⁴⁰ This dangling between the past and the present underlies how Portia is in between Gabriel's ontological absence and his hauntological presence. While she ontologically belongs to the real world, she is hauntologically lost in the other world. Her desire to reunite with Gabriel urges her to commit suicide by drowning, as Gabriel did. Her obsessive visits to the riverbank foreshow her eventual drowning in the same waters. Similar to Gabriel, Portia is like a ghost trapped between life and death. Her memories, such as intimate moments with Gabriel and guilt because of his death, lead her to a liminal space. In Act I Scene Three, Portia's lover Damus asks why she comes the riverbank very often, and she replies that "I come here because I've always come here and I reckon I'll be comin' here long after I'm gone. I'll lie here when I'm a ghost and smoke cigarettes and watch ye earthlin' goin' about yeer pointless days."⁴¹ Portia thinks that she will turn into a ghost like her brother after she dies. She has been a ghost since Gabriel died, she is a spectre within her family, and she will be a "revenant" to haunt the others. She will always be a border-crossing haunter as she criss-crosses the past, present, and future. In order to cope with traumatic memories and mourning, Portia chooses to commit suicide as a salvation. Instead of being suffocated by trauma and melancholia, she prefers to drown in the river, which is a means to disburden the liminal effects of being caught in a limbo.

⁴⁰ Derrida, 29.

⁴¹ Carr, 203.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as one of the representatives of contemporary Irish drama, Marina Carr's *Portia Coughlan* depicts both individual and cultural trauma in terms of reflecting Portia's loss of her twin brother Gabriel, her reversing traditional gender roles, and her inheritance of trans-generational and cultural memories. From a Derridean perspective, pursued by Gabriel's haunting until her final suicide and caught in a trap between her traumatic memories and present life, Portia deeply mourns for Gabriel's ontological absence whereas she becomes exhausted of his hauntological presence. When we look at the text from LaCapra's understanding of trauma, Portia culturally inherits haunting legacies such as patriarchal pressures, trans-generational trauma, and her tinker blood. Due to Gabriel's haunting and trans-generational memories, Portia cannot save herself from the bonds of trauma and continues to remain within it. Portia is dissociated from her familial bonds and would prefer to reconnect with Gabriel rather than cope with his absence. She is gradually driven to a liminal space where she emotionally hovers between life and death. Nonetheless, her eventual suicide is a means of resistance and stands for her liberation from cultural boundaries and trauma.

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