

## Foreword

When I cast my mind back to that day when I first met John McGahern in 1995, I remember a bright and windy Parisian afternoon. There are fleeting images glittering with intellectual and literary wealth in my mindscape. I was studying at the Sorbonne University when John McGahern gave us a thought-provoking and unforgettable lecture on his novel, *The Barracks* (1963). What struck me the most was his humbleness, his wit, his generosity and his kindness. I had read *The Barracks* more than ten times for my final exams. I was haunted by his voice, his forlorn lyrical prose and I was finally meeting the author, one of Ireland's most revered literary voices in the Latin Quarter on the left bank of the Seine. John McGahern explored memory not just as a narrative device, but as a central force in shaping identity and emotional truth. Memory for him, was not merely retrospective, it was generative and a pathway to creativity. It was where storytelling began.

More than twenty years after my first encounter with John McGahern, I met Dr. Dana Radler, a Lecturer at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, in the Department of Modern Languages, Business and Communication and we talked about Irish Literature and obviously John McGahern, drinking coffee in Romania and beginning a never-ended conversation of very high intellectual calibre and a life-long friendship. It is an honour and a privilege to introduce the work of an outstanding scholar, who shares John McGahern's qualities, humbleness, wit, generosity and kindness. Dr. Dana Radler completed her PhD on John McGahern's works in Cultural and Literary Studies at Bucharest University (2015). Her current well-crafted and elaborate study, *Memory and Writing in John McGahern's Works* explores the powerful titanic Mnemosyne, the mistress of memories, the tragic and cheerful bearer of lost moments entangled with McGahern's writing, digging into cultural memory and literature, while visiting sites of memory and imagination to unveil McGahern's *Ars Poiesis* and *Ars Memoriae*, and finally showing how his works moved from the page to the screen.

Beneath the quiescence of McGahern's prose lies a persistent meditation on memory. The characters in his novels from *The Barracks* (1963) to *Amongst Women* (1990) live in a world haunted by the past, a past that is often painful, complex, and inescapably consequential. In both his fiction and memoir, McGahern explored the kaleidoscopic power of memory which serves as a personal archive, a way of making sense of the self over the course of a lifetime.

McGahern constructed an intricate connection between personal recollection of rural Irish life and the broader social changes that occurred in twentieth-century Ireland. In *Memoir* (2005), he dug into the act of remembering and reflected on his

childhood in County Leitrim, the death of his mother, and the authoritarian presence of his father, a Garda sergeant. These memories are presented with a deep personal questioning. Even though John McGahern was aware that memory was inherently selective and subjective, his work often emphasizes the unpredictability of memory, how it changes over time, how it is whittled by silence, repression, and longing. Moreover as Dr. Dana Radler stated, “in McGahern’s fiction, individual memories never stand alone; they are inevitably mixed and re-imagined with those of the others” and “the ‘vortex of memories’ suggested by Rigney covers all types of representations”. McGahern’s work suggests that memory is not simply a private matter, but a way of engaging with collective history. It contains Whitmanian multitudes and ethical responsibility.

In novels like *Amongst Women* (1990) and *The Barracks* (1963), memory is henceforth according to Dr. Dana Radler tied intimately to place. The Irish countryside is not just a backdrop, but a repository of memory. Fields, houses, barracks, schools, and churches become charged with emotional resonance, imbued with personal histories and communal rituals.

The combination of individual and collective memories for Dr. Dana Radler, is illustrated by the wide range of characters and topics John McGahern chose: “His characters are iconic yet diverse” with difficult family backgrounds, roots and rootlessness, life and death as well as teaching and writing issues.

In *Amongst Women*, the patriarchal figure embodied by Michael Moran clings to memories of his IRA past, using them to maintain authority over his family. Yet these memories are as much a psychic jail as a source of pride, they isolate him from the present, from change, and from emotional commitment. For Michael Moran, memory is a tool of self-justification and a means of controlling others, but it also reveals the wispiness of his identity.

Similarly, in *The Barracks*, Elizabeth Reegan, a woman dying of a breast cancer, reflects on her past and the choices that led her to a life of domestic immurement. Her memories are splintered and often suffused with a sense of unrevealed potential. The novel uses her interior monologue to show how memory is both a place of refuge and a source of existential and excruciating pain. What is remembered is often what cannot be expressed in words, the ineffable truth and a quest for light out of darkness. McGahern’s characters like Elizabeth Reegan or Michael Moran frequently live under the shadow of unspoken traumas, bereavement, political violence, sexual repression and the failure to articulate these experiences often deepens their psychological insulation. In this way, memory is as much about absence as it is about presence. The act of remembering while writing books, becomes a way to unearth, however partially, what has been lost or denied.

As Dr. Dana Radler expressed “books stood out for McGahern as sites of both physical refuge and intellectual growth”. Because books became allies in time of

sorrow and loyal companions. Umberto Eco wrote in *Apostille to the Name of the Rose* that books talk to other books. They are the guardians of memory. Books survive through rewriting, palimpsests and translations. McGahern was translated in numerous countries and adapted for the screen because his writing moves us from the parochial to the universal and teaches us that to remember is to bear witness, not only to happiness and love, but also to irretrievable loss, injustice, and suffering. John McGahern's fiction, imbued with the quiet strength of remembered life, stands as a testimony to the enduring significance of memory in shaping both the unfathomable and thorny journey to one's inner self and the transformative power of literature.

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## Introduction

This paper is the result of my ongoing interest in memories and how a writer assembles one's individual recollections and imaginary representations in their works. The main aim of this study thus concerns how fiction mingles with memories in the works of a prominent Irish writer, John McGahern (1934-2006). When I started this research, I thought that the main focus would mainly concern memory, identity and intermedial representations. In addition, psychoanalytical criticism is the third key valuable approach. Over the course of the last few years, I have become increasingly aware that the main theme is broadening up significantly and have then tried to filter both theoretical contributions and suggestive fragments from McGahern's prose. While employing key scholarship on McGahern, I have also selected more recent contributions on areas about memory, autobiographical writing, as well as diverse sources on premediation and remediation.

The study is structured in four main sections. The first chapter outlines major theoretical contributions about representations of memory, history, faith and culture to the day. It also presents the concepts of premediation and remediation, including both *lieux* and *milieux de mémoire* and it signals the interplay of individual, communicative and cultural memory. As a pioneer taking the study of memory beyond its purely clinical manifestations, Maurice Halbwachs has opened up this field towards social and cultural types of analysis. From this point of view, layers of memory do not work on their own but are sustained by composite imaginary elements, resulting in a new outcome, typical for *lieu de mémoire*. Secondly, psychoanalysis contributed substantially to examining the works of memory and subconscious, while scholarship about mediation, premediation and remediation refined the connections with other types of media in which memories operate comparatively.

One key aspect shaped the way this study developed from the very beginning. McGahern's works could have been examined chronologically, looking at changes and in content and mode of expression. Using the temporal criterion would have offered a linear and somewhat accessible interpretation route. However, this option would not have permitted a comparative analysis of aspects either traversing or intersecting each other in McGahern's prose. On the other hand, a second option meant organising the material into thematic strands. While this alternative would have required reflection and careful selection, it also opened up to comparison and in-depth debate. Nonetheless, I was aware that one obstacle comes up: thematic sections may generate unavoidable fragmentation. For instance, aspects relating to one particular narrative may illustrate premediated or remediated memories, while particular means of expression would fit sources of orality and Irish folklore. Despite this limitation, the