



# Stewart Parker's Belfast: Babylon or New Jerusalem?

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### **Stewart Parker’s Belfast: Babylon or New Jerusalem?**

Pentecost, a play by Stewart Parker (1941-1989), even if written in 1987, stages five characters imprisoned in a house because of the Loyalist Workers Council’s strike which brought down the Executive of the power-sharing government in Northern Ireland in 1974. Parker, though reared in a Protestant working-class family, gives a critical insight into this event which he qualified to be the worst Northern Ireland ever experienced. His play is set in Belfast, more precisely in Ballyhackamore, a Protestant area in the east of the city. The notion of space is indeed essential in this part of the globe where the two communities, i.e. Protestant and Catholic, have felt dispossessed for centuries and have since tried to define their territories through flags, colours and murals.

Parker is undoubtedly aware of the territorial stakes of his own community, since it seems that, behind the labels “Catholic” and “Protestant”, lays a race for territory dating back to the seventeenth century. Effectively, since the Plantations, the British colons had considered themselves to be the descendants of the Jews from The Bible and turned to the Scriptures to justify their conquests. Similarly, the Irish thought they could be assimilated to the Israelites since, like them, they had been dispossessed and deprived of their land, as can be read in the introduction to The Authorized Version of the King James Bible:

To Oliver Cromwell, fighting against Catholics in Ireland, it seemed no less appropriate to justify the brutal obliteration of Catholic society and, if necessary, the massacre of his opponents, by supporting the Protestant Plantation in Ulster with images of the Israelites occupying Canaan appropriated from the book of Joshua. To the Catholic Gaelic Irish of the same period, it seemed equally obvious to compare their sufferings with the

‘children of Israel in Egypt under the oppression of the enemies of God’, a reciprocity of images that has prompted Conor Cruise O’Brien to comment that one could say Ireland was inhabited not really by Protestants and Catholics but by two sets of imaginary Jews (xxxix, xl).

At the end of the twentieth century, the situation had grown into a more or less similar situation. Therefore, at that time, both Northern-Irish communities had inherited this propensity to see themselves as biblical victims, leading the Province to become a sort of Israel and Belfast a sort of Jerusalem. Within Parker’s play, the audience will find this parallel between the two capital cities. But, Belfast, eaten up by the flames of the Troubles, is undeniably compared first to Jerusalem as depicted in The Old Testament, then to Babylon, the great harlot and the place of sins as seen in The New Testament. Nevertheless, thanks to the various revelations of his characters, the author’s native city becomes a place where God might triumph some day, thus drawing a clear parallel with New Jerusalem, the town of God according to the book of Revelation.

In Pentecost, the action takes place in 1974, which means 6 years after the beginning of the Troubles, which inspired Stewart Parker to depict Belfast like a chaotic city in the midst of a war in which some members of two communities face each other.

It is first the house in which the characters enter the one after the other which is described as decaying. The author writes in the stage direction:

The kitchen in particular is cluttered, almost suffocated, with the furnishings and bric-à-brac of the first half of the century, all of the original fixtures still being in place. But in spite of now being shabby, musty, threadbare, it has all clearly been the object of a desperate, lifelong struggle for cleanliness, tidiness, orderliness-. (171)

This house, like the city it is in, does not seem to be too much welcoming since, one of the author's main characters, Lenny Harrigan, stresses that, though a refuge for another character, Marian, it is located in the centre of the conflict:

Ach, for Jesus' sake come off it, Marian, you can't possibly live in this gaff, it's the last house on the road left inhabited!- the very road itself is scheduled to vanish off the map, [...] not to mention the minor detail that it's slap bang in the firing line, the Prods are all up in that estate (*Gesturing towards the back of the house.*) the Taigs are right in front of us, anyway look at it- it's reeking of damp, there's five different layers of wallpaper hanging off the walls...  
(179)

Later on, Lenny will add that it is not only one area which has been affected but the whole city since it is surrounded by barricades and infested with soldiers. He explains to his best friend, Peter, that he would like to leave Northern Ireland, but he physically cannot:

Nothing to keep me here now. Apart from three hundred –odd street barricades, and thousands of hooded men with clubs. (202)

This recent disorder is not without recalling others such as the one which took place during the Second World War, and, which the original occupant of the decaying house, Lily Matthews, lived throughout. Marian, after reading the diary she left when she died, remembers for her the time when the bombs rained over Belfast:

Lily sat in that parlour, right through the Blitz. Alfie [her husband] was a fire warden, out most nights- she promised him she'd stay down in the cellar during the air- raids, instead of which she sat up in that front parlour, in the blackout, the pitch dark, listening to the war in the air...the bombers and the fighters, the ack-ack and the shells falling, falling and exploding... [...] and her ears roared now with the rage of a wholesale slaughter, pounding the

ground under her and the air all round her, Armageddon, random and blind, pulverising her whole body [...] and she composed herself to die there, waiting for the chosen bomb to fall on her... (237)

Previously, Lily, as, now a ghost, sometimes appears to frighten Marian away, had also reminded her and the audience that Belfast had also undergone the War of Independence in 1921, and that her own house was engulfed in flames:

Three years of sacrificing for every little stick we possessed, all that we had managed to scrape together, destroyed in the one night, it's a mercy we even lived through it, me crouched in there, in that pantry, crying out for the Lord Jesus to deliver us, Alfie out in the yard trying to block up the back door, but they come over the wall and bate him senseless to the ground and on into this very kitchen roaring and rampaging like the cruel heathens they were, smashing through those gas mantles with their clubs and cudgels till the whole house went up. [...] Smoke and ashes, scorched walls, water flooded everywhere...my beautiful house... [...] every wee thing we'd saved up for ruined in the one night. By a pack of Fenian savages! (182-183)

For centuries first, the Irish had struggled to get their land back. Then, from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. since the isle has been divided, 1921 to be more precise, some Catholics, the nationalists and the IRA have violently fought to reunify both parts, North and South. A first parallel can thus be established between Belfast and Jerusalem, since this capital city has also been repeatedly destroyed by recurring wars involving the possession of land.

In The Old Testament, we can read that, before the reign of David, Jerusalem was independent. Once he had conquered it, David decided to make Jerusalem the political as well as the religious centre of the people of God (i.e. the Hebrews). When Ezechias became King

in 727 BC, he signed an alliance with Egypt and with Merodach Baladan, then King of Babylon. In 601, Nabuchodonosor (Nebuchadnezzar), the son of the latter, entered Judea to consolidate his father's power. He captured and carried away to Babylon certain notables of Jerusalem, together with Daniel, the young prophet. The next king, Joakim, did not agree with this Babylonian bondage, but his son Joachin (Jehoiachin), surrendered to Nabuchodonosor, and gave him the city which was despoiled. Moreover, 10,000 inhabitants, the king included, were taken to Babylon (2 Kings 24:1-16). However, Joachin's successor, Sedecias, rebelled against his sovereign in 596 BC (2 Kings 24:18-20). Therefore, Nabuchodonosor returned to Syria and sent his general, Nabuzardan, with a great army to Jerusalem. The city surrendered one more time after an over-eighteen-month siege. The Temple, the royal palaces, and other principal buildings were given to the flames, and the city was destroyed a little bit more. The sacred vessels, with everything else of value, were carried away to Babylon; the Ark of the Covenant (brought by David) alone could be hidden by the Jews. Only husbandmen and the Poor were left in the country (2 Chron. 36:11-21). In 458, under Artaxerxes I, Esdras came to Jerusalem as governor of Judea with 1500 Jews and carried out the political and religious restoration of Israel. Several years later, once she had been authorized by the King, Nehemias, totally restored the City of David.

Antiochus Epiphanes, in 170, entered the Holy City, massacred 40,000 persons, and carried away as many more into bond (1 Macc.1: 17-25; 2 Macc. 5:11-23). A couple of years later he sent his general Apollonius to suppress the Jewish religion by force and replace it with Greek paganism at Jerusalem. The city was dismantled. The priest Mathathias of Hasmon and his five sons known as the Maccabees, prepared an heroic resistance. Judas Maccabeus, succeeding on the death of his father (166), gained four victories over the Syrian armies, occupied Jerusalem (164), and, after various repulses and victories, made an alliance with the

Roman Empire (1 Macc. 8). Later, Pompey declared Jerusalem a tributary of Rome; that was the time when Jesus was born.

From the beginning of the reign of King David until the Roman invasions<sup>1</sup>, a wall surrounded the Holy City. David had built it around Jerusalem to protect it from potential invaders of course but also to make it a haven on earth –as he called Jerusalem “the Holy City”, as mentioned in The Holy Bible: “David took the castle of Sion and dwelt in the castle, and called it, the city of David: and built round about from Mello and inwards” (2 Sam; 5:7, 9). When Ezechias became king in 727 BC, alarmed by the fall of the Kingdom of Israel (721), he erected a second wall to protect the suburbs which had come into existence to the north of Mount Sion and the Temple. His son, Joatham (759-44), strengthened the city by building "the high gate of the house of the Lord <sup>2</sup>"--south of the royal quarter. When the Romans entered, the walls of the Temple that David had also built and those of the city were almost completely demolished. Nowadays, the wall of the Temple that remains in Jerusalem is called The Wailing Wall<sup>3</sup>.

Similarly, a temporary wall, called peace-line, was erected in September 1969 in western Belfast to keep the communities separate, and to prevent rioting, according to Chichester-Clark, then Northern Ireland Prime Minister. This temporary structure was replaced over the years by a more substantial 'peace wall' that still remains in place. This parallel reinforces the resemblance between Jerusalem and Belfast, even though Parker does not mention it, his play being set in eastern Belfast.

Finally, in Pentecost, one of the protestant characters, Ruth, identifies Magdala Street, the place where Marian used to live when she was a student. This reference is not innocent since Magdala Street is an area also known as the Holy Land, and corroborates the idea that we previously noted, that is the parallel between Belfast and Jerusalem.

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<sup>1</sup> This wall was destroyed.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08344a.htm>

In Pentecost, then, this warlike atmosphere, as well as other social issues such as unemployment, prompted some of the young to emigrate to Great-Britain or North America, as was the case of Peter, another of Parker's characters.

The audience makes the acquaintance of Peter in act 1 scene 3. This last character- but not the least since he seems to bespeak the author - comes on stage to give the viewpoint of someone who has travelled a lot, in other words, someone who left Belfast to broaden his mind and bring an objective viewpoint on the situation according to himself. Indeed, he urges Lenny to realise that: "the rest of the world has crossed the street, long since, passed on by- on account of having fully grown twentieth-century problems to be getting on with- the continued existence of the planet, say, or the survival of the species". (200). He has been to the USA first, and then to Great-Britain, Birmingham, where he has settled down. Peter epitomizes this generation, who, like the author himself, had to go away to get away. Peter confesses he longs for "the direct opposite of homesickness, Exilephilia. The desperate nagging pain of longing to be far, far away." (218) This attitude is interpreted as a kind of unfaithfulness towards Ireland, his own Province, by Ruth, another character who still believes in the importance of Protestantism. No matter how pious Ruth is, she will also be unfaithful herself to her own husband and to her own religious creed when she will surrender to Peter's charms and make love to him. Similarly, Lily Matthews, although a Presbyterian puritan, had cheated on her husband and even gave birth to an illegitimate child in the 1940s. She admits: "I sinned against my own flesh in lust and fornication, I had to desert my own baby, nobody ever knew only the Lord our God knew and His eye was on me all right, burning into the very soul of me..." (231). Marian, the main character, also behaves in an immoral way, since she has been trying to sink her grief (caused by the death of her five-month-old baby) in alcoholism. On a religious viewpoint, all these attitudes are considered to be inappropriate towards God and can remind us of the behaviour of the Israelites in The Old



Testament who first had to leave Jerusalem to go to Babylon, the place of all vices and idols. Its complete destruction was interpreted as God's punishment for leaving Him and the capital city. In fact, behind its inhabitants, it was the city which was condemned. The city was thus personified. And when the Jews came back to Jerusalem, they had been badly influenced by life in Babylon. Therefore, it is not surprising that the town should be compared or qualified to be a harlot by prophet Isaiah:

How is the faithful city become an harlot! It was full of judgment;  
righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers. Thy silver is become dross, thy  
wine mixed with water: Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves:  
every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the  
fatherless; neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them (1: 21-23).

Then, like Jerusalem, Belfast may turn into a harlot in Parker's play. Effectively, the emotions felt by the characters in the play are also those perceived by the city. Thus, Belfast in Stewart Parker's Pentecost, like Dublin in James Joyce's Ulysses, becomes one of the main characters of the play for Parker does not conceal that Joyce greatly inspired him:

I knew from an early age that writing could not merely be a passion, that I  
would be making a life sentence out of it. The later experience of reading  
Dubliners, A portrait, Ulysses, and Ellmann's James Joyce, was a form of  
confirmation. There was so much that was familiar. In the tenacity of his  
emotional ties with Dublin, the possessive love mingling with the obsessive  
execration, the struggle over the years to annexe the place to the realm of his  
own imagination, I saw mirrored my own tangled involvement with Belfast  
(Parker, 1982, 32-34).

Hence, humanity is depicted as unfaithful to God by quite a few writers in The Old Testament. Stewart Parker also underlined this immorality by placing Belfast in an

uncomfortable position: the city is compared to Jerusalem and Babylon at the same time.

Along those lines, the episode of the Tower of Babel, where Man's infidelity as well as the punishment God afflicted him with is obvious in the Scriptures, is also dealt with in Pentecost.

Lily Matthews's house is described as if it were unreal. Indeed, Parker writes, "Everything is real except the proportions. The rooms are narrow, but the walls climb up and disappear into the shadows above the stage." (172) After reading the book of Genesis in The Old Testament, especially the passage where the Tower of Babel is described, another parallel between Lily's house and the tower can be outlined. The passage in the Bible explains that:

Now the whole earth had one language and few words. And as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth " (Gen., 11, 1-4).

In building this tower, men were trying to prove they were self-dependent down on earth and were able to reach heaven and God by themselves. This act was interpreted to be a challenge to God, who punished them and confused their language:

And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth:

and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth (Gen., 11, 5-9).

According to this parallel, Lily's house would not be set in Jerusalem, but in Babylon, the place of vices and idols, and this house seems to have been erected/ imagined by the author so as to challenge God. Now, in The Bible, when God confused men's language, He prevented them from understanding one another. That is why, at the beginning of Pentecost, communication between the various characters is as chaotic as the environment they are living in. The characters do not understand one another and verbal violence pervades the dialogues, which are even at time mere juxtaposed monologues. For instance, Lenny and Marian try to have a conversation but the situation ends up in confusion:

MARIAN. What's this?

LENNY. That's old. So. What do you reckon?

MARIAN. There's a cup sitting here with milk in it and sugar in it. Christ.

LENNY. I told you. I haven't touched a thing.

MARIAN. She must have brewed this up just before it happened.

LENNY. No such thing.

MARIAN. She never got a chance to pour it out.

LENNY. The ambulancemen, is all it would have been.

MARIAN. It's stone cold.

LENNY. The ambulancemen at the door, is all it possibly could have been.

*Marian turns her first attention on him for the first time.*

MARIAN. I see. They prepared a nice pot of tea, prior to removing the corpse.

LENNY. She walked out of here, in her Sunday hat and coat and best handbag, is what I'm saying, under her own steam, into the ambulance, it was in the hospital she died... (172)

Even sometimes, the characters start talking and can't help expanding on what they say. This overflow of the thought or "accès de logorrhée" in French, is symptomatic of the state of emergency they are trapped in. Language here reflects the external situation.

Yet, the dialogues can easily be understood and followed by the audience. Effectively, Parker's play cannot be considered to be part of the Theater of the Absurd since he was more willing to create a kind of Theater of the Ludic. In this respect, he aims at getting back the communication his characters are getting far from time and again. He seems to have chosen the mode of revelation to reach his goal.

So as to re-establish communication between the various characters, each epitomising his or her own community, Stewart Parker launches them on a quest for truth, enacted through various revelations.

Paradoxically, but certainly ironically, Peter is sure that he will not be hurt or affected by the strike and the Troubles since he reveals to Lenny: "Me, I'm one of the elect- my daddy's even a minister of the true faith." (201). This revelation reinforces the parallel between Belfast and Jerusalem since, the elected people in The Bible, corresponds to the Israelites and then the Hebrews in The Old Testament and finally to the members of Jesus Christ's Church in the New one. The history of Ireland highlights this comparison too, since, from Saint Patrick's evangelical missions onwards, Catholics and Protestants have considered themselves to be peoples chosen by God so that they might give a little more weight to their theories and ideologies. In his book entitled The end of Irish Catholicism?, Vincent Toomey writes :

It seems that Patrick's late seventh-century biographer, Muirchu, was the first

Irish writer to think about Ireland and its inhabitants as a nation, and who portrayed the Irish not only as *gens* (a nation in the sense of Mt 28:19) but even as a 'chosen race' (using The Old Testament's text referring to Israel that 1 Pet 2:9 applies to the Christian community, the Church) ( 23).

Today, in Northern Ireland, even a few Loyalists close to the UDA (Ulster Defence Association), are persuaded they are the 13th tribe of Israel. That might be one of the reasons why, now, Republicans and Loyalists in Ulster respectively support Palestinians and Israelites, clearly indicating and confirming that there is a close link between territory and ideology.

In Parker's play, the problematic position the Province is stuck in is mirrored by the personal and private illnesses the characters are going through. That is why, before she leaves the earth definitely, Lily, who has recently died, comes back to haunt the living, and more precisely Marian. Ghosts in Irish Literature have always been resorted to so as to embody the repressed colonial past. In this play, a ghost appears so that the repressed personal past of the various characters might be overcome. When the play starts, Lily cannot go and rest peacefully in heaven because she has hidden a heavy secret for her whole life: she had an illegitimate baby whom she had to abandon. Only when Marian discovers it, will she be allowed to leave the earth. The revelation of Lily's secret will then enable Marian to face her own reality and her own problem generated by the sudden death of her five-month-old baby in his cot. From that time on, Marian had somehow ceased living. Therefore, Lily's death will permit Marian to come back to life.

In the play, the image Lily resorts to when she reveals how she abandoned herself is really impressive, she explains:

It was only an evening dander along the front. The sun was setting over the lough, hanging out of the sky like a big swollen blood orange. The water all

glistening with the redness of it and the sky and the hills on fire with it. Like what you'd see after a war, maybe...it took your breath away, it was a real picture, but it was frightening. That's what I thought anyhow. (229)

Then, Lily keeps on describing Alan Ferris, her lover, like the Antichrist. She says:

His kin was fair, it burnt easy, he didn't like the sand. [...] he'd come from across the water, you see. Flown across, through the air (Alan Ferris was an English airman during WWII). I'd never even been on the water, let alone up in the air, couldn't imagine it. [...] Alan...He came from across the water, you see...there was a picture in my Bible, at Sunday school, the fair-skinned archangel standing at the gates of heaven, that was what he looked like...only he was a dark angel. Angel of death. Angel of Satan. He swept me up, high up, took me up in the sky...and then he dropped me. Left me. Flew home. Left me falling. Falling. (228-232)

These images have a dream-like quality and can even be quite apocalyptic. Lily describes Belfast as if the city was being completely destroyed, as if it had to be purified. Alan Ferris plays the part of the angel of Satan who will be defeated by Christ as narrated by Saint John in the Book of Revelation.

Apocalypse, from the verb *apokalypso*, which means "to reveal", is the name given to the last book in The Bible, also called the Book of Revelation. Its writer, John, as he calls himself (though this is controversial), explains that one day, the great harlot will disappear, and the sins of society will be expiated. With the new era (and The New Testament), the great harlot became Babylon, the place of idolatry and prostitution. The Apocalypse is made up of a series of visions and revelations pronounced by Jesus the Messiah, conqueror of Satan and his Kingdom, and addressed to John. Through the shedding of his blood he has opened the book with seven seals and has triumphed over Satan. John describes the power of Christ over Satan

and his kingdom. The lamb, as Jesus is referred to, a symbol for gentleness and purity, defeats the dragon and the beast, the personification of lust and cruelty. This idea is developed in a drama of five acts, coincidentally like Parker's play. Within this book, we become the witnesses of the struggle, the fall of Babylon the harlot, the victory of the Christ, and final beatitude. The third part of the Apocalypse is the most interesting one for this paper as John reveals:

And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever (Rev., 19, 1-3).

When he wrote this book, John was surely inspired by the prophecies of Daniel in The Old Testament. The Book of Daniel was written with a view to comfort the Jews under the cruel persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes. The Seer in the Apocalypse had a similar purpose. At that time, Christians were violently persecuted. The danger of apostasy was great. False prophets were mushrooming, and tried to talk the peoples into adopting the practices of heaven and taking part in the worship of Julius Caesar. The Seer urged his contemporary believers to stick to their faith and Christian beliefs. He encouraged them with the promise of an ample reward which would come soon. He also assured them that the triumphant coming of Christ was very close. Both at the beginning and at the end of his book, the Seer underlines that the hour of victory is approaching. Once Christ has come, the woes of those who have faith in him will be avenged. Moreover, those who oppress them will be severely judged and tormented forever. The martyrs that have died will be raised to life, and will be allowed to share the pleasures of the kingdom of Christ. That Christ will return at the end of times to

judge the living and the dead is thus an article of faith. But the time of His second advent is not known yet.

In Northern Ireland, the Pope has often been identified with the beast, the Antichrist, notably by the reverend Ian Paisley, founder and leader of the Free Presbyterian Church and of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) in Northern Ireland and also mentioned ironically in Parker's play. As well as Rome, the cradle of Catholicism, it has played the role of Babylon, the great harlot<sup>4</sup>, thus allowing the Catholic side of Belfast to be compared to Babylon. In their book entitled Anti-Catholicism in Northern Ireland, 1600-1998, The Mote and the Beam, John Brewer and Gareth Higgins confirm this when they say: "The Catholic church is believed to be the whore and harlot described in the Scripture, and the papacy the anti-Christ" (104). But Stewart Parker does not share this opinion at all. According to him, Belfast might become a New Jerusalem, the city where "God dwells in the midst of His saints who enjoy complete happiness" and where He and the lamb are the sanctuary. In fact, in the Apocalypse, Saint John explains:

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away (Rev., 21, 1-4).

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<sup>4</sup> The application is very easy and tempting if we take into account the seven hills of Rome and the red robes of the cardinals.



It is true that Lily's house, the location of the plot, is in decay. It is also true that the area where it is situated is in poor condition. However, Lenny adds that "it is in the middle of a redevelopment zone" (179), and indeed, by 2006, the area had been redeveloped. Stewart Parker was thus optimistic on the future of the capital city.

If the city of Babylon became the great harlot in the Book of Revelation, Jerusalem turned into a new city, which was previously referred to as "the mother of us all" by the Galatians, and qualified as Wisdom in the Proverbs of The Old Testament. Effectively, in The Old Testament already, Babylon had become the place of prostitution as soon as God had forgiven Jerusalem for being unfaithful according to Isaiah who assures:

Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called. For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee (Isa., 54:4).

Similarly, in Pentecost, Marian begs Lily to forgive her for having discovered her secret. She says: "forgive me Lily" (232), as if through her, Belfast had to be forgiven for behaving unfaithfully.

In his book, Isaiah added that once God had forgiven Jerusalem, the city would be allowed to be inhabited again:

Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the LORD. Enlarge the place of thy

tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited (Isa., 54:1-3).

Therefore, it is possible to think that when God forgives Belfast, the city will be full of life too, which has not been the case according to the characters, especially the female ones who have not been allowed either to bear a child (Ruth has repeatedly miscarried), or raise it (Marian's son died prematurely and Lily had to abandon it since it was illegitimate).

To come back to this new city of Jerusalem as described in The Apocalypse, it does not abide by the laws of space and time. Its powers go further: it is heavenly, as holy as King David wanted it to be in The Old Testament and even more.

In Pentecost, Belfast is also depicted as a city where the laws of time and space have been broken. First, that Marian, a Catholic, should precisely pick on a Presbyterian house and a Protestant area to live in bespeaks the author's belief that one can transcend the territorial stake mentioned at the beginning of this paper. Then, through the ghost of Lily Matthews, which becomes a link between reality and imagination, the playwright also shows his will to go beyond this mere representation of space. The ghost of Lily who looks even younger whenever it appears- she is 74 at the beginning of the play and 33 when it ends- as well as the numerous flashbacks or narrations in the past and remembrances encountered throughout the play, indicate the author's decision to go beyond chronological time, too.

Along this last comparison, Belfast could be a heavenly city as well, a city whose inhabitants could start believing in the future, as he did.

Of course, Stewart Parker's play is set during the Loyalist strike whose aim, bringing down the Executive of the power-sharing government, was reached throughout Pentecost 1974. This was the first reason why the author entitled his play Pentecost. Yet, as the play

reaches its end, Ruth reminds the other characters that the day is Pentecost, “the day our Lord’s apostles were inspired by the Holy Spirit” (240) as she adds before remembering the passage in The Bible where this episode is narrated, aloud and by heart. Actually, it seems that Lily’s revelation not only enabled her to leave earth for good, but it also led the others to come to term with their personal grieves. Ruth confesses she will leave her husband for good, since he has been beating her for a long time, Peter can finally explain why he is so angry against Northern Ireland, Lenny admits the wrongs he had done to Marian, who can finally exorcise her anger against the death of her baby. She even calls the others to believe in “the Christ in ourselves” (244). Communication then appears to have been re-established, as if they had all been inundated with the tongues of fire and indeed, the episode of Pentecost was written to balance the one about the Tower of Babel. The scene, and the play, end on an atmosphere of peace, the “secular apostles of Belfast” having finally found a reason to hope in the future. In fact, Lenny and Peter start playing music, an image which cannot but remind us of the angels in the Book of Revelation, who sounded their trumpets to announce that the kingdom of Christ was about to be established<sup>5</sup>.

In 2006, more than ever, the comparison between Belfast and Jerusalem, and more precisely, between the resolution of the conflicts in Northern Ireland and in Israel/Palestine is obvious and relevant. The two divided countries, together with their two capital cities, are famous for being the theatre of violent riots and fights between two supposedly religious communities, which has an impact on their artists. However, the leaders of the political parties

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<sup>5</sup> Seven angels issue forth, each one holding a trumpet. The sounding of the first four trumpets causes a partial destruction of the elements of nature. One-third of the earth is burned, as also one-third of the trees and all the grass. One-third of the sea becomes blood (cf. Exodus 7:17). One-third of the rivers is turned into water of wormwood. One-third of the sun, moon, and stars is obscured, causing one-third of the day to be dark (cf. Exodus 10:21). At the sounding of the fifth trumpet locusts ascend from the abyss. Their work is to torment men for five months, They are specially charged not to touch the grass.. At the sound of the sixth trumpet the four angels chained at the Euphrates are let loose. The angel standing on the land and the sea swears that at the sound of the seventh trumpet the mystery will be completed. The seventh trumpet is now sounded, the nations are judged and the kingdom of Christ is established.

are urged to try to find a compromise. In fact, while Sinn Fein's President in Northern Ireland, Gerry Adams, has agreed to discuss with Ian Paisley on the future of Northern Ireland - even though Ian Paisley rejected the offer on May, 22<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Ehud Olmert, Israel's Prime Minister and successor of Ariel Sharon, agreed to talks with Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian National Authority. Ultimately, the following question arises: have the tongues of Pentecost also fallen on them?

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