Postcolonial Identity in Ireland: Hybridity, Third Space, and the Uncanny

in Hugo Hamilton’s THE SPECKLED PEOPLE A Memoir of a Half-Irish Childhood and THE SAILOR IN THE WARDROBE

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Abstract

This essay explores and investigates post-colonial identity in Ireland in Hugo Hamilton’s *The Speckled People: A Memoir of a Half-Irish Childhood* (2003) and *The Sailor in the Wardrobe* (2006). Relying primarily on Homi K. Bhabha’s postcolonial criticism, which draws on some ideas from psychoanalysis, this essay argues that the autobiographies resonate well with the ideas of culture as a strategy of survival and of the post-colonial child as an analyst of Western modernity. Thus, three chosen concepts; ‘the Uncanny’, ‘Third Space’ and ‘Hybridity’ work together to reveal a recurring theme of split and duplicity in reference to the colonial past throughout. Furthermore they also reveal that the actual writing of the autobiographies in itself must be regarded as a way of responding to and negotiating that very same split and duplicity in reference to Ireland’s past.
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1. Introduction

My father says we have nothing to worry about because we are the new Irish. Partly from Ireland and partly from somewhere else, half-Irish and half-German. We’re the speckled people, he says, [...] (TSP 7).

A characteristic of post-colonial criticism as Homi K. Bhabha describes it is its specific relation to temporality (Byrne 66). It seems to be a misconception to think that colonization would come to an end at a certain point in time, such as the end of the Algerian War of Independence in 1962 or the formation of the Irish Free State in 1921. Instead Bhabha describes colonization as an ongoing condition, when in The Location of Culture he suggests that

Reading from the transferential perspective, where the Western ratio returns to itself from the time-lag of the colonial relation, then we see how modernity and postmodernity are themselves constituted from the marginal perspective of cultural difference. They encounter themselves contingently at the point at which the internal difference of their own society is reiterated in terms of the difference of the other, the alterity of the post-colonial site. (Bhabha 281)

This process also affects our cultures and our identities, as, according to Bhabha, “what is in-between settled cultural forms or identities – identities like self and other – is central to the creation of new cultural meaning” (Huddart 7). This is also why Bhabha urges us to look critically at modernity again and again, as modernity has attempted to suppress its colonial origins. His project, according to Huddart is “the necessary analysis of modernity to uncover this repression, which perhaps has become even more urgent of late” (Huddart 9).

In her study on Homi K. Bhabha, Eleanor Byrne also emphasizes that the attempt “to account for and find a narrative strategy to address adequately the impact of migration on cultural and national identity remains central to any model of post-colonial Britain” (Byrne 47). She also stresses that “[t]heories of cultural translation and the migrant’s double-vision, of time-lag and belatedness and of the haunting of national narratives by spectral narratives of colonialism, offer significant interrogations of the ways in which writing and living
newness can be possible” (Byrne 47). Following this thinking, the purpose of this essay is to explore and investigate post-colonial identity in Irish writer Hugo Hamilton’s autobiographies The Speckled People: A Memoir of a Half-Irish Childhood (2003) and The Sailor in the Wardrobe (2006).

In these works, Hamilton takes us back to the problematic context of his own post-colonial, cross-cultural childhood and youth in a seemingly homogenous 1950s and 60s Dublin neighbourhood. As the child of an Irish-speaking nationalist father and German mother, young Hugo finds himself at the margins of Anglophone Irish culture and I suggest that the autobiographies resonate both with Homi K. Bhabha’s idea of culture as a strategy of survival and of the post-colonial child as an analyst of Western modernity, and that these processes are at play in Hamilton’s autobiographies (Bhabha 247) (Huddart 8, 78, 93). Questions of identity will therefore be examined through the dual lenses of postcolonial and psychoanalytic criticism, relying primarily on Bhabha’s postcolonial criticism, which draws on some ideas from psychoanalysis. Focus will be on three main concepts. These are ‘the Uncanny’, ‘Third Space’ and Hybridity.’

The uncanny in this context refers to the psychological effect that is attained when a subject is confronted with something that in a very unsettling way feels familiar yet unfamiliar. Such instances, triggered by something that has been repressed but all of a sudden comes back to haunt us, cause a kind of unsettling of one’s identity. ‘Third space’ refers to the actual in-between spaces that emerge between cultures and which also enable marginals to disorder, deconstruct and reconstitute the dominant definitions of belonging and power relations” (Kalscheuer 37). Hybridity is understood as “the result of an identification process by others” and the actual recombination of elements that are rooted in different traditions and that are creatively combined in the interstitial space between cultures” (Kalscheuer 38). Those concepts work together to reveal how “writing and living newness”
manifest themselves in the specific works by Hamilton.
2. Hugo Hamilton

Hugo Hamilton was born Johannes O’Urmoltaigh in Dublin in 1953. He was born into an Irish-German family and was brought up speaking both Irish and German, but was strictly forbidden from speaking English at home. According to Cotta Ramusino Hamilton’s “[…] upbringing was intended to be the answer to live issues of the twentieth century Irish cultural and linguistic debate” (Cotta Ramusino 10). Moulded by on the one hand the politics of Irish cultural nationalism and on the other hand his German background, Hamilton found it very difficult to create an identity of his own. As reported by Fordham News this search for an identity ultimately

[…] led him to reject his parents’ ethnicities and, occasionally his parents as individuals. As he grew older, he did not want to be seen with his father in public because he would be forced to speak Irish. Likewise, he avoided his mother due to the collective shame borne by Germans over the Holocaust. (Fordham News)

That this upbringing must have been traumatic is apparent in the autobiographies and Hamilton himself also confirms this. During an appearance at Fordham University he admitted that: “It’s very good if you’re able to shake hands with your father and come to some sort of agreement or understanding, but he died long before I could have that kind of conversation with him […] and I was well into my 40s before I began to embrace my Germanness again and the German language.” (Fordham News)

Since the publication of his autobiographies, Hamilton has been lauded as an original voice in Irish literature. For example Gouez states that “Hugo Hamilton brings a refreshing new vigour and impetus to Irish literature […]” (Gouez 1). Similarly, Hermione Lee, in her review of The Speckled People in The Guardian, claims that The Speckled People stands up well in the mighty, unending competition for most memorable Irish life-story as it “triumphantly avoids the Angela’s Ashes style of sentimental nostalgia and victim claims”,

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but rather “is more like the early pages of Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist*”, as it is “shaped like a fiction, told as if naively, in the language of a child” (Lee 1).

One could assume that this air of freshness and uniqueness has to do with both his post-colonial Irish perspective and his being the son of a German mother. Additionally, Hamilton left Ireland for Germany in 1970 and did not return until the mid-1980s, which provides him with a simultaneous insider and outsider perspective. As an example Literature in Ireland, which defines itself as “a not-for-profit organization” that promotes Irish writers and writing internationally, claims that Hamilton’s memoirs *The Speckled People* (2003) and *the Sailor in the Wardrobe* (2006), “[a]re informed by an acute awareness of the historical, cultural and linguistic dimensions of his Irish-German inheritance and to many critics offered a long overdue revision of the terms ‘identity’, ‘cultural diversity’, and ‘Irish’ (Literature in Ireland 1).

Apart from the autobiographies, Hamilton has also written six novels and one collection of short stories, three set in Germany and the rest in Ireland. Significantly, they often deal with how personal identity is linked to national identity. Hence, a recurrent theme in Hamilton’s writing is exploration of how identity on the one hand is made up by memory, the past, heritage and nationhood and on the other hand how those are interlinked with home and displacement (Literature in Ireland 1; Cotta Ramusino 10).
3. Post-colonial Ireland

The perception of Ireland as a post-colonial country seems to be controversial or at least complex, as there is still debate as to what degree Ireland can be viewed as having been a British colony. For example, Brenda Murray states that “there exists some difficulty in perceiving it as being ‘post-colonial’ ”regardless of the fact that “Ireland emerged as an independent state as recently as in 1922” and in fact did so “by virtue of the fact that this was sanctioned by a recognition of its 26 counties and borders by other nations (and its former coloniser)” (Murray 18).

According to Joe Cleary, common objections to the conceptualization of modern Irish society in postcolonial terms “take a variety of forms but three broad categories recur with particular frequency” (Cleary 252). As they provide important background I choose to quote him at length.

The first category of objections to Ireland being defined as a postcolonial country

[…] is that the development of twentieth-century Irish society has more in common with other small, peripheral, mainly agrarian European societies than with that of the African and Asian colonies of the British Empire. In these distant overseas colonies, it is argued, the scale of poverty and the levels of violence and racial oppression endured by the colonized peoples were incommensurate with anything experienced in nineteenth or twentieth-century Ireland. (Cleary 252)

However, Murray, who finds obvious connections between the colonization of Ireland and colonization elsewhere based on issues of race, religion and language, asserts that from as early as the 12th century the “[s]ystematic incursions into Ireland by more powerful, and military advanced neighbours” were justified by “the mission of saving the Irish, from themselves […] based on conceptions of barbarism, ignorance, paganism and
inferiority” (Murray 19). Likewise Tomás Mac Símóin, when presenting his hypothesis that “significant sections of the Irish population today suffer from SCIS (Super-Colonized Irish Syndrome)”, emphasizes that “SCIS” has more in common with the similar, if not identical, complexes that afflict peoples who were brutally colonized rather than with the world outlook and psychology of those other nations – such as some of our present European partners […]” (Mac Símóin 40). For the same reason he also emphasizes the common trauma shared by indigenous peoples (Mac Simóin 41).

However, opponents who advance the first category of objections usually also maintain that the problem with Ireland and postcolonial studies is simply that ‘a native population which happened to be white was an affront to the very idea of “white man’s burden’, and threw into disarray some of the constitutive categories of colonial discourse’ (Halloran 1).

This ‘racial factor’ is contradicted by others who see no such distinction. For instance Murray refers to the 12-century Giraldus Cambrensis, who in A Topography of Ireland, “attacks the Irish for “their religion and customs” and describes them as “‘indeed a most filthy race, sunk in vice, a race more ignorant than all other nations of first principles of the faith” (Murray 19). Andrew O’Heir stresses the fact that “[t]he island’s native people, despite their white skin, were viewed as savage and barbaric because they did not speak English, practiced an alien religion and hewed to unfamiliar cultural customs” (O’Heir 1).

Furthermore, both O’Heir and Murray also emphasize Ireland’s unique role as a test case of colonialism. According to O’Heir “Ireland was the original colonized nation, and was subjected to a near-genocidal conquest centuries before the Holocaust. It was where the policies of the British Empire were road-tested for use in India and Africa and where a subject population stripped of property and political rights was then blamed for its own poverty”
Likewise by Murray’s statement regarding the previous quote from *A Topography of Ireland*, 1182 that

> These representations of the ‘uncivilised ‘other’ were early examples of racialisation and Ireland proved to be no exception. Belligerence in the form of uprisings and rebellions were understood as ignorance. This formed the basis of discourses of inferiorisation and colonial history for many centuries […]. Discourses of ‘otherness’ were similarly applied to communities of the Orient at a later date. (Murray 19)

> Nevertheless, it is also against the background of Ireland being a unique ‘test case of colonialism’ the second common category of objections to the conceptualization of modern Irish society in postcolonial terms will have to be considered, as according to Cleary

> […] conceptions of twentieth-century Ireland as a postcolonial society carry an inevitable conservative undertow. To conceive of matters thus, it is suggested, serves conveniently to mitigate Irish responsibility for Irish problems by displacing blame on to an oppressive past or to the United Kingdom. (Cleary 252)

> This kind of reasoning is supported by Liam Kennedy, who denies “[…] Irish aspirations to postcolonial inclusion by inverting the assertion into an argument that actually incorporates Ireland within English centrality” and “even suggests that ‘Ireland in effect, was a junior partner in that vast exploitative enterprise known as the British Empire’ while arguing that Ireland in fact has had and still has a very ambiguous relation to England and the United Kingdom (Kennedy 176). Kevin Kenny draws our attention to the circumstance that “[w]hile ‘Engels described Ireland as England’s first colony’, and critics today ‘frequently characterise it as having a post-colonial society’, Ireland ‘was also a part of the metropolitan core of Empire and supplied many of its soldiers, settlers and administrators’. This dual status results in ‘the paradox that Ireland was both ‘imperial’ and ‘colonial’ “(Kenny 93).

Consequently much of the same “paradoxical involvement in British Imperialism” could also be found domestically. For example when Mac Simóin points at the problematic role of the Catholic Church on Ireland which on the one hand: “filled the
spiritual, cultural and leadership vacuum left by the disappearance of the Gaelic civil order in the 17th century “while on the other hand also “quickly became – hand in hand with the British civil authorities – the major anglicizing force on the island” (Mac Simóin 78).

However, while Murray and in particular Mac Simóin see Irish ‘ambivalence’ as symptoms of colonialism, the third category of common objections to the conceptualization of modern Irish society in postcolonial terms contradicts this as Cleary asserts that

[…] even if it is conceded that Ireland was a British colony prior to the establishment of Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State in the early 1920s, it remains the case that Ireland won its independence quite early in the twentieth century and has long since had ample time to overcome its ‘postcolonial’ legacies and ‘colonialism’. (Cleary 252)

This third category of objections may also be contradicted by those who advance the opinion that even if Ireland no longer is a formal colony, colonialism and its heritage still characterize Ireland. Mac Simóin finds Stockholm Syndrome to be a “highly appropriate” metaphor “to present-day Irish bonding with the English

[…]what better metaphor to present-day Irish bonding with the English by those who never experienced English oppression – with all of its tortures, slaughter of prisoners, hangings, decapitations, rapes, eviscerations, castrations, evictions, coffin ships at first hand?

Apart from rejections of their ancestral language by the present generation of Irish, their submissive emotionally-charged response to members of the British royals and other symbols of British power evidences a Stockholm-syndrome like condition. Visitors note the widespread Irish interest in English sport and popular culture, facilitated by the ready availability in Ireland of British print and electronic media. The huge number of people, along with those of Irish descent, living in Britain and integrated into the British way of life, cannot but strengthen such bonding. (Mac Simóin 122)

Likewise, Murray underlines that there are many reasons to believe that much of what has resulted from centuries of domination lives on in Western ideology of progress and development today. Apart from the inextricable link between the coloniser and the colonies, the latter are to a large extent epistemologically dependent on the former (Murray 18).
In other words, drawing from Murray and Mac Simón, what still characterizes Ireland seems to be what is known as a ‘colonized conscience’ or a ‘colonization of the mind’ which according to Dascal:

[…] may take place through the transmission of mental habits and contents by means of social systems other than the colonial structure. For example, via the family traditions, cultural practices, religion, science, language, fashion, ideology, political regimentation, the media, education, etc. (Dascal 2)

Mac Simón takes this even further, arguing that “the Harp”, i.e. the Irish culture, has been “broken” as a result of three colonizations of the Irish mind even resulting in biological consequences (cf. Mac Simón 165). Accordingly, Mac Simón eventually also comes to the conclusion that “[t]he major obstacle to any serious public engagement with a serious language revitalization project is the wide spectrum of attitudes towards Irish derived from SCIS” and that “[a] thoroughgoing psychological decolonization, impossible though its seems today, would be a necessary preliminary to, or concomitant of, any comprehensive effort to place Irish Gaelic on a seriously viable footing” as

For, without a clear historical perspective of how colonization affected and continues to affect Irish behavior, replacement of the colonizer’s language by the ancestral tongue makes little sense. And the more so especially when the imposed language is the language of the world’s most powerful nation, with a vocation to be the sole universal medium of communication. (Mac Simón 196)

It is important to acknowledge the differences between Ireland and nations usually understood as colonized, as Ireland has been both “colonized” and an agent of Empire. However, it is also the lingering effects of this that make it particularly worth looking at Hamilton’s autobiographies through the dual lenses of postcolonial and psychoanalytic criticism.
4. The Uncanny

The uncanny is the psychological effect that is created when a subject is confronted with something that feels unsettlingly familiar yet unfamiliar. Such instances, triggered by something that has been repressed but all of a sudden comes back to haunt us, cause a kind of unsettling of one’s identity. Even if the English word *uncanny* can be tracked down to old Scottish English, where the old poetic roots of the modern word signified “a mixing of what is at once old and long-familiar with what is strangely ‘fresh’ and new” it is via German and Sigmund Freund that it has developed into what we associate it with today (Royle 12). For example, it was Freud who with his 1919 essay ”Das Unheimliche” established the double significance of the term *heimlich*, as he found that “ […] this word heimlich, is not unambiguous but belongs to two sets of ideas, which are not mutually contradictory, but very different from each other – the one relating to what is familiar and comfortable, the other to what is concealed and hidden (Freud 132). He then drew the conclusion that as a consequence of unheimlich being the antonym of heimlich “[…] the term uncanny (unheimlich) applies to everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away, and has come into open” (Freud 132). In English we also find a similar relation between the words canny and uncanny. Royle maintains that […] in its archaic past, ‘canny’ has already meant its opposite (‘uncanny’) […] “and that “ […] the similarities between English (or Scottish English) and German regarding the ways in which ‘uncanny’ (unheimlich) haunts and is haunted by what is ‘canny’ (heimlich) are themselves perhaps uncanny (Royle 11).

This psychological effect, according to Bhabha also can help describe post-colonial or colonized people's condition as, for example according to Huddart, Bhabha alleges that: “modernity has repressed its colonial origins, origins that install a foreignness within its
identity from the very beginning. What is uncannily revealed, what might better have remained hidden from some perspectives, is that foreignness within the self” (Huddart 93). This must then be understood against the background of Bhabha’s idea about “the reading from the transferential perspective”, which emphasizes that “the Western ratio” is bound to repeatedly return to itself from “the time-lag of the colonial relation.” This also makes modernity and postmodernity “encounter themselves contingently at the point at which the internal difference of their own society is reiterated in terms of the difference of the other, the alterity of the post-colonial site “(Bhabha 281).

In consequence, it is also easy to find numerous examples of uncanny effects or uncanny moments in Hamilton’s autobiographies. When confronted with expressions of “the old Irish culture”, which of course is their own, Irish people in Hamilton’s autobiographies often feel tragically perplexed, lost or threatened. For instance, when first Hugo’s father and then his mother spend weeks walking around Dublin trying to sell party hats that have been imported from Germany but not a single one can be sold, as Hugo’s father insists there will be no deal unless the customers can pronounce his Irish surname correctly.

There is nothing wrong with the party hats and crackers and caramel canes. Everybody says they’re just lovely. The people in the shops and pubs and hotels say they would love to buy them but they can’t. It has nothing to do with them being German or Germany losing the war or what the Nazis did. And it’s got nothing to do with the Irish famine either, or the people of Ireland not having the money to spend on themselves and celebrating and having parties. The problem is the not the party hats and crackers. It’s the name, our family name. My father will not sell anything to anyone unless they say his name properly in Irish. It’s the name that causes all the trouble. The Irish name: Ó hUrmoltaigh. People jump back with a strange expression and ask you to say it again. They don’t really trust anything Irish yet. ‘What’s that in English?’ they ask. (TSP 108)

The state of things depicted in the autobiographies could also be associated with the discussion between Ken Gelder and Jane M Jacobs about the aboriginal experience “[t]he land is both theirs and uncannily not theirs in the wake of European colonization: feted for
having a special relationship with the land and at the same time they must contend with racist exclusion” (Huddart 85). For instance, this phenomenon is made apparent when Hamilton’s mother recollects how she once had to step in and apologize on the half of some boys, the Bradley boys, who kept calling a poor tailor and his wife dirty

My mother spoke to the Bradleys and told them what was happening. Mister Bradley laughed. Missis Bradley said the tailor and his wife were dirty people, living in squalor. My mother was not able to persuade them to control the boys, so she tried something else. The next time they shouted ‘dirty’ in the door, she decided to go in and apologize for them. She stepped inside the cottage and got the smell of poverty coming up from the two old people. She apologized for the children’s behaviour and said she hoped they were not offended. The old people looked up and said nothing, because they didn’t understand English. They could only speak Irish and the Bradley boys started laughing. Even Mister and Missis Bradley found it funny and my mother says the whole town was laughing at the idea of a German woman trying to apologize to the poor tailor and his wife when they only spoke Irish. (TSITW 170)

Hugo’s father maintains that “the Irish people began to pretend they didn’t belong to the same country as the tailor and his wife. They made a foreign language out of their own tongue and that allowed them to become racist against their own people” (TSITW 172).

The feelings of embarrassment or frustration when people are confronted with Irish seem to reveal an affirmation of Byrne’s words:” [t]o feel at home or estranged at the same time, or to feel not at home even when one is at home might be a painfully familiar condition for the colonised or postcolonial subject […]” (Byrne 70).

Thus Hugo’s father also seems to be absolutely right, though not unproblematically so as his own insistence on a certain linguistic Irishness seems to be a chief antagonist, when claiming that

[…] the Irish also went underground against the British. He says they lost their language and now they’re walking around like ghosts, following maps, with invisible streets and invisible place names. He says the Irish are still in hiding in a foreign language. But one of these days they’ll come out and speak their language again. (TSITW 55)
In fact one could very well argue that the old way of being Irish seems to be the uncanny doppelganger of the more modern Irish lifestyle as almost every time that these two ways of living encounter each other it seems to result in different kinds of uncanniness. This reflects Bhabha’s theory about how modernity and post-modernity meet “contingently at the point at which the internal difference of their own society is reiterated in terms of the difference of the other” but also, as Rahimi points out, shows that the combination of E.T. A. Hoffman’s writing and Freud’s analysis has resulted in “a repertoire of lasting themes and metaphors for the uncanny” (Bhabha 196, Rahimi 458). Rahimi mentions but a few when he suggests that

[…] the main tropes of the uncanny, such as doppelgangers, ghosts, déjà vu, alter egos, self-alienations and split personhoods, phantoms, twins, living dolls and many more in this list of ‘things of terror’ typically share two important features in literary and psychological traditions: they are closely tied with visual tropes, and they are alterations of the theme of ‘doubling’ – both of which are associated with the basic questions of ego-development and self-identity. (Rahimi 458)

For that reason it also seems logical that when Hugo and his friends travel to the Aran Islands, the impression conveyed is that of a visual encounter with what is not only geographically but also culturally the other way around

The first thing that we noticed going out to the Aran was the light. It was coming from the opposite direction and felt strange. To us living in Dublin, on the east coast of Ireland, the world seemed turned around a full hundred eighty degrees when we took the boat out from the Galway Islands. The white glimmer of sunlight that we expected to see when coming ashore was right there ahead of us on the way out to the sea. It was like an inverted homecoming […]. (TSITW 147)

Further, it is also evident that the uncanny moments in Hamilton’s biographies also reflect the idea that what people prefer to forget or remember in a post-colonial society can be radically different from official versions of history. Since if most of Hugo’s contemporary Irishmen can be accused of hiding in the English language, Hugo could be considered to be in hiding in Irish or German instead
It’s forbidden to speak in English in our house. My father wants all the Irish people to cross back over into the Irish language so he made a rule that we can’t speak English, because your home is your language and he wants us to be Irish and not British. My mother doesn’t know how to make rules like that, because she’s German and has nothing against the British. She has her own language and came to Ireland to learn English in the first place. So we’re allowed to speak the language of Franz Kaiser, but not the language of John Hamilton. We can speak Irish or German, but English is like a foreign country outside the door. (TSP 12)

In his home and his life English and every imaginable expression of English culture is completely forbidden: “My father pretends that England doesn’t exist. It’s like a country he’s never even heard of before and it’s not even on the map” (TSP 38).

Consequently, the most prominent uncanny examples that involve Hugo are the ones when, in the middle of his home, the suppressed English-oriented Irish ways of life encounter a “contemporary” but still backwards looking Irish way of living and not the other way around.

One of the most notable examples is the account of how Hugo as a young boy is playing in his parents’ bedroom and happens to open his father’s wardrobe, where he makes a peculiar discovery

At first there was nothing much in my father’s wardrobe, only cufflinks, ties and socks. But then we found a big black and white picture of a sailor. He was dressed in a sailor’s uniform with square, white, lapels over his tunic and a rope lanyard hanging down over his chest. He had soft eyes and I liked the look of him. I wanted to be the sailor, even though I had no idea what this sailor was doing in my father’s wardrobe.” (TSP 10)

The portrait seems to threaten Hugo’s sense of self, as it causes him to undergo the feeling of being threatened by something unknown and incomprehensible that is just as enigmatic to the individual as his own psyche usually is as illustrated by the words “I wanted to be the sailor, even though I had no idea what this sailor was doing in my father’s wardrobe” (TSP 11). However, the ongoing visual identification process also seems to reflect what Lacan calls the mirror stage, which according to Huddart “encapsulates what happens in
colonial discourse’s stereotyping productions” and thereby also could function as a “good model for the colonial situation” (Huddart 43).

Although here in post-colonial Ireland and under the circumstances which Hugo finds himself in, it is uncertain who is who; that is to say who is the colonizer and who is the colonized? In any case, the outcome of this type of situations seem to be not only anxiety but also loss of identity as Bhabha also points out that

In the objectification of the scopic drive there is always the threatened return of the look; in the identification of the Imaginarey relation there is always the alienating other (or mirror) which crucially returns its image to the subject; and in that form of substitution and fixation that is fetishism there is always the trace of loss, absence. (Bhabha 81)

Correspondingly this is also what takes place here, as illustrated by Hugo’s reflection that: “[t]he sailor in the wardrobe, with his short haircut and his soft eyes looking away, was not able to talk to us. Even if he was still alive and came to visit us and was ready to tell us all about his travels around the world on those ships, about all the cities and ports he had been to, I could not have asked him any questions” (TSP 13). It is striking that all the questions concerning the background of the sailor will remain unanswered both because the person is dead and cannot answer but also because even if he was alive his means of communication would probably be English, the forbidden language. The story behind it alters Hugo’s identity completely

I had no idea that I had an Irish grandfather who couldn’t even speak Irish. His name was John Hamilton and he belonged to the navy, the British navy, the Royal Navy. He joined up as a boy of fifteen and served on all kind of ships – Defiance, Magnificent, Katoomba, Repulse. He fell on a British naval vessel called HMS Vivid when he was only 28 years of age. He died because he was homesick and lost his memory. But I didn’t know any of that. (TSP 10)

This also mirrors Bhabha’s idea that “what is uncannily revealed, what might better have remained hidden from some perspectives, is that foreignness within the self” as
the sailor in fact is a representative of everything Hugo’s father has taught him to avoid or even hate. At the same time it also reflects the previous quote by Rahimi about how the main tropes of the uncanny tend to be closely tied to sight, and “alterations of the theme of ‘doubling’ which in turn are associated with the basic questions of ego-development and self-identity” (Rahimi 458). It would therefore also be logical to interpret the situation with the sailor in the wardrobe as a situation in which Hugo confronts his father’s uncanny double (cf. Huddart 92).

However, the uncanny also has to do with faculties other than sight, as Royle also calls attention to the fact that

Hoffman’s story suggests uncanniness in the experience of sound, ear and voice. Freud makes no mention of this dimension of ‘The Sandman’. Again it is [the uncanny] a question of something neither thematic nor formal, but rather an eerie performative twisting. (Royle 4)

Significantly, the uncanniest example of all is also one that includes sound, ear and voice. Then for the first time around the table, we realize that he is speaking to us in English. The most basic rule to keep everything British outside the door has been broken by himself. […] We are astonished at how natural he is in this forbidden language. He’s a different man, more relaxed, more like other men in Ireland. Even though we are still afraid to join in, we admire the way he speaks with a soft Cork accent. (TSITW 235)

Not only does this local point in time and the description of it reflect Bhabha’s idea about how the ‘unhomely’ cannot “be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres” (Bhabha 13) it is also easy to recognize in the continued description how there is something unsettlingly familiar yet unfamiliar about hearing which causes the unsettling of identity.

For the first time in my life; I hear him speaking to us in his own language, putting everything in his own words, breathing in English. Up to now he’s always been speaking to us in a foreign language, either in German or in Irish, languages that were never his own. Now he’s speaking to us in his native tongue, the language of his own mother. It’s the language he went to sleep in when he was a boy, the language of stories and songs that he heard when he was growing up. Now I can understand what he really means to say, as if he’s got his voice back after years of exile. It should
be a moment of freedom, but we feel rigid, almost wishing that he would keep to the rules no matter how absurd they have become. Franz is worried that my father might ask him a technical question and he won’t know what language to answer in. We’re still afraid to speak, so we would rather be silent and listen. (TSITW 235)

Though above all it also reflects Bhabha’s idea that “The unhomely moment creeps up on you, stealthily as your own shadow and suddenly you find yourself taking the measure of your dwelling in a state of incredulous terror” (Bhabha 13).

Along with this it is also evident that the autobiographies entail a kind of uncanny tone throughout

When you’re small you can inherit a secret without even knowing what it is. You can be trapped in the same film as your mother, because certain things are passed on to you that you’re not even aware of, not just a smile or a voice but unspoken things, too, that you can’t understand until later when you grow up. Maybe it’s there in my eyes for all to see, the same as it is in my mother’s eyes. Maybe it’s hidden in my voice, or in the shape of my hands. Maybe it’s something you carry with you like a precious object you’re not told to lose. (TSP 18)

The uncanny tone probably owes something to genre, as stated by Royle that ”[i]t is impossible to think about the uncanny without involving a sense of what is autobiographical, self-centred, based in one’s own experience” which in turn implies a “[…] sense of ghostliness, a sense of strangeness given to dissolving all assurances about the identity of a self” (Royle 16). The tone in Hamilton’s autobiographies also seems to be in keeping with his reasoning that

[t]he uncanny is – even (or especially) if inter alia – an experience of writing. And conversely of reading. One tries to keep oneself out, but one cannot. One tries to put oneself in: same result. The uncanny is an experience of being after oneself, in various senses of that phrase. It is the experience of something duplicitous, diplopic, being double. It calls for the regulation of a strange economy, an art of negotiation which presupposes a kind of double talk, double reading, double writing. (Royle 16)

Though most of all the uncanniness seems to be an effect of the unique point of view, which is also extra sensitive to the uncanny, primarily because the text is a product of the process in which Hugo analyses and deconstructs the grand narratives of modernity. While doing so from his position in the margins of modernity, he finds “their ambivalence”
but also “that these margins are an uncanny echo of histories that modernity might prefer had remained hidden” (Huddart 78). Above all as there is nearly always a German alternative or dimension put in contrast to the Irish, as for instance with the portrait of the sailor, where two different grandparents who represent two different cultures are compared.

There’s a picture in the front room of Franz Kaiser and Berta Kaiser with her head leaning on his shoulder, both of them laughing with a big glass of wine on the table in front of them. There’s no picture of John Hamilton or his wife Mary Frances, alone or together, hanging anywhere in our house. Our German grandparents are dead, but our Irish grandparents are dead and forgotten. I didn’t know that the bronze medal I was wearing beside the Iron Cross belonging to my German grandfather came from the British Navy and was given to my Irish grandmother, Mary Frances, along with a small British war widow pension which she had to fight for. I didn’t know that my Irish grandfather, John Hamilton, and my German grandfather, Franz Kaiser, must have stood facing each other in the Great War. Or that my mother and father were both orphaned by that same war. Or that I was wearing the medals of two different empires side by side. I didn’t know the questions to ask. (TSP 12)

Thus the text also reflects the opinion, expressed by Huddart that “[f]or Bhabha, it is possible to compare the childhood of an individual with the beginnings of modern Western history: in both cases, something is repressed but inevitably breaks through the veneer of civilization” (Huddart 78).

To sum up, what is significant and prevalent throughout the texts is the impact of colonialism. The reason for this is that regardless of the fact that in Hamilton’s autobiographies we are no longer in a colonial context, but a post-colonial one, it is nevertheless evident that whenever that “suppressed Western ratio returns to itself from the time-lag of the colonial relation” it also causes uncanny moments (Bhabha 281).
5. Third space

Third space refers to the spaces that emerge between cultures and that “enable marginals to disorder, deconstruct and reconstitute the dominant definitions of belonging and power relations” (Kalscheuer 37). How this is connected to post-colonial theory is explained by Bhabha in *Location of Culture*, where he asserts that

> It is only when we understand that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation [i.e. the third space, my remark], that we begin to understand why historical claims to inherent originality or ‘purity’ of cultures are untenable, even before we resort to empirical historical instances that demonstrate their hybridity. (Bhabha 37)

Bhabha’s position seems in no way to be in conflict with the view that there should exist different national cultures or different cultural characteristics of people belong to certain cultures (Ikas 123). When Bhabha describes the states in the US bordering on Mexico as places where it could be particularly interesting to study the third space phenomena this could only imply that he acknowledges that there are certain general differences between American and Mexican cultures (Ikas & Wagner 6). On the contrary, as Kalscheur states that “[b]y focusing on the ambiguity and uncertainty of articulations, he situates cultures in an uncertain, unstable border zone where articulations are negotiated and cultural hierarchies can be judged anew” (Kalscheuer 38).

In Hamilton’s autobiographies, there are also numerous examples of recollections of what Bhabha refers to as “local points in time” when such negotiations take place (Ikas & Wagner, from Bhabha’s preface 3). For instance, this phenomenon is made apparent when Hamilton takes notice of a story he has been told by his mother about such a “local point in time” when she first, even before she met Hugo’s father, was offered to stay the night in a house on the Irish countryside
Then it started raining and getting dark and she had to find a place to stay quickly. It was raining so much that the water was jumping away from her eyes when she blinked and her shoulders were shivering. She got off the bicycle because it was impossible to go any further. A man pointed to a house that didn’t even look like a guest house, but it was better to stay there because you couldn’t see a thing any more. There was a light on inside and the woman of the house came to the door with lots of children behind her. One girl had her dress in her mouth, all of them staring as if my mother had come in with the rain.

‘It’s not often we see a German woman cycling around these parts on her own,’ the woman said. My mother says you can’t be sure in Ireland if people say things with admiration or not. Irish people are good at saying things in between admiration and accusation, between envy and disdain. She says the woman looked her up and down as if she liked German clothes but didn’t completely trust her.

‘I have come from Lough Derg,’ my mother explained. That made everything right. She was a pilgrim. A pilgrim coming to Ireland to pray for all the bad things that happened in Europe.

In the kitchen they made her sit and eat a meal while they all watched and the man of the house kept asking questions about Germany. Was it in ruins like they said in the papers? She had to describe the cities after the war – Nuremberg, Hamburg, Dresden. The woman of the house kept saying ‘You’re not serious’, but people in Germany wouldn’t make up something like that. The children kept staring. They were so shy that they were afraid to move closer to her. It was like being a film actress. They spoke about her as if she was still in a film. She’ll have some more bread, the man of the house said. She’ll be needing a glass of whiskey, after she was finished eating, as if they had to celebrate the guest who came with the rain.

The man of the house raised his glass with all the children looking up.

‘Heil Hitler,’ he said.

There was a big smile on his face, my mother says, and she didn’t know what to say. Of course, he was only being friendly. It was part of the Irish welcome.

‘Fair play to the Germans,’ he said.

He said the Germans were great people altogether. He kept saying it was a pity they lost because they were a mighty nation. He winked at her with admiration, then left a long silence, waiting to see how she would respond.

‘Fair play to the Germans, for the almighty thrashing you gave the British. Fair play to Hitler for that, at least.’

He was only being hospitable, my mother says, to make her feel at home. She could not argue with him. She was trapped inside German history and couldn’t get out of it. Instead she smiled and said it had been a long journey back from Lough Derg. She thanked them for such a lovely welcome, but said she could no longer keep her eyes open. (TSP 20)

As suggested this example is telling, primarily as it reveals preconceptions, and secondarily how those are renegotiated and thirdly how “cultural hierarchies can be judged anew” (Kalscheuer 38). Thus, what would naturally qualify as the most conspicuous preconception about ‘the other’ would be the Irish family’s tendency to associate Hugo’s mother with World War II, German politics and of course Nazism, exemplified when the man
in the house suddenly says “Heil Hitler”. On the other hand it is also evident that Hugo’s mother harbours some preconceptions as well. Her comment on this sudden greeting (“it was part of the Irish welcome”) together with her reflection earlier when she is complimented for her dress “you can’t be sure in Ireland if people say things with admiration or not” convey the anticipation of a certain expected behavior.

As the meeting proceeds, preconceptions about the other are also renegotiated. The focus in general also seems to change from an obsession with difference: ‘It’s not often we see a German woman cycling around these parts on her own,’ towards a direction where it is possible to find more common ground.

In this regard, what the meeting also reveals is a certain kind of ambivalence that could be traced to Irish identity understood through language, culture and religion and where genuine Irishness equates profession of the Roman Catholic faith as well as serves as marker of a national identity separate from that of the English (Mac Simoin 76). As shown in the quote above, while the German woman undoubtedly is a foreigner and an outsider, she also seems to be an insider as she is a Catholic.

It is likely that the outcome of this particular third space meeting would be, as Kalscheuer suggests, that “cultural hierarchies can be judged anew” (Kalscheuer 38) since the Irish family seems to have entered into the feelings of the German woman while at the same time the Irish family is likely to lay aside some of their confusion as regarding what Germany and being German represents to them and instead has reached a more nuanced understanding. Similarly, it can be assumed that Hugo’s mother must have reached a more nuanced understanding of to what degree Irish identity is based on a post-colonial legacy in general or as in this case on anti-British feelings in particular. Thus, existing national images are unmasked or negotiated in the zone between national cultures.
Nevertheless, associations with Nazis and Nazism tend to be consistent and hard to suppress and the space between Germans and Irishmen tends to easily turn into a space of confrontation and guilt, especially when boys Hugo’s own age are involved.

Sieg Heil, they shout. Actung, Schnell schnell. Donner und Blitzen. I know they’re going to put us on trial. They have written things on the walls at the side of the shop and in the laneways. They’re going to get us one of these days and ask questions that we won’t be able to answer. I see them looking at us, waiting for the day when we’re alone and there’s nobody around. I know they’re going to execute me because they call my older brother Hitler, and I get the name of an SS man who was found in Argentina and brought back to be put on trial for all the people he killed. (TSP 4)

As suggested it is significant how asymmetrical and unequal those situations tend to be, as there in fact seems to be very little or no possibility to renegotiate or detach attachment to Nazism or war crimes from a German identity.

They kept saying we were Nazis until my mother came out and heard them. ‘Heil Hitler,’ they shouted. They were not allowed to say that kind of thing and I looked at my mother to see what she would do. They said it again and laughed out loud, so there was no way that she might not have heard it. She even stopped and looked at them for a moment. But she said nothing. I knew she was biting her lip. I knew by her eyes that she was sad this was happening, but she could not do anything about it. ‘Come on, let’s walk ahead,’ she said. (TSP 85)

Thus, as indicated by the example above, she has already come to the conclusion that”[s]he could not argue with him. She was trapped inside German history and couldn’t get out of it” (TSP 22).

However, what provides Hamilton’s autobiographies with their distinct characteristics is also the fact that Hamilton’s father’s cultural war and strict language policy, which advocates no negotiation with English culture or language, is in profound contrast with Bhabha’s principle of third space as a place for articulation and negotiation and where cultural hierarchies can be judged anew.

The problem is the not the party hats and crackers. It’s the name, our family name. My father will not sell anything to anyone unless they say his name properly in Irish. It’s the name that causes all the trouble. The Irish name: Ó hUrmoltaigh. People jump back with a strange expression and ask you to say it again. They don’t really trust anything Irish yet. ‘What’s that in English?’ they ask.
But you can’t betray your family name. My father says we can’t give the English version, Hamilton, no matter how often they ask for it. We can’t even admit that an English version exists. If they call us Hamilton, we pretend it’s not us they are talking to. Our name is proof of who we are and how Irish we are. We have to be able to make a sacrifice, even if they laugh at us. They can torture us and make martyrs of us and nail us to the cross and still we won’t give in. It would be a lot easier to let them have their way, to give the English name, just to be friendly and make it simple so they’ll buy things. But my father says there can be no compromise. It’s hard for business, but you can’t betray your own name, because if the cheque is made out to Hamilton, he will send it back and not accept until it’s paid in Irish. (TSP 108).

As indicated by the example Bhabha’s principle of a third space, as a place for negotiation, also seems to reflect what is only natural or human or at least as here good for business or survival whereas Hugo’s father’s principle on the other hand stands out as unnatural, inhuman, bad for business and bad for survival. Thus Hugo’s father’s insistence on giving priority to culture over business is also quite the opposite of Bhabha’s idea of culture as a strategy of survival (cf. Bhabha 247).

Besides, as the events are seen from the perspective of a child, the no-negotiation policy that Hugo’s father advocates emerge as extra cruel whereas it also seems to go against natural inborn reflexes to respond to ones surrounding and others, be social and find a common ground.

One day I was playing with the umbrella in the hallway, trying to kill all the coats with one arm behind my back, and Franz was outside on the street with his scooter. He was listening to the trains pulling into the station, waiting for my father to come home. But then he saw some other boys playing on the street with sticks and guns. They ignored him and didn’t call him any names, so he stood there with one foot on and one foot off the scooter, looking at them from a distance, even though he couldn’t join in. They were cowboys fighting and killing Indians. Franz was pretending that his scooter was a horse and that he had a real gun in the side pocket of his lederhosen, until my father came around the corner with his limp and his briefcase swinging. Then Franz turned around and tried to scoot back to the house as far as he could, but it was already too late. […] Franz had to be punished for pretending to be with the other boys on the street.

‘Now why is that?’ my mother asked
‘He was listening to them in English,’ my father said.
‘My God,’ she said. ‘Are you not taking this too far?’
My father shook his head. (TSP 191)
For that reason it is also striking how the no-negotiation policy makes Hugo’s German side of
the family think of Nazism

Tante Marianne said there was nothing wrong with speaking English. But my father shook his
head. He said we were the new Irish children and soon the whole country would be speaking Irish
in the shops. He said children were the strongest weapons, stronger than armies. But then Tante
Marianne had an argument with my father. She said all the things my mother can’t say. She said it
was wrong to use children in war. She kept her arm around Maria all the time as if she was going to
protect her for the rest of her life. ‘In Germany, she said, ‘they used children too’. (TSP 133

His German relatives feel disappointed as they realize that Hugo’s family does not speak
English despite the fact the family is surrounded by it, but instead a language which seems to
be charming but of so little use. They want to learn English, seem blissfully unaware of
Ireland in relation to England and their colonial past and show no understanding of what
Hugo’s father has against the English or the English language.

However, Gerard Wagner remarks Bhabha’s idea “of negotiation” in a third
space “[...] need not be restricted to relations between majorities and minorities nor to those
between residents and migrants” as “[i]n principle, it can be applied to all those cases in
which a dominant definition of national identity is challenged by an alternative that cannot
simply be ignored (Wagner 169). For instance it is striking how Hugo’s father’s ideals clash
with his own Irish side of family in a similar fashion to the German side. An example of this
is how the apple of discord in the following quote seems to be the same as in the row Hugo’s
father had with Tante Marianne

There was an argument at that funeral. When all the people were gathered together, Aunty Eily
came over to my father and spoke to him about how he was raising his children. Even though she
was heartbroken with grief for her son Gerald, she told my father that what he was doing was
wrong. The news was out that my father had stopped allowing his own children to speak English.
Even though she had never been to our house and never travelled out of Skibbereen, she had heard
it from other relatives who came to visit us from West Cork, saying they had met my mother and
tasted her cakes. They said the children were very polite, but that they were afraid. ‘Fearful’ was
the word they used, because each time they asked us a question, we took in a deep breath and were
afraid to answer. After the funeral, Aunty Eily told my father that he should stop what he had started before it was too late. ‘You’ll turn them against you,’ she said. He didn’t listen to her. He smiled and said everybody in Ireland would soon be doing the same. He was leading by example and our family was a model for all Irish families in the future. He would not let anyone to interfere with his mission or say anything about the way that he wanted to run his family. (TSP 73)

To illustrate this further, it is also noticeable that whenever Hugo leaves his house his father’s ideals also seem to clash with the rest of Ireland

Who gave you those poppies?’ I could see that my father hated even saying the word. ‘They’re British army poppies. Who gave them to you?’ ‘Mr Cullen.’ ‘Mr Cullen has no right. I’m going over to have a word with him.’

On the other hand, what is equally important is also that third space is not restricted to a division between a domestic and a public life. On the contrary, being the son of a German immigrant as well as son of an Irish nationalist the third space is also prevalent even at home as illustrated by the example below

There were things they didn’t talk about. She kept her secret and he buried his past as well. He hid the picture of his own father in the wardrobe. He didn’t want to offend her, having photographs of a British sailor hanging in the house. But she had nothing against England. It was not a marriage against anything, but for something new she said. (TSP 41)

It is also within the domestic sphere that it becomes particularly obvious how various national preconceptions or prejudices have a tendency to fall short or even be deconstructed in the third space. Hugo’s father and mother represent totally different attitudes to problems that arise in the domestic life which in turn contradict established conceptions about German and Irish national characteristics. Hugo’s father advocates strict discipline and a keeping of this discipline through corporal punishment while Hugo’s mother prefers discussion and more non-violent solutions. (TSP 77, 94, 223) Besides she is also portrayed as more humorous than Hugo’s father. (TSP 185) Thus the stereotype, as established by
Connelly, “of the aggressive, order-obsessed, military muscle bound German” with no humor seems to be a more appropriate description of Hugo’s Irish father than his German mother. (Connelly 40) While on the contrary Connelly’s stereotype of the “easy going” Irishman with “the ability to mix business and humour to a disarming degree” seems more appropriate as a description of his German mother than vice versa. (Connelly 15) Hamilton has elsewhere commented on their differences, saying that that

Though his parents robustly displayed their ethnicities, their attributes ran counter to traditionally beliefs about Germans and the Irish.
‘Generally, we like to believe that Irish people are very funny; they drink a lot, and we tend to believe that Germans are very straight, honest, serious and that they’re good at making cakes, ‘he said.
‘The cake part was definitely true about my mother,’ he said. ‘But apart from that, all the stereotypes were switched around in my family. My father was the idealist; very rarely did he crack jokes. It was my mother who was the funny one.’ (Fordham News 1)

On the whole, the situation is complex and the complexity of it all could very well be compared to how another Irish writer, Seamus Heaney, once described what growing up in Ireland with conflicting origins was like

The child in the bedroom listening simultaneously to the domestic idiom of his Irish home and the official idioms of the British broadcaster while picking up from behind both signals of some other distress, that child was already being schooled for the complexities of his adult predicament, a future where he would have to adjudicate among prompting variously ethical, aesthetical, moral, political, metrical, sceptical, cultural, topical, typical, post-colonial and taken altogether, simply impossible (Green Collins 193).

Since on the whole it is very easy to recognize a similar kind of complexity, where various irreconcilable opinions and considerations clash around Hugo, as can be seen observed in the following up of the previously mentioned example with the British army poppies

But my mother pulled on his elbow again. She told him that Mr Cullen’s father died in the First World War and we didn’t want to offend him. My father said Mr Cullen was trying to offend us.
Lots of good people died on the German side, too, as well as all the Irish people who died fighting against the British army instead of joining in with them. And what about the people who died in the famine and there are no badges you can get for them. Mr Cullen was mocking us, he said, giving us the poppies on purpose because the Germans lost the war and the Irish lost six counties. My mother says she’s not offended and Mr Cullen is too nice a man to even think of something like that. It’s time to be big-hearted, she says. It’s not important to win. And one day they’ll commemorate all the people who died in those wars, not just their own.

‘They have no children,’ she said.

I was afraid that my father would find out we got chocolate and that would go in the fire, too. (TSP 48)

Along with this it is noteworthy how third space in Hamilton’s memoirs, apart from being a place which makes cultural difference discernible, also brings into focus ideas about "overt" and "covert" culture brought forward by another post-colonial thinker, David Hall, whose approach to intercultural communication, according to Britta Kalscheuer in “Encounters in Third Space” is based on the

[…] assumption that all cultures have an identity of their own, which guarantees that people refer to a common set of values and beliefs. All of these form the material of the covert culture. Unlike the overt culture, elements of the covert culture are not part of individual awareness and reflection. It was Hall’s deepest conviction that cultures hide more than they reveal. (Kalscheuer 29)

As could be illustrated when Hugo’s mother accompanies an Irish woman to a dancehall, which in turn triggers of a chain reaction of thoughts

My mother said Irish dancing was not like waltzing or any kind of dancing that she had ever seen before. She said in Ireland your feet never ever touch the ground. […] She says it was funny, a German woman pushing an Irish woman out to dance against her will. She says it’s hard to understand what’s going on in people’s heads in Ireland. She says Irish people dance with their heads and speak with their feet. Everybody knows what’s inside everybody else’s head, but nobody ever says it out loud. They like to keep everything inside. She says German people say what they think and Irish people keep it to themselves and maybe the Irish way is sometimes better. In Germany, she says, people think before they speak so that they mean what they say, while in Ireland, people think after they speak so as to find out what they mean. In Ireland the words never touch the ground. (TSP 56)
While Hugo's mother seems capable of distinguishing cultural differences, she also appears unable to figure out or come to terms with the codes as such. In other words, a study of third space in Hamilton undoubtedly supports Hall’s statement that “[e]ach culture has a hidden code of behaviour that can rarely be understood without a code breaker. Even though culture is experienced personally […], it is nonetheless a shared system. Members of a common culture not only share information, they share methods of coding, storing, and retrieving that information” (Kalscheuer 29). Although Hugo’s mother has spent some time in the spaces between German and Irish culture she still is not fully capable of understanding the latter.

She doesn’t understand Ireland sometimes, because they like strange things like pink cakes and soft ice cream and salt and vinegar. They spend all their money on First Holy Communion outfits. They don’t like serving people and they don’t like being in a queue either, because when the bus comes they forget about the rules and just rush for the door. The bus drivers in Ireland are blind and the shopkeepers don’t want to sell things to you. The butcher has a cigarette in his mouth while he’s cutting the meat, and nobody knows how to say the word no. In Ireland they nod when they mean no, and shake their heads when they’re agreeing with you. She says it’s like in the films, when somebody looks up with a worried face and says one thing, it means the opposite is going to happen. When somebody says nobody is going to come out alive and that they’re all going to die, then at the last minute somebody comes along to the rescue. And when everybody at the bus stop begins to say that the buses have stopped running, along comes the bus at last and they all rush forward to get on. (TSP 98)

Finally, third space in Hamilton’s memoirs emerges in the domestic as well as in the public sphere as a result of Ireland’s colonial past and its consequences. The reason for this is that there are numerous different “idioms” which tend to represent contradictory explanations of what kind of country Ireland is, why and in what direction it ought to be heading which in turn cause rifts. The situation is further complicated by the German culture versus Irish culture dimension. The cultural differences that become discernible at those particular moments “when the cultural differences are not fixed but negotiated in the moment of enunciation” are what constitute the actual third space (Kalscheuer 38). However, at the
same time as we can take notice of a tendency towards different generalizations as a result of third space situations we also see how various preconceptions or prejudices have a tendency to fall short or even be deconstructed in the third space.

6. Hybridity.

Bhabha suggests that all cultures are constantly changing or translating themselves in order to adjust to other cultures or different representatives of the cultures that they encounter. Bhabha also refers to this translation as ”hybridity” or even ”hybridization”, as he wants to emphasize its ongoing nature. According to Bhabha, “[t]he excercise of colonial authority requires the production of differentiations, individuations, identity effects through which discriminatory practises can map out subject populations” that are “tarred with the visible and transparent mark of power” (Bhabha 158). Bhabha explains it in the following way

Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is the discriminatory identities that secure the ‘pure’ and original identity of authority). Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identification in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. (Bhabha 112)

When looking at Hamilton’s biographies for hybridity, what is really striking is the shifting of identities that the three generations of men in the Hamilton family go through, which can be seen as signs of the productivity of colonial power.
The first case is the one that involves Hugo’s grandfather, who lived during what we must assume to be the late colonial and probably the very early post-colonial period in Ireland. He has lost or changed or “translated” a great deal of what we associate with “genuine Irish culture” and “genuine Irish identity”, and adapted British culture and a British lifestyle.

Importantly he is not fully British but still Irish, but something in between. Yet he is also neither, as he does not seem to fit neatly into any category. For example, we learn that it was not popular around West Cork to have a father in the Royal Navy, which supports that he must have been regarded as a kind of traitor. However, at the same time we also learn that his widowed wife had to “pray and fight for a pension from the British Navy, no matter how long it took”, despite the fact that “he fell on a British naval vessel called HMS Vivid when he was only 28 years of age” (TSP 12, 170). Consequently he is neither Irish nor British but should rather be perceived as someone who, “unsettles the narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identification in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power” (Bhabha 112).

It should also be taken into account that the cultural transformation that Hugo’s grandfather exemplifies is not especially subversive but fits into the practice of colonial history and narrative. Even if the hybridization process includes displacement, distortion, and dislocation of culture it is not really a threat to the traditional colonial discourse.

Nevertheless, according to Bhabha

It is crucial to remember that the colonial construction of the cultural (the site of the civilizing mission) through the process of disavowal is authoritative to the extent to which it is structured around the ambivalence of splitting, denial, repetition – strategies of defence that mobilize culture as an open-textured, warlike strategy whose aim ‘is rather a continued agony than a total disappearance of the pre-existing culture’. (Bhabha 163)
Thus as we move on to the second case of hybridity, the one that Hugo’s father represents, we first of all see a disavowal of the previous hybrid identity. Having been ridiculed for having a father in the Royal Navy and having experienced how little the British authorities cared about his mother as a widow, he ends up hating and rejecting everything British including his own hybrid father.

Based on his own family trauma, Irish history and the opinion that “they were not beyond British law as they were still depending on Britain for their jobs and still speaking English” Hugo’s father certainly takes drastic measures (TSP 37)

So when the time came, my father jumped. He didn’t emigrate or drink whiskey or start making up stories either. Instead he changed his name and decided never to be homesick again. He put on a pioneer pin and changed his name from Jack to Seán and studied engineering and spoke Irish as if his home town didn’t exist, as if his own father didn’t exist, as if all those who emigrated didn’t exist. (TSP 37)

He is determined to reject his father and the hybridity he represents and instead become something completely different, even different from the other people in his home town. Yet he keeps the photograph of his father in his uniform and his medals, which also indicates ambivalence.

It is also possible to find a total increase of the cultural product as he takes things a step further as it is not only himself Hugo’s father wants to change, he also wants to reverse the hybridity process in Ireland in general

De Vesci Terrace, Albert Road, Silverchester Road, Neptune Terrace, Nerano Road, Sorrento Road. Royal Terrace became Ascal Rioga, because money and profit were not everything, he said. On Sundays we walked everywhere to make sure that we covered them all. He told us about the great Irish poets and scholars who once lived in Munster where he came from, among them his own grandfather who was known as Tadhg Ó Donnabhain Dall, or Ted O’Donovan Blind. When the names of people and places all over Ireland were changed into English, all those poets and Irish speakers lost their way and suddenly found themselves in a foreign land. He told us how they all went blind overnight, stumbling around in the dark with no language. And now it was time to change back to Irish so the people knew where they were going again. (TSP 114)
However, in the post-colonial situation the cultural damage is already done, as everything that occurs in the third space occurs after “the traumatic scenario of colonial difference” (Bhabha 153). As a consequence a longing for a prior or archaic Irish culture or identity is in itself a blind alley. In other words, the belatedness that determines the colonial or postcolonial situation implies that “the colonial presence is always ambivalent split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference” (Bhabha 153).

For that reason it is also worth noting that a typical characteristic in Hugo’s memoirs is that negotiations or translations often seem ironic or paradoxical, especially on those occasions when Hugo’s father is involved. As a result we can also see how Hugo’s father is sometimes perceived by others, even the ones he so desperately wants to identify with, as a funny character, almost like an Irish Don Quixote, a Domhnall O’ Chaoithótaidh whose struggle seems antiquated and pointless. For example when on holiday in Connemara

They drank whiskey and smoked pipes and passed around plates of ham sandwiches. It was a great night because nobody was laughing at the Irish language, except one woman who disagreed and said nobody could live on their imagination forever. It was no use being poor, the woman suddenly said, and everyone in the house went so quiet that you could hear the turf hissing in the fire and someone’s stomach murmuring. The woman said she was sick to death of seeing people coming down from Dublin for their holidays and all they wanted was the people in Connemara to stay living in thatched cottages with no toilets inside. What was the use in speaking Irish if you couldn’t put food on the table? (TSP 179)

The irony or paradox to be found in situations like these reflect Bhabha’s opinion that “[t]he question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a self-fulfilling prophecy – it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image” (Bhabha 75). Besides, Huddart states that “[f]or [Franz] Fanon, as for Bhabha, although fixed identities may seem to offer stability and certainty, in fact they merely produce an idealization which we can never be identical, and so in fact they introduce alienation into our sense of self” (Huddart 29).
In spite of his preference for “fixed identity”, Hugo’s father’s complexity is visible on several levels. Accordingly on the one hand he is looking into the future as he advocates a new Ireland and on the other hand he is looking backwards, dreaming of an Ireland that once was or he imagines has existed.

But then my father made a speech in Irish that made everybody hold their glasses up in the air to him. He said he could see the woman’s point of view and it was no fun to be poor, but that’s why people in Dublin were busy making a sacrifice too, so that Ireland could live on in its own inventions and its own imagination. And in the end he turned the argument around to say that toilets inside the house and food on the table were no good if you lost the language. Your stomach could be full but your heart would be empty. (TSP 179)

It is probably also against the background of a reluctant understanding of the impossibility of a total reversal that we should comprehend the German-Irish project. My father pretends that England doesn’t exist. It’s like a country he’s never even heard of before and it’s not even on the map. Instead, he’s more interested in other countries. Why shouldn’t we dance with other partners as well, he says, like Germany? So while he was still at university he started learning German and listening to German music – Bach and Beethoven. Every week he went to classes in Dublin that were packed out because they were given by Doctor Becker, a real German. He knew Germany was a place full of great music and great inventions, and one day, he said to himself, Ireland would be like that too, with its own language and its own inventions. Until then, he said, Ireland didn’t really exist at all. It only existed in the minds of idealists looking forward. Far back in the past or far away in the future, Ireland only existed in songs. Then he started making speeches. (TSP 38)

At first sight this idea might seem far-fetched but this only signifies another stage of development in the hybridity process, as those ideas also seem to be structured around the same ambivalence of splitting, denial, repetition – strategies of defense that we have seen before. Specifically as it seems as if Hugo’s father on the one hand seems to “mobilize culture as an open-textured, warlike strategy whose aim ‘is rather a continued agony than a total disappearance of the pre-existing culture’ “ and on the other hand follow a familiar binary structure where German and Irish culture seem to be thought of as an opposite
pole to English culture according to a kind of fuzzy the enemy of my enemy is my friend logic (Bhabha 163).

Additionally the German- Irish project might not be as farfetched as it seems as for example Hernández suggests that “[…] creative hybridity is not a sign of inappropriateness but a strategy of resistance, the means through which they retain various aspects of their cultural identity instead of being fully absorbed (disappearing) […]” into the culture of the other (Hernández 68). Consider for example the threat of a mix between German and Irish culture theoretically pose to the discourse, as stated by Connelly, constructed around “the image of the wild, uncivilised Irishman” or the contrast between “John Bull” who “embodied the virtues of the hardworking, individualistic, law-abiding Englishman, while the Paddy was his polar opposite, unruly, drunken, brawling, superstitious and lazy” (Connelly 16). Essentially since an involvement of another component will “open up an interstitial space of negotiation […] “(Hernández 69).

On the other hand, a “strategic reversal” of this kind will not lead to “an erasure of existing structures of power, or power itself” as “inequality is not eliminated but the articulation of power is equivocal, contradictory” (Hernández 69). Thus, as already may have been anticipated, when Hugo is in his late teens, his father also seems to understand that the strategy for which he has sacrificed himself and his family was not as successful as he thought and changes strategy again

My father knows he’s lost the language war because he’s behaving more like other fathers now. He bought a television set and started watching programmes in English like the detective who pretends he knows nothing. He got a car too, and buts petrol in English and even eats biscuits that are not made by mother. Sometimes he looks like he's tired of fighting and tired of making sacrifices all his life, and he’s sad because he might not as well have bothered. There's no point in keeping the waves back any more. He says he made mistakes. It's not easy to say that you lost, but he came to me one day and shook hands and said he wished he could start all over again because he would make different mistakes this time. Sometimes if you lose everything is wrong. If you win everything is right. (TSP 281)
Nevertheless, even if Hugo’s father eventually seems to realize how difficult it is to fully undo colonial discourses, what he has accomplished has not been a complete waste of time. Specifically as according to Hernández

[t]he unequal distribution of power persists as an inevitable characteristic of cultural relations (past and present) [...] “the outcome of his creative hybridity will be that “[…] the ambivalence inherent in both the discourse and the exercise of power […] “ will complicate the “readability“ even further and thus “ […] ambivalence makes hierarchical structures difficult to maintain. (Hernández 70)

Presumably it is also from this point of view that we should understand the entire idea about having a speckled identity

My father says we have nothing to worry about because we are the new Irish. Partly from Ireland and partly from somewhere else, half-Irish and half-German. We’re the speckled people, he says, the ‘brack’ people, which is a word that comes from the Irish language, from the Gaelic as they sometimes call it. My father was a schoolteacher once before he became an engineer and breac is a word, he explains that the Irish people brought with them when they were crossing over into the English language. It means speckled, dappled, flecked, spotted, coloured. A trout is brack and so is a speckled horse. A barm brack is a loaf of bread with raisins in it and was borrowed from the Irish words hairin breac. So we are the speckled-Irish, the brack Irish. Brack home-made bread Irish bread with German raisins. (TSP 7)

What is more, speckled or breac seems to express the creative process of hybridization that we are dealing with here in a nice metaphor, not only as it suggests unlike elements being mixed but also as a closer look at how the word breac is used in Irish and deployed here seems to indicate that what Hugo’s father is up to is to sprinkle or scatter German identity over Irish identity. In other words, rather than replacing Irish elements with German, he could be seen as simply adding elements.

Furthermore a speckled identity also reflects Bhabha who suggest that “[h]ybridity as a cultural condition, allows minority positions to deploy the partial culture
from where they emerge and, so, to construct their own visions of community and their own version of historic memory” (Hernández 70).

It is also with this idea about a space for the minority that we approach the last stage or case of hybridity, the one that begins with Hugo, whose platform in life is quite different from that of his forefathers. Involuntarily put in a position in the “imprecise position on the margins of cultures” but also as at the front of Irish politics, life becomes exceptionally complex, as there are rules to follow indoors as well as outdoors” (Hernández 72). On account of this Hugo also finds himself in an in-between position, juggling with languages and cultures

So we have to be careful in our house and think before we speak. We can’t speak the words of the Garda or the workers, that’s English. We speak Áine’s words from Connemara, that’s Irish, or my mother’s words that’s German. I can’t talk to Áine in German and I can’t talk to my mother in Irish, because she’ll only laugh and tickle me. I can talk to my father in German or Irish and he can speak to the Garda and the workers for us. Outside, you have to be careful too, because you can’t buy an ice pop in German or in Irish, and lots of people only know the words of the Garda and the workers. My father says they better hurry up and learn Irish fast because we won’t buy anything more in English. (TSP 28)

Moreover with this kind of cultural war and with this kind of “speckled” identity, Hugo finds he is different from the majority of other Irish people as well as the majority of Germans. Here we should take into consideration Byrne’s claim that

Cultural hybridity is theorised as the result of the continual process of translation which is internal to any culture, which in turn stems from an apprehension of cultural difference. The translator acknowledges difference, and cannot avoid drawing attention to the otherness internal to any symbol-forming activity or signifying practise. (Byrne 33)

As a result a most natural reflex is the one that is expressed by him where he asserts that

[…] we’re aliens and we’ll never be Irish enough, even though we speak the Irish language and my father says we’re more Irish than the Irish themselves. We have speckled faces, so it’s best to stay inside where they can’t get us. Inside we can be ourselves (TSP 7)
However, as he is supposed to pursue his father’s plan for the ideal Ireland “[h]e said we were the new Irish children and soon the whole country would be speaking Irish in the shops […] [h]e said children were the strongest weapons, stronger than armies” staying indoors the rest of his life is not an option (TSP 133). With a mother and father who robustly display their ethnicities, he finds no understanding for such impulses. On the contrary they want him to be proud of his hybrid identity, which of course is fine with young Hugo

So my brother and I ran out wearing lederhosen and Aran sweaters, smelling of rough wool and new leather, Irish on top and German below. We were indestructible. We could slide down granite rocks. We could fall on nails and sit on glass. Nothing could sting us now and we ran down the lanes faster than ever before, brushing past nettles as high as shoulders. (TSP 2)

As Hugo becomes older this hybrid identity also becomes an increasingly major problem as this wish from his parents contrasts with his own wish to blend in with the majority “But you don’t want to be special. Out there in Ireland you want to be the same as everyone else, not an Irish speaker, not a German or a Kraut or a Nazi” (TSP 3). As a consequence, Hugo is torn, as he on the one hand feels loyal to his parents’ or his father’s ideals but on the other feels that if he is loyal he will not fit in with the people around him. This conflict emerges when Hugo has started going to a new all-Irish school in Dublin where everything is done through Irish

He asked me to read out a piece in a book and the whole class had to listen. He said it was a miracle how a Dublin boy could become so Irish. He escaped out of the classroom and took me by the hand, flying down the stairs three at a time and leaving all the boys behind fencing with rulers. He said I had to go around and read in front of the whole school. I had to go to every classroom and show them what a native speaker was like, and the principal said I should be on television as an example of how history could be turned back. Everybody was proud of me and I liked being Irish. But I knew all the boys in the school were laughing at me. Nobody really wanted to be that Irish. If you wanted to have friends you had to start speaking to yourself in English, so that nobody would call you a mahogany gaspipe or a sad fucking sap or think that you were from Connemara long ago. You’d never get into the Waverly Billiard Hall speaking Irish. You had to pretend that you had no friends who lived long ago like Peig Sayers. You had to laugh at Peig Sayers so that nobody would suspect you were really Irish underneath. You had to pretend that Irish music and Irish dancing were stupid and Irish words smelled like onion sandwiches. You had to pretend that you were not afraid of the famine coming back, that you didn’t eat sandwiches made by your own
mother and that you had an English song in your head at all times. You had to walk down O’Connel Street and pretend that you were not in Ireland. (TSP 235)

His feelings seem to correspond with the way Byrne describes the situation for the third generation Indian - American population in Jumna Lahiri’s Pulitzer Prize winning collection of short stories The Interpreter of Maladies. They are people “whose affiliations to home and locations of their identities” according to Byrne are “marked by ambivalence (Byrne 15). Also expressed by Lahiri herself in “My Two Lives” in the following way

When I was growing up in Rhode Island in the 1970’s I felt neither Indian nor American. Like many immigrant offspring I felt intense pressure to be two things, loyal to the old world and fluent in the new, approved of on either side of the hyphen. Looking back I can see that this was generally the case. But my perception as a young girl was that I fell short at both ends, shuttling between two dimensions that had nothing to do with one another. (Lahiri)

Notably neither/nor is also, as suggested above, typical for the outcome of hybridity. Equally typical is, as was also suggested above, “the process of disavowal”, which is structured around the ambivalence of splitting, denial, repetition – strategies of defence that mobilize culture as an open-textured, warlike strategy whose aim “is rather a continued agony than a total disappearance of the pre-existing culture” (Bhabha 163).

Consequently, on the whole, Hugo’s hybridity process also seems to be about that shuttling between different cultural belongings on account of his sensitiveness and reluctance to be different from the majority, which results in the various and frequent different kinds of negotiations with inheritance that are recurrent themes in Hugo’s memoirs. This phenomenon can be observed when looking at the following quotes: “I don’t want to be German I said” (TSP: 227), “After that we tried to be as Irish as possible” (TSP 230) or

Myself and my brother Franz wanted to be insiders from now on, like everyone else in Ireland, so we decided to try and find some way of getting in with them. I started practising English on my own saying things to the wall like ‘What are you lookin at?’ I rehearsed conversations out loud in my room, threatening to kick the shit out of the wardrobe and telling the door to watch out or else I
would go over and straighten his face for him. I even practised the walk that they had around our place that my mother calls the ‘Glasthule Swagger’. I stopped to glance sideways at myself in the mirror before going out. I was the hard man of the house and I felt as real as anyone else out there. (TSITW 43)

…or

So then we try to be Irish. In the shop we ask for the ice pop in English and let on that we don’t know any German. We’re afraid to be German, so we run down to the seafront as Irish as possible to make sure nobody can see us. We stand at the railings and look at the waves crashing against the rocks and the white spay going up into the air. We can taste the salt on our lips and see the foam running through the cracks like milk. We’re Irish and we say ‘Jaysus’ every time the wave curls in and hits the rocks with a big thump.

‘Jaysus, what the Jaysus,’ I said.
‘Jaysus, what the Jaysus of a big huge belly’ Franz said, and then we laughed and ran along the shore waving our fists. (TSP 5)

In other words and seen from that perspective, Hugo’s hybridity, at least within the memoirs also seems to be less productive or creative or at least different in comparison to his father’s. For while Hugo’s father appears as a determined person with an ambition Hugo does not have. As the constant shuttling between identities indicates, young Hugo is incapable of combining elements from different cultures and remains a neither/nor character in the course of time set out in the autobiographies. He cannot embrace and live with his speckled identity the way it was intended.

Although, while Hugo’s hybridity in the autobiographies may appear less creative, there are also more creative ideas boiling under the surface

There are things you inherit from your father, too, not just a forehead or a smile or a limp, but other things like sadness and hunger and hurt. You can inherit memories you’d rather forget. Things can be passed on to you as a child, like helpless anger. It’s all there in your voice, like it is in your father’s voice, as if you were born with a stone in your hand. When I grow up I’ll run away from my story too. I have things I want to forget, so I’ll change my name and never come back. (TSP 37)

Thus it is also striking how Hugo, unlike his father who once changed his name to an Irish name, now wants to change his Irish name into an English name, unlike Hugo’s father, who wants to maintain difference, in line with Bhabha’s thoughts that minorities “[…] do not aim to reduce but to maintain difference as an inherent characteristic of all cultures”, in
contrast we here see the opposite desire to obliterate difference (Hernández 71). To put it another way, his productivity is same but different.

Notwithstanding these observations from within the text it is also clear that the writing in itself is the product of third space as a means of negotiating and sorting out identity and thus also could be regarded as a result of creative hybridity. Commenting on his biography *The Speckled People A Memoir of a Half-Irish Childhood* in an interview in the TV program “En bok en författare” on Swedish Television Hamilton claims that

I think, up to the time that I wrote this story I was the victim of this story. And the story was always being told by my father, or it was being told by my mother or being told by the people on the street outside. So I was just this helpless victim running around between all these different versions. And it’s only as a writer that I’ve actually claimed the story for myself I think that is the great liberation of any storytelling. That sort of silence that was cast over the whole family that has now been lifted by this book.

To sum up, hybridity in Hamilton’s memoirs becomes visible when looking at the three generations of Hamiltons and their different approaches and creative ways of responding to the colonial context they experience and have to negotiate.
7. Conclusion

It is safe to say, after looking at Hugo Hamilton’s *The Speckled People* (2003) and *the Sailor in the Wardrobe* (2006) through the dual lenses of postcolonial and psychoanalytic criticism, that the autobiographies resonate both with Homi K. Bhabha’s idea of culture as a strategy of survival and of the post-colonial child as an analyst of Western modernity, and that these processes are at play in Hamilton’s autobiographies.

The three chosen concepts worked together to reveal a recurring theme of split and duplicity in reference to the colonial past throughout.

The uncanny showed to what extent and how strong the impact of colonialism in the Irish society actually is and how the repercussions of it still pose a threat to Irish families and the Irish identity in ways which could be hard to understand otherwise. Different Irish families and different Irish individuals have their own past heritage which they either prefer to hide away and forget or on the contrary put on a pedestal and emphasize. However, the point is that these things can only remain hidden for so long, as is indicated by the ”Sailor” who is a kind of doppelgänger

The result of the study of third space in Hamilton’s autobiographies also showed how shattered Ireland really is due to its colonial past. The reason for this were the numerous different idioms that tend to represent contradictory explanations of what kind of country Ireland is, why and in what direction it ought to be heading, which in turn cause rifts between people. Aside from this the situation is even further complicated by the German culture versus Irish culture dimension.

Finally, a closer study of hybridity resulted in revealing how the three generations of Hamilton and their different approaches and creative ways of responding to the
colonial context they experience and have to negotiate could be regarded as signs of colonial productivity but also a “strategy of survival” (Bhabha: 247).

Another aspect that likewise underlines the thesis of this essay is that the three chosen concepts also worked together to reveal that the actual writing of the autobiographies in itself must be regarded as a way of responding to and negotiating the very same split and duplicity in reference to the colonial past.
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