Abstract

The narratives of individual and collective trauma have been variously represented in works of fiction. Novels such as *Anil’s Ghost* by Michael Onndatje and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, treat historical events, namely the collective trauma of civil war in Sri Lanka and African slavery respectively, through the fictionalised experiences of individual protagonists. The trauma narrative sits comfortably within the sub-genre of historical fiction, since the telling of history often involves the representation of significant traumatic events that have a profound impact on nations and their people for generations. This paper outlines my own creative writing project: a novel that tells the story not only of the slavery of thousands of Irish during seventeenth century, but specifically the traumatic experience of enslavement of the Irish women and girls sent to Virginia as sex slaves for the planters. I position my trauma narrative within the Irish landscape for two reasons; there are few fictional representations of the story of Irish slavery in the seventeenth century, and Ireland has a rich and unique tradition of storytelling and folklore. In an effort to transform the traumatic experience into a story of survival, I will draw together elements of the history of Irish slavery, the trauma narrative and Irish heroic tales to re-imagine Irish women’s experience as an Irish heroic tale. The paper argues that the power of fiction lies not in holding to the historical facts, impossible when they do not exist, but in creating a living world that gives voice to women whose lives have all but gone unrecognised in history, and that resonates with a contemporary audience.

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