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Dying to be Seen: AIDS, Diaspora and the Queer Irish Novel

Declan Kavanagh

Literary narratives that explore queer identities within the Irish diaspora have garnered critical attention over the last decade in Irish studies. Focusing upon queer subjects in women's migrant literature, Tina O'Toole has explored the "ways in which queer kinship and migrant affinities unsettle the fixities of family and place in Irish culture."¹ Moreover, Ed Madden has argued that the study of queer Irish sexualities constitutes a diasporic project in and of itself.² This article builds upon O'Toole's and Madden's important readings of the queer Irish diaspora to demonstrate how writers like Colm Tóibín and Katherine O'Donnell differently foreground death and dying in ways that queer the Irish diasporic tale. For both Tóibín and O'Donnell, death unfolds queer diasporic temporalities, which confuse past and present to uncover the homophobic machineries of silence and forgetting that structure queer life. In O'Donnell's debut novel *Slant* (2023), readers are introduced to the main protagonist Ro McCarthy as she canvasses for votes. The novel opens in the months leading up to the same-sex marriage referendum in the Republic of Ireland, which took place on 22 May 2015.³ *Slant* is an Irish queer novel that explores death in the diaspora during the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. Indeed, to the degree that the 'Irish queer novel' can be said to exist as a discrete genre it is remarkable for its paucity of engagement with HIV and scarce representation of those affected by AIDS.⁴ I define 'Irish queer fiction' as fiction that not only represents lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual,

¹ Tina O'Toole, "Cé Leis Tú? Queering Irish Migrant Literature," special issue, *Queering the Issue*, *Irish University Review* 43:1 (Spring/Summer 2013): 131-32.

² Ed Madden, "Queering the Irish Diaspora: David Rees and Pádraig Rooney," *Éire-Ireland* 47:1-2 (2012): 172-200.

³ For a record of this amendment please access: <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/cons/en/html>

⁴ The preponderance of historical fiction (set before the late twentieth century) as a favored genre within Irish queer writing may account somewhat for the absence of AIDS specific narratives.

intersex, trans and non-binary lives but also affords some narrative space to query identitarian political representation *tout court*. In *Slant*, Ro's 'coming out' as a lesbian is preceded by a 'coming into' lesbianism, which invites us to query the affective entanglements of identity itself. One facet that makes *Slant* a queer novel, as opposed to being solely a lesbian novel, is O'Donnell's questioning of identity across a queer temporal arc sutured to an Irish American diasporic history. Although the narrative begins with the referendum campaign, Ro's story does not linger there but shifts to an earlier time in her life in the 1980s when she was as an undocumented Irish immigrant in Boston, U.S. O'Donnell narrates the lives of both the younger and older Ro McCarthy and, in doing so, connects the crisis of AIDS in the 1980s to the later marriage equality activism in 2010s Ireland. Ro's memory of the AIDS epidemic—"all the dying boys"—haunts the otherwise liberal teleology of marriage equality activism in the 2010s.⁵ As Jack Halberstam notes, "Queer time" surfaces "most spectacularly, at the end of the twentieth century, from within those gay communities whose horizons of possibilities have been severely diminished by the AIDS epidemic."⁶ Halberstam's reading of the queer temporalities engendered within and beyond the AIDS epidemic is relevant to how the epidemic is re-lived by Ro as a means of destabilizing narratives of LGBTQIA+ 'progress' in the present.

Death in *Slant*, both the many deaths from AIDS-related illnesses and the enforced social death inflicted by the stigma of a HIV-positive status, is a fact that Yes Equality activism has chosen to outwardly ignore, basing their campaign strategy instead upon positive stories of Irish same-sex love. Pointedly, Ro's dissatisfaction with lesbian and gay activism in the 2010s is tied to the erasure of the AIDS epidemic from the calculus of the Yes campaign. *Slant* presents its readers with a trans-temporal narrative, which positions its central protagonist as

⁵ Katherine O'Donnell, *Slant* (Dublin: New Island, 2023), 243.

⁶ Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), 2.

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existing at different historical coordinates, offering readers two distinct narrative selves that each shape Ro's characterization. This trans-temporal structure is intimately tied to Ro's own status as a lesbian who was once part of the Irish diaspora in the United States of America. The grief that Ro carries from experiencing AIDS-related deaths in Boston in the 1980s serves as a temporal anchor for the reader. In *Slant*, the Irish diaspora is a site for queer world-making with Ro's fellow-Irish immigrants Eily and Mags helping to affirm her lesbianism. The Irish in Boston intersect through characters like Ro, Eily and Mags, with a queer community whose young men are dying. Death is interwoven into the Irish diasporic tale as queerness—read sometimes as lesbianism or gayness—gains cultural visibility under the sign of death.

Like *Slant*, Colm Tóibín's *The Blackwater Lightship* (1999) centers on a cis-gendered heterosexual protagonist, Helen, who is a teacher working in Dublin and married with two young sons. Both novels center female protagonists who are confronted by the AIDS epidemic as it affects their kin: for Ro it is her chosen queer diasporic family and for Helen it is her biological brother, Declan. In *The Blackwater Lightship*, Declan returns to his grandmother Dora's home in rural Co. Wexford as a young man who is dying from AIDS-related illnesses. Declan is an émigré and his story (largely told through the perspective and memories of his sister Helen and gay friends Paul and Larry) is one of fraught homecoming. His return is marked by death, both his own impending demise and, for Helen, the trauma of their father's untimely passing. In these queer novels, the AIDS epidemic is both diasporic, namely something that returns, but also something that is already homely. In both narratives, AIDS-related death surfaces as a diasporic tale of return, viewed through the eyes of Ro and Helen: two Irish women of the same generation, one lesbian and the other straight. The narrative viewpoint of both central protagonists affords a measure of interpretive but not emotional distance to the stories borne out in *Slant* and *The Blackwater Lightship* as AIDS-related illness

is always something that is observed by Ro and Helen but not actually physically experienced by them.

For Helen, Declan's imminent death remains future tense although it is empirically speaking already certain as her brother's bodily functions shut down throughout the novel. For Ro, death is in the past. O'Donnell transports her reader back to Ro's earlier life in Boston; death therefore occurs in a relived past tense, underscoring the novel's belated melancholia. Conversely, Declan's death scene is anticipated but never textually fulfilled in *The Blackwater Lightship*, a fact confirmed by the novel's terminus, which suffuses Tóibín's narrative with its own distinct quality of queer bathos. Although *The Blackwater Lightship* and *Slant* were published some twenty-four years apart (Tóibín in 1999 and O'Donnell in 2023), both novels reflect upon the AIDS epidemic from the perspective of what commentators describe as a "post-AIDS" culture, whereby a discourse of crisis and death has evolved into one of survival and living."⁷ As Cormac O'Brien notes, in Ireland, post-AIDS culture manifests as follows:

In terms of being 'post-AIDS', Ireland bifurcates into two paradoxical socio-economic discourses: that of HIV as a medical event, and that of AIDS as a cultural narrative. Medical discourse and practices are progressive and democratic. HIV-positive citizens receive free medications, doctor consultations, and counselling, regardless of income, and the HIV clinic at St James's hospital in Dublin is a leading global research centre. On the other hand, the national epistemology underwriting AIDS as an Irish cultural narrative is steeped in contagion paranoia, and tainted by deeply embedded institutional stigma toward HIV-positive citizens.⁸

⁷ Cormac O'Brien, "Performing POZ: Irish Theatre, HIV Stigma, and 'Post-AIDS' Identities," *Irish University Review* 43:1 (2013): 75.

⁸ Ibid.

O'Brien's parsing of a "national epistemology underwriting AIDS" as being tied to "an Irish cultural narrative ... steeped in contagion paranoia" warrants further scrutiny in relation to both O'Donnell and Tóibín. As José Carregal-Romero argues, "Tóibín in *The Blackwater Lightship* prefers to put the focus on an Irish progressive discourse on AIDS, projecting an image of a society that has learned to treat HIV-positives with respect and dignity."⁹ In *Slant*, attention is drawn to the national epistemology underwriting AIDS in the 2010s as Ro's affective response to Yes Equality activism connects readers to the trauma of AIDS-related illness and death, which is erased from the novel's political present.

Indeed, the charting of AIDS-illness and death is central to *Slant* as a novelistic project, which the older Ro embarks upon. Toward the end of the novel, O'Donnell reveals that Ro has been writing the novel we have been reading all along. It is worth pausing here to note that both O'Donnell's and Tóibín's texts are not histories, however much they might enact queer historicism. As Michael G. Cronin notes, "literary or novelistic discourse is one discourse among several."¹⁰ Both novels offer accounts of AIDS-related illness from the perspective of an Irish post-AIDS context in which the availability of effective treatments have made being HIV-positive a chronic but manageable condition. Moreover, *Slant* was published in 2023, when the "U=U" campaign had begun to address the "contagion paranoia" that O'Brien identified a decade earlier. Writing in *Gay Community News* about the 2022 campaign, Beatrice Fanucci states:

U=U stands for 'Undetectable equals Untransmittable' and is a global campaign aimed at informing people about the fact that someone with an undetectable viral load cannot

⁹ José Carregal-Romero, "The Cultural Narratives of AIDS, Gay Sexuality, and Family in Colm Tóibín's *The Blackwater Lightship*," *Papers on Language and Literature* 52:4 (2016): 357.

¹⁰ Michael G. Cronin, *Impure Thoughts: Sexuality, Catholicism and Literature in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 7.

transmit HIV to a sexual partner. A person living with HIV who is on effective treatment has a viral load in the body so low that it cannot be detected.¹¹

In *Slant*, Ro's older self exists at a time before U=U is widely known, and her perception of AIDS discourse in Ireland remains tied to the contagion paranoia that O'Brien ascribes to Ireland's cultural narrative on AIDS. However, the fact that the publication of *Slant* is coterminous with U=U activism shows how the cultural narrative of AIDS in Ireland is being addressed from several arenas, with novelistic discourse featuring as one domain in which stigma is reckoned with.

Moreover, Cronin's point about novelistic discourse being but one discourse among many is important when considering Tóibín's *The Blackwater Lightship*, which has attracted generous critical attention. Such interest can make a story like *The Blackwater Lightship* signify the totality of HIV-positive experience in 1990s Ireland. However, as other discourses like life writing show, being HIV-positive in Ireland in the 1990s was not always marked by death. In *Woman in the Making: A Memoir* (2014), Rory O'Neill, also known by his drag persona of "Panti Bliss," recounts receiving his treatment plan in 1996 at the HIV Clinic at St. James's hospital, Dublin:

On my first visit the doctor said she wanted to put me on medication. Exciting new drugs had recently been approved and a new treatment strategy known as "hit early, hit hard" was being advocated in the US. After some discussion, I agreed to start taking drugs. Thirty pills a day, to be taken at various times, some with food, some without,

¹¹ Beatrice Fanucci, "Man2man, Rainbow Project and Veda Release Powerful U=U Video," *GCN* 13 (July 2022). Available at <https://gcn.ie/man2man-veda-video/>

some in neat capsules. Some in huge, powdery, gag-inducing tablets, and all with side effects.¹²

As life writing like O'Neill's shows, the outcome for HIV-positive patients in Ireland in the mid-1990s varies. Neither Tóibín's fictional Declan nor O'Neill's account can fully represent that experience. Like Tóibín's novel, O'Neill's memoir charts a history of AIDS-related illness in an Irish context. Unlike Tóibín's novel, O'Neill's story is one of survival, not death: "Sixteen years later *everything* has changed. I didn't know it at the time but I was lucky to be diagnosed when I was, on the cusp of new effective HIV treatments. I know have a chronic manageable *condition*. I take one small pill a day and I get on with my life."¹³ The "luck" that O'Neill expresses here in being diagnosed at a time when access to effective treatment was available helps to sharpen our own awareness of Declan's plight in *The Blackwater Lightship*. Importantly, O'Neill's life writing shows how Declan's story is an anachronistic one in the context of late 1990s Ireland, as effective treatment made a HIV-positive diagnosis more about living with the condition as opposed to dying from AIDS-related illness.

If *The Blackwater Lightship* offers a novelistic history of AIDS-related illness, it is as accurate as a stopped clock. Declan dies beyond the final pages of the novel and his charted decline within its pages heralds an end to death from AIDS-related illness in Global North countries like Ireland. Declan's dying body is prematurely embalmed in novelistic time. As explored later, O'Donnell's deft ekphrastic deployment in *Slant* of Bruegel's falling Icarus as one of the "dying boys" of the AIDS epidemic resonates with Tóibín's Declan. Like Icarus, Declan exists in a temporality in which he remains suspended in time as a record of a dying body. Just as Icarus appears dying to be seen (legible only as a sinking, half submerged body),

¹² Rory O'Neill, *Woman in the Making: A Memoir* (Dublin: Hachette Books Ireland, 2012), 155-56.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 165.

Declan's diasporic return in the novel signals another dying to be seen moment as he only gains visibility under the sign of death: he must, in fact, be dying to be seen at all.

If history is stopped by imminent death in *The Blackwater Lightship*, then death queers history's promised linearity in *Slant*. O'Donnell writes Ro as a transtemporal character whom readers meet in different time periods and locations. This transtemporal characterization in *Slant* connects a queer political past with a homonormative present through Ro's diasporic movement as she emigrates from Cork to Boston in the 1980s before returning to Cork in the 1990s, the decade in which Tóibín's story is set. Tóibín's novel wears its politics lightly, in contrast to O'Donnell's representation of the 1980s ACT-UP and Irish marriage equality campaign in 2015. Situated shortly after the decriminalization of homosexuality in Ireland in 1993, *The Blackwater Lightship* deflects from offering a wider view of the treatment of queer people in the Irish Republic by confining such considerations to the familial sphere. The question of homophobia, culturally ambient in 1990s Dublin, is decentered through Helen's perspective. For example, Helen's mother Lily has assumptions about Declan's friends Paul and Larry, which have an unspoken basis in homophobia:

"How long have you known about Declan?" her mother asked. "Since yesterday. I told you." "I mean, how long have you known that he had friends like Paul?" "Like what?" Helen asked. "You know like what." Her mother sounded irritated.¹⁴

A latent homophobia infuses this exchange between Lily and Helen in a way that typifies the gentler politics animating *The Blackwater Lightship*. Lily's remarks gain meaning here only as a source of discomfort between daughter and mother. Homophobia is a plot device that builds narrative tension in what is otherwise an already fractured maternal relationship for Helen.

¹⁴ Colm Tóibín, *The Blackwater Lightship* (London: Picador, 2000), 110.

In what is now a canonical essay on Colm Tóibín's homoerotic fiction, Éibhear Walshe outlines how Ireland's status as a postcolonial country forbade any public recognition of the queer subject:

The post-colonial struggle to escape the influence of the colonising power became a struggle to escape the gendered relation of male coloniser to female colonised. Therefore the post-colonial culture could not permit any public, ideological acknowledgement of the actuality of the sexually 'other'.¹⁵

Walshe carefully outlines the historical legacy of a sharply drawn incommensurability between Irishness and the homoerotic. In her portrayal of a young Ro, O'Donnell writes the story of a queer Irish immigrant, one who discovers Irish lesbians living together abroad when they could not live together at home. When Ro returns to Ireland in the late 1990s, her own queerness remains at odds with society. Tóibín's novel is most attuned to the verboten status of homosexuality in twentieth-century Ireland. AIDS-related illness and death in these novels signifies a breach in history, a rupture that blots the record. Tóibín presents Declan as a body or, more properly, as an object in terminal decline and rarely ever as a linguistic subject. Ro decides to write *Slant* as a memorial that records the forgotten history of friends who died from AIDS-related illness and suicide.

Both Declan and Ro are queer émigrés who return dying to be seen. In *The Blackwater Lightship*, Declan's body becomes a dying text that Helen must interrogate even as his physicality wastes. In *Slant*, Ro's novel becomes a metafictional text to be absorbed in some hopeful queer future. The older 2010s Ro lives her life in mourning for those lost to AIDS-

¹⁵ Éibhear Walshe, "The Vanishing Homoerotic: Colm Tóibín's Gay Fictions," *New Hibernia Review* 10:4 (2006): 5.

related illness and suicide. Although not confined to Ireland, the phrase ‘dying to’ holds an idiomatic meaning in a Hibernian-English context as it conveys an urgency to do something. As a turn of phrase, ‘I am dying to’ telegraphs camp performativity. Taken literally, the person who utters it is so eager to do something they will perish from their compulsion. Of course, idioms are not meant literally. However, literal meanings linger. ‘I’m dying to’ carries a destabilizing promise: a subjective desire that promises the death of the subject. Both Ro and Declan feature in these two queer diasporic novels as characters who return home in the 1990s dying to be seen: Declan in Wexford on the cusp of his untimely death and Ro, in Cork, living a life of grief that amounts to a form of living death.

Living Death

Many of them seemed relieved to have sorted it out for themselves. It was the right order – the straights were better, everyone knew that, and the homos just had to accept it I would wave a cheery goodbye, thank them for their time and leave them with a small leaflet I had written and got printed.¹⁶

Jack Halberstam argues that queer people often experience a “stretched out adolescence” as queer experience so often “challenges the conventional binary formulation of a life narrative divided by a clear break between youth and adulthood.”¹⁷ Ro’s living death signifies a “stretched out adolescence” that also enfolds mourning for those lost to the political indifference that shaped the AIDS epidemic. In the excerpt above, Ro recalls her experience on doorsteps in her constituency. A pattern emerges between Ro as a visibly lesbian canvasser

¹⁶ O’Donnell, *Slant*, 6.

¹⁷ Halberstam, *Queer Time*, 153.

and the straights who either squirm or appear entitled in the face of a direct confrontation. As Patrick McDonagh notes, Ireland was “a country, which since the foundation of the state up to decriminalization in 1993 had viewed sexual acts between males as criminal activity and homosexuals as sick, perverted, and sinful.”¹⁸ Although the referendum resulted in a majority in favor of equal marriage, O'Donnell's decision to introduce Ro as an early but conflicted canvasser speaks to the textured history that *Slant* tells.¹⁹ O'Donnell is not invested in a teleology of flat neoliberal progress that envisions Irish lesbian and gay rights as properly culminating in the success of the Yes Equality campaign.²⁰ For one, Ro's own story does not align with the positive stories that Yes Equality promoted. As Anne Mulhall points out, “The ‘Yes Equality’ campaign saw the sharing of personal stories as a central strategy.”²¹ This campaign generated a national conversation that foregrounded how lesbian and gay couples were the ‘same’ as their straight counterparts and therefore deserving of rights. The sharing of personal histories invited further public questioning, and as Mulhall states: “the campaign sought to encourage a ‘national conversation’ whereby people felt enabled to ask queers anything no matter how homophobic the question.”²² The campaign also downplayed the differences inherent in the LGBTQIA+ community in Ireland, favoring a focus on gay men and lesbian women who were in monogamous relationships and were also parents.

Reflecting upon the Yes Equality campaign, Mulhall recalls, “Gender variance and sexual orientations that troubled the hetero and homo binary were resolutely marginalized and

¹⁸ Patrick McDonagh, “‘It’s Poppyclock to Say Homosexuals Can Be Excused’: Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement in the Republic of Ireland, 1970s-1990s,” in *From Sodomy Laws to Same-Sex Marriage: International Perspectives since 1789*, ed. Sean Brady and Mark Seymour (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 183.

¹⁹ On 22 May 2015: “forty-one of Ireland’s forty-two constituencies, representing 1,202,198 people passed a referendum legalizing same-sex marriage, making Ireland the first country in the world to do so by popular vote.” See McDonagh, “It’s Poppyclock,” 183.

²⁰ The ‘Yes Equality’ campaign was launched on 9 March 2015 at the Rotunda Pillar Room in Dublin. See <https://www.iccl.ie/archive/yes-equality-the-campaign-for-civil-marriage-equality-formally-launches/>

²¹ Anne Mulhall, “Queer Narrative,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Queer Studies*, ed. Siobhan Somerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 149.

²² Ibid.

silenced.”²³ The deaths of queer Irish people from AIDS-related illnesses remained conspicuously unaddressed by the campaign. Furthermore, the voices of HIV-positive activists like Panti Bliss and Veda were disregarded by Yes Equality. In *Slant*, Ro remains ambivalent about marriage as a legislative goal for gay and lesbian couples. Ro’s uncertainty arises from a deep sense of disassociation from Yes Equality activism:

I had signed up for a vision of lesbian and gay liberation that did not seek a cosy nod of recognition by the ‘haves’ but wanted nothing less than a complete redistribution of social goods for all the marginalised and despised. Nobody spoke in that way anymore. I was lost. All that had guided me in my past was now gone in this awful present and I had no future hope to steer towards.²⁴

Equal marriage, with its ties to the Church and civil law, appears as the apex of an assimilationist politics, which an earlier version of lesbian and gay liberation sought to dismantle. Reflecting upon identarian politics of the mid 2010s in Ireland, Michael G. Cronin has recently queried the framing of the marriage equality campaign as it reproduced “an homogenised oppressive majority of ‘them’ aligned against an equally homogenised minority of the queer ‘us’ – in which the dynamic structure of class relations, and the neoliberal ideology underpinning contemporary capitalism, disappears from view.”²⁵ Cronin’s critique of minority politics is internalized by Ro in *Slant* as she navigates a Yes Equality campaign seemingly devoid of class consciousness. In fact, it is the absence of what Cronin names as a ~~queer~~ political endeavor that is “universal and radically humanist in its imaginative scope” that makes

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ O’Donnell, *Slant*, 305.

²⁵ Michael G. Cronin, *Sexual/Liberation* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2022), 128.

Ro disassociate.²⁶ O'Donnell points to how Ro has written and printed her own leaflets to leave with voters. As Mulhall argues, the leaflets produced by Yes Equality “foregrounded a homogenous norm: groups of smiling, uniformly white people and families, looking remarkably not queer.”²⁷ It is tempting to read Ro’s self-published leaflet as an outright rejection of the homonormativity that Mulhall identifies. However, Ro’s canvassing predates the formal launch of Yes Equality in March 2015 and we never learn what information is printed in her leaflet. In a moment of Irish queer history making, Ro’s small leaflet signals an unrecorded history that is impactful however irretrievable. The leaflet might also be a record of grief that remains felt but unspoken; an ACT UP communiqué that quietly counters the omissions of Yes Equality activism.

Time in *Slant* is shown to be never wholly of the present, as current political events in Ireland like the 2015 Marriage Equality campaign become imbued with the rich activist textures of past queer resistance. *The Blackwater Lightship* is a novel that is concerned with registering the passing of time. Helen’s gradual acceptance of Declan’s illness and her emotional steeling against his imminent death unleashes memories of their father’s earlier passing from cancer when they were children. Tóibín explores how death and dying tease the potential for temporal rupture within the narrative bounds of the queer Irish novel, as Helen’s recognition of her brother’s own mortality renders her present relation to him queerly disjointed. When staying at her grandmother’s house in Cush, Co. Wexford, Helen experiences the scents and materialities of that house in ways that fracture temporal boundaries:

The lino in the room was torn, some of the wallpaper had peeled, the paint on the ceiling was flaking, an the presence of the shiny modern radiator made the room seem even

²⁶ Ibid, 129.

²⁷ Mulhall, “Queer Narrative,” 149.

more dingy and depressing. When she pulled the old candlewick bedspread back, she found that the blankets were stained ... The smell seemed sharper now, and sour, and it was the smell more than anything which brought her back to the time she and Declan had lived in this house.²⁸

Torn linoleum and peeling paint become temporal markers for the passing of time, which the “modern” radiator brings into sharp relief. The olfactory in this moment brings the past that Helen shared with Declan into her present as the “stained” blankets provide a material analogue for their childhood’s traumatic relationship to the present. The time that Helen and Declan lived in their grandparent’s house was also the period in which their own father suddenly died, and their mother could not care for them. Death in *The Blackwater Lightship* affords an ingress into historical memory that is inflected by both the personal and political. Like the representation of time in *Slant*, death in Tóibín’s novel shows time to be out of joint. The grief of the living has an affective dimension that makes past become present through sensory stimuli like touch and smell.

In *The Blackwater Lightship*, Tóibín deploys grief as a private feeling that queerly sutures the past to the present. Helen’s unresolved childhood trauma—the death of her father—spans twenty years and serves to connect her psychically with the late 1960s Ireland of her shared childhood with Declan. Although her brother appears as a visibly sick and dying body, it is Helen’s own private trauma that is described as “rotting”: “I had put away parts of myself that were damaged and left them rotting. When my father died, half my world collapsed, but I did not know this had happened.”²⁹ Helen’s grim description of her interior archive of rotting parts gets projected onto an external coastline that is, in a material sense, eroding:

²⁸ Tóibín, *Blackwater Lightship*, 55-56.

²⁹ Tóibín, *Blackwater Lightship*, 187.

The erosion had stopped, but when she watched now she noticed fine grains of sand pouring down each layer of cliff, as though an invisible wind were blowing or there was a slow, measured loosening of earth. It was bright enough still while she looked south to see Raven's Point and Rosslare Harbour. The strand, as she walked along, became narrower and stonier; she listened to the waves hitting loose stones, unsettling them, knocking them against each other and then withdrawing.³⁰

Like the torn linoleum and peeling paint of her grandmother's house, the coastline that boundaries Dora's house, and by extension, the characters in the novel, is shown to be crumbling away. Reading the novel's metaphoric investment in costal erosion through the lens of the environmental humanities, Robinson Murphy argues that "Tóibín's descriptions make clear the similitude at work between viruses that attack human bodies, and the more metaphorical iterations that likewise render thin natural, earthly bodies."³¹ For Robinson, environmental damage wrought by the climate crisis is linked to the unrelenting havoc that AIDS-related illness wreaks upon Declan's body as "Helen makes the cognitive leap to her brother, who is likewise on the verge of disappearing."³² Most dramatically, coastal erosion has threatened to collapse her grandmother's house into the sea: "From here as far as Keatings' the erosion had stopped or slowed down. No one knew why. Years earlier, it had seemed just a matter of time before her grandmother's house would fall into the sea, just as Mike Redmond's and Keatings' outhouse had done."³³ Curiously then, within the extended world of erosion that Tóibín assembles, it is Helen's rotting parts that stand out for their invisibility.

³⁰ Ibid., 51.

³¹ Robinson Murphy, "'Pain Comes in Waves': Eroding Bodies in Colm Tóibín's *The Blackwater Lightship*," *Critique* 62: 5 (2021): 555.

³² Ibid.

³³ Tóibín, *Blackwater Lightship*, 51.

Helen's private grief is rendered public through her projection of that grief onto an archive of damaged ambient parts: torn linoleum; peeling paint; Declan's wasting body; the imprint of climate crisis upon the Wexford coastline.

In *Slant*, Ro's own private grief is transformed into public activism in the form of the leaflet that she writes and prints to leave with those she canvasses. This leaflet is but one of many documents that go unread in *Slant*. In facing her feelings of loss of selfhood, brought about in part by the referendum campaign, Ro begins to temporally orientate herself toward the political past of gay liberation in the 1980s and her own deeply entangled affective connection to that epoch. In *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (2010), Elizabeth Freeman argues that it "may be crucial ... to complicate the idea of horizontal political generations or waves succeeding each other in progressive time with a notion of 'temporal drag' thought less in the psychic time of the individual than in the movement time of the collective political fantasy."³⁴ Freeman remarks that temporal drag may offer "a way of connecting queer performativity to disavowed political histories."³⁵ In the political present of Yes Equality, Ro embodies a temporal drag which points to histories of trauma that are silenced. O'Donnell plunges her readers into the psychic undertow of the Yes Equality political wave by literally moving the novel's central protagonist backward in time. Ro relates how she "began to get taken over with memories, disassociated from the present, reliving [her] past with the hindsight of how very tough those times had been."³⁶ This turn backward focuses on the "ghost of Jenny," Ro's first love, who we are told "walked beside me, although she had been gone for the war."³⁷ The loss of Jenny is imbricated with "war" trauma, which we later learn

³⁴ Elizabeth Freeman, *Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 65.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

³⁶ O'Donnell, *Slant*, 10.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

to mean the AIDS epidemic as Ro experienced it unfold within her small circle of gay male friends in Boston and Provincetown in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

In crucial ways, both O'Donnell's *Slant* and Tóibín's *The Blackwater Lightship* unsettle what Ann Cvetkovich identifies as the confining of AIDS-related activist traumas to "public and collective formations, rather than private or therapeutic ones."³⁸ Ro's backward turn pulls the reader into the undertow of queer trauma that cannot be fully accommodated by either public or private spheres. To enact this temporal drag, O'Donnell foregrounds notes written on postcards to Jenny that Ro has kept but never sent, thus turning our attention to her queer archive of things chronicled but unsaid:

I sat on the beach and read and re-read an old postcard from Jenny and the note I had written to her in return but, as so often, had never sent. I had to start there, with Jenny's words and my reply. I had to pick up and follow those lines to remember again, to literally re-member me, to put my limbs and body, my mind and memory, back together again. To begin again.³⁹

In *Time Binds*, Freeman conceptualizes temporal drag as being like the undertow of a wave in so much as a wave's forward movement also necessitates a pull backwards.⁴⁰ Suffering from burnout caused by canvassing, Ro returns to Herring Cove, Cape Cod, to listen "to the thump and sizzle of the waves."⁴¹ The soundscape of the sea prompts her to consider how the linear temporality that undergirds minority politics, evidenced by the progress message of Yes Equality, obscures the fact that the winning of rights is not an irreversible event: "... I felt now,

³⁸ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 156.

³⁹ O'Donnell, *Slant*, 12.

⁴⁰ Freeman, *Queer Temporalities*, 65.

⁴¹ O'Donnell, *Slant*, 12.

once again and as if for the first time, the shadows looming, the forces threatening my youth. Those forces still lived and still threatened and now I was getting older.”⁴² In *The Blackwater Lightship*, Helen also remarks upon the waves that she spies from the strand at Cush:

And as each wave came in, it looked as though it might not break, but merely casually spill in and then get sucked back, but every time there came the inevitable lift and curl and a sound that was almost remote, a sound that, she believed, had nothing to do with her and had no connection to anything she knew, the quiet crashing of a wave.⁴³

For Helen, the waves crashing on Cush strand invite feelings of disassociation and withdrawal. Like the light from “Tuskar” lighthouse, which spills into the windows of her grandmother’s house at night marking the rhythms of external time, the waves on the strand push Helen further into her own inner world.⁴⁴ If the waves at Herring Cove call on Ro to “begin again,” Helen’s recognition of the “inevitable life and curl” of the waves announces a temporality that is not hers, but one that is adjacent to the present, namely the temporality of dying.

While Helen faces the finality of death as natural process, the sound of waves, for Ro, prompts her to confront her own living death. The second chapter in *Slant* is entitled “FOSTER STREET 1984.” This timestamp continues a pattern of temporal maneuver, which witnesses Ro’s call to “begin again” fulfilled as she begins again in an earlier timeline. Sections of the book are dated and placed in a narrative sequence that spans Ro’s years in Boston as an Irish immigrant in the 1980s up until the novel’s present of May 2015. Each section is a piecing together of a history that has been disavowed in the ebb and flow of the equal-marriage referendum campaign. In this way, *Slant* becomes a *drag*. Ro’s testimony, her journey to

⁴² O’Donnell, *Slant*, 10.

⁴³ Tóibín, *Blackwater Lightship*, 50-51.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 255.

coming out as a young dyke, her relationship with Jenny, and her ACT UP activism, serves as the undertow of those waves of neoliberal progress enshrined by the legislative win of equal marriage. In Tóibín's novel, Declan's death is an inevitability that never comes as the narrative offers no closure, leaving Declan on the cusp of death much like a wave "that looked as though it might not break."

Death and the Reparative Life of Activism

Death and dying in these queer Irish novels is both literal and metaphorical. As a returned émigré Ro lives out a life in Ireland that metaphorically seems like a living death as she avoids commitments and life goals. In a different way, Helen witnesses her brother Declan dying from a constellation of AIDS-related illnesses, which wreak various ill effects on his body, including loss of eyesight: "I felt over the past while that I was losing the sight in it, and now it's gone."⁴⁵

In an often overlooked way, Tóibín's quiet depiction of Declan's loss of sight connects the novel to other artistic discourses of the period, which detailed AIDS-related ocular issues. In *Chroma* (1994), the artist, gardener, and film maker Derek Jarman offers an exploration of colour and its meanings, with the chapter "Into the Blue" coming toward the end of his text. This section also informed Jarman's film *Blue* (1993), which features an extended voiced narrative sequence set to a blue screen. Jarman wrote his reflections on colour as he experienced AIDS-related retinal lesions, which affected both his peripheral and central vision in both eyes. In a gentle way, Tóibín connects the fictional Declan to the very real biography of Derek Jarman, suturing the story of *The Blackwater Lightship* to the visual narrative of Jarman's *Blue* in ways that echo across the archive of AIDS texts by queer artists. Whilst the novelistic descriptions of Declan's dying invite connection to activists like Jarman, Tóibín gives scant detail on gay or lesbian activism. When detail is given, it is relegated to the realm

⁴⁵ Ibid., 200.

of the comedic in the form of Larry's story about "the time Mary Robinson invited gay men and lesbians" to Áras an Uachtaráin, the Irish president's official residence in Dublin.⁴⁶ The story that Larry tells recounts his fear of being captured by news cameras at the presidential residence, however; Tóibín's writing is most likely a fictionalization of anxiety that some members of the gay and lesbian rights group GLEN felt when asked to pose for a photograph with the then President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, during her signing into law of the act that decriminalized homosexuality in 1993.⁴⁷ Although Larry's story is slight it is nonetheless a source of entertainment for Declan's family, who are unfamiliar with queer activism.

To a much larger extent, O'Donnell makes activism a source of life affirmation in the face of death and dying. In *Slant*'s final chapter, entitled "Duluth, Louisana, New York, Boston & P-Town 2015," Ro relates how she "started writing *Slant* when [she] was on the plane from Shannon to New York."⁴⁸ Coming in the final pages, Ro's reflection on how she began to write curiously places her novel literally into the hands of the reader. This metafictional turn serves to disrupt our own readerly sense of a distinction between the mythic and the historic. It also recalls another instance of the use of myth in the novel that is directly connected to death and dying. A *leitmotif* for the death and dying *tout court* in the novel is the painting *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (c.1558) by Pieter Bruegel.⁴⁹ This painting is first mentioned by Ro's Provincetown queer-friend Russ, as he recounts his time gallery hopping in Europe:

⁴⁶ Ibid., 144.

⁴⁷ For an account of this incident, see Lynne Kelleher, "Robinson: Gay Rights Leaders Afraid to be Photographed in '93," *Irish Examiner*, 20 June 2017. Available at <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-20452923.html>

⁴⁸ O'Donnell, *Slant*, 313.

⁴⁹ For another reading of O'Donnell's use of *Icarus*, see Declan Kavanagh, "Historians of the Closet: Queering the Past in Contemporary Gay, Lesbian, and Trans Fiction", in Jeremy Chow and Declan Kavanagh (eds) *The Edinburgh Companion to Queer Reading* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2025), 204-219.

“But in Paris, all the paintings were painted by people who obviously were suffering from cataracts. I was *weary*! And then I went to La Musée des Beaux-Arts and I met a painting that helped me understand the world a bit more.”

Russ paused dramatically.

I took up my cue: “What was the painting?”

“It is *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* by Bruegel the Elder and everyone is very busy in it. The ploughman who takes up most of the scene is working hard at ploughing on a headland. In the sea down below him the fancy ship must have witnessed the amazing sight of Icarus, a boy who flew too close to the sun, falling to his watery death. The wax on his homemade wings has melted, but nobody notices his white legs crashing in the green water.”

“Oh.”⁵⁰

In Russ’s exchange with Ro, we learn that Bruegel the Elder’s painting of Icarus has helped him to understand “the world a bit more.” The world that Bruegel depicts is one in which the labour of the plowman takes central focus as Icarus’s falls from the sky to his “watery death.” The painting does not fully capture Icarus’s fall in suspension save the detail of his “white legs crashing in the green water” in the bottom lower right of the painting. Russ stresses that the seafarers onboard the “fancy ship” in the lower right of the painting “must have witnessed” the descent but he also counters this assertion by telling her that “nobody notices.” There is something queer about the way in which Russ reads Bruegel’s Icarus. He tells Ro that he “laughed and laughed!” but then realised that “it was sad, too.”⁵¹ Bruegel’s Icarus is queer, perhaps, not because of the tragedy of his unnoticed fall but more precisely because the very

⁵⁰ Ibid., 161-62.

⁵¹ Ibid.

meaning of his watery end is not fixed. Addressing his estranged mother on a postcard of the painting, Russ writes: “Mama, I realise now that every true thing has more than one meaning.”⁵² Bruegel’s painting of Dedalus’s lost son occasions Russ’s note to his own lost mother, which signals the resurfacing of Russ as Icarus incarnate.

The metafictional turn in *Slant* transforms the novel’s discourse of death and dying into one of life and living. O’Donnell’s queer calling of attention to Ro’s writing suggests to us that the novel might be productively read as a textual Icarus in its mythic and historic assemblage of a shared past that is “not remembered enough to be called forgotten.”⁵³ More precisely, it also testifies to how *Slant* as a queer novel offers readers a history that, however critical of the Irish gay and lesbian political present, is nonetheless reparative for its recording of the love that motors ACT-UP responses to queers in a Reagan-era America that seeks their quiet Icarus-like erasure. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes, the desire animating a reparative impulse is such that “it wants to assemble and confer plenitude on an object that will then have resources to offer to an inchoate self.”⁵⁴ Sedgwick argues that reparative approaches to texts show us “the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture – even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them.”⁵⁵

Ro’s activist duties in the Boston chapter of ACT-UP, working with the “Treatment and Data affinity group,” chronicles the crucial part that lesbian and queer women played in AIDS activism in the United States in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This representation stands in stark contrast to Toibín’s foregrounding of the Devereux women in *The Blackwater Lightship* as apolitical actors who must be schooled in gay rights by Declan’s friends Paul and Larry. In many ways, *Slant* offers the obverse by zoning in on the role of women in AIDS

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⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 10.

⁵⁴ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 149.

⁵⁵ Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 150-51.

activist work. The specific teamwork of facilitating education and gathering medical data has been recently documented by Sarah Schulman in *Let The Record Show* (2021). Schulman writes that “each member adopted one drug or illness or protocol and became an expert, engaging science and pharma on behalf of that specific project.”⁵⁶ Whilst *Slant* details Ro’s affinity group work it also reveals how ACT-UP offered its members reparative possibilities in the present: “I travelled fairly frequently to New York and D.C. for die-ins, political funerals, media jamming. I loved our joyful, sexy, wild parties ... We laughed because for some of us there would be no tomorrow. But there was this glorious now, a space and time for us that we had created together, and we relished every beat. I was there. I saw it all.”⁵⁷ If the novel records the paranoid position that fuelled ACT-UP activism (and most forms of political intervention), then it also calls witness to the powerfully reparative nature of that very same activism. Ro’s testimony recall’s Russ’s realisation, following Bruegel’s Icarus, that “*every true thing has more than one meaning*.” The “glorious now” that Ro records is akin to Bruegel’s painting of the partly submerged Icarus with his white legs crashing but not fully sunken. Her memory bears witness to the reparative potential that exists in a queer activist past that has been forgotten by her generation or is largely unknown by younger Irish lesbians and gays. Whilst readers are afforded some detail about gay and lesbian political organization through Larry, Tóibín eschews the kind of focus that O’Donnell gives to instead confer political authority on the quietly normative and assimilationist politics embodied by Declan’s other friend, Paul, an Irish émigré who lives in Brussels and works as a diplomat. Tóibín presents Paul’s relationship to François, his partner, as a Yes Equality marriage long before the campaign existed. Notably, in a mass scene that is strangely anachronistic, Helen regards how Paul “dressed conservatively

⁵⁶ Sarah Schulman, *Let The Record Show: A Political History of Act Up New York, 1987-1993* (New York: Picador, 2021), 593.

⁵⁷ O’Donnell, *Slant*, 231.

and could have fitted in as a local farmer's son, a staunch pillar of the community."⁵⁸ Where there is a liberal politics that emerges from death and dying in *The Blackwater Lightship*, it is a resolutely male one that female characters like Helen quietly absorb.

In *Slant*, O'Donnell's trans-temporal writing of Ro historicizes the overlooked role that lesbians and queer women played in AIDS activism, whilst also recovering the queer joy of lesbian identification as a reparative resource:

Already I could feel my feet were wet through the Converse sneakers and I was never so integrated, so whole and clean and sure. I might not be a real lesbian, whatever that might be or look like, but I could be lesbian, adjective and adverb. I wanted to be with the lesbians. I wanted to romance and live there and learn from them and grow strange and old among that tribe.⁵⁹

The above scene occurs as Ro crosses "the bridge over the Charles River at Allston" where a thunderstorm had "brought a deluge of warm teeming rain."⁶⁰ Ro's realization of her own lesbianism is less an ontological question and more a recognition of tribal affiliation. Prior to this, her earlier drink with Jenny involved discussions about what constitutes a "lesbian." Ro probed Jenny on the semantics of coming out: "I don't understand why it's coming out, isn't it more like coming into yourself, coming into a lesbian life?"⁶² Although Jenny disagrees and later Eily tells her that "it really is out, not coming in. There's no point questioning it when that's what is said!"⁶³ the question reminds us that queer self-identification precedes and

⁵⁸ Tóibín, *Blackwater Lightship*, 237.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 109.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 121.

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exceeds the act of coming out. Whether or not one comes out or finds themselves closeted, the act of coming in is, in fact, a precondition for one's embracing of a queer life at all. Part of the reparative work then in this remembering of how "integrated . . . whole and clean and sure" Ro felt when she realized that she "could be a lesbian, adjective and adverb," is the recovery of the queer epistemology of *coming into* lesbian identification. This textual knowingness in *Slant* is reparative because it replaces the scrutiny that often attends publicly coming out with the pure queer joy of private affirmation. This is also a textual moment that queries the coming-out trope, thereby offering readers queer complexity in place of the normative certainties of the coming-out narrative. Again, as Ro comes in above Boston's largest river, we are reminded of Bruegel's Icarus falling *into* the sea. Ro's *coming in* offers us another queer reading of Icarus's death as a transformative moment of queer failure. In *The Blackwater Lightship* dying is Declan's route to coming out. We are told by Helen that she has known for a decade; however, it is Declan's illness and impending death that outs him to his mother, Lily, and grandmother, Dora. Importantly, Declan never verbalizes that he is gay or bisexual in the novel: he never comes out in the traditional sense to his family. Illness and dying replace the act of coming out for Declan in ways that gesture to Ro's epistemology of "coming in" that he, like all queer people, shares in.

Conclusion: Dying to be Seen

Both *Slant* and *The Blackwater Lightship* narrate the lives of queer émigrés who are dying to be seen, namely Ro and Declan, characters whose queerness emerges under the sign of death. In both narratives, Irish diasporic community nurtures a queer life that is nonetheless marked by death. Queer subjects in these diasporic narratives return to Ireland as temporal shocks, as émigrés who upset the discreteness of the national past. In *Slant*, an older repatriated Ro lives a metaphorically dead life that bears the scars of loss. In *The Blackwater Lightship*, Declan

emerges as a body that is literally dying to be seen, his queerness only recognizable in the context of his hastening AIDS-related illness and decline. Ro's diasporic identity is tied to queer death. In the 2010s, living in Cork city and with the trauma of the loss of many friends from AIDS-related illness as well as the psychic cost of activist work past, Ro lives out Icarus's submersion out of time: "Any jobs I've had, or house shares or flats I've rented, have never required me to sign a contract, so it's been largely inconsequential to anyone else if I come or go."⁶⁴ She queerly reads herself as "being good at failure."⁶⁵ Ro's celebration of failure chimes with Halberstam's claim that "Failing is something that queers do and have always done exceptionally well."⁶⁶ More than resistance to heteronormative expectation, Ro's own "failure" as self-erasure recalls the literal erasure, after her friend Neeraj's death, of the queer life that he shared with his partner, John, in their Boston home:

It was awful to see the apartment utterly stripped of the plethora of framed photographs of John and Neeraj. The Tom of Finland poster in the bathroom was gone, the video collection was nowhere to be seen, the piles of magazines on either side of the sofa were stripped of all of the fashion, fitness and gay titles. Even the original poster for the movie *Funny Girl* had been removed from the kitchen. I couldn't speak.⁶⁷

As her friend John receives Neeraj's parents and sister in the apartment that he once shared with him, Ro is enlisted to play the part of his beard (his would-be girlfriend). In this fictive reality, John and Neeraj were just friends and any evidence of them as lovers is fully erased from the apartment. The site of confirmation for this fictive reality is the body of Ro. It is Ro's

⁶⁴ Ibid., 280.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 3.

⁶⁷ O'Donnell, *Slant*, 236-37.

female and docile body that provides the screen upon which to project the heteronormative fantasy that allows John to grieve with Neeraj's family without outing him. The love that John feels is marked by erasure; however, that very erasure is itself a final act of love for Neeraj, who could not be out to his family. For Ro, Neeraj's funeral gathering, in her newly-imagined apartment with John, forces her into the perspective of one of Bruegel's labourers, who does not see or refuses to engage with, Icarus's watery end. It is in the aftermath of this moment that Ro queerly transforms the potential of not being *recorded* as a reparative mode for survival: "I know myself by my loneliness. This is me. This is me."⁶⁸ The death of friends like Russ and Neeraj pushes Ro into a life of the unrecorded: a living death.

In perhaps the starkest queer Irish diasporic tale in *Slant*, readers learn through Ro's memory how John Kerrigan's return from Boston to Ireland ends in his suicide from jumping onto train tracks and being struck by a train. Ro infers that this brutal end is chosen by John to hide his own advancing AIDS-related illness from his family shortly after his return to Ireland. O'Donnell painfully conveys through John's story the way in which Irish queer émigrés return dying to be seen, as queerness and Irishness remain incommensurable unless figured as death. In Tóibín's novel, Declan's imminent death forces Helen to connect with her unresolved grief surrounding the death of her father. In one of the most moving scenes in Tóibín's *oeuvre*, we see a young Helen assemble the clothes of her late father into the familiarity of his silhouette on her parent's bed:

She laid the suit full-length on the bed. She put the shirt inside the jacket and stuffed the sleeves of the shirt into its arms, and opened the buttons of the shirt and put the vest inside, and then closed up the buttons. She put the tie around her own neck, as if it were her school tie, and tied a knot in it and placed it inside the collar of her father's shirt

⁶⁸ O'Donnell, *Slant*, 282.

and straightened it. Then she put the underpants inside the trousers and laid the trousers out, tying up the buttons of the fly, and tucking the shirt into the trousers. She found the socks and put one inside each shoe and placed the shoes at the bottom of the trouser legs, but they didn't look right.⁶⁹

In this flashback scene, the young Helen absorbs the painful loss of her father by queerly attempting to resurrect him through her careful sartorial arrangement of his belongings. Although doomed to queerly fail, Helen's memory of this act of mourning offers her, and by extension Tóibín's reader, reparative possibilities in the present as she confronts her brother's AIDS-related illness. For Helen, Declan's dying fractures temporality in ways that make available repressed memories. In this way, Tóibín communicates a truth about death: the pain felt always exceeds the singular subject that one mourns. Death is a condition that opens the veritable floodgates of time. Whilst *Slant* and *The Blackwater Lightship* diverge in their engagements with the politics of AIDS and its attendant queer activisms, both novels make death itself upon the terrain of diasporic crossings the entry point into a politics that is reparative. Declan's impending death opens a familial space for reconciliation across generations of women in the novel. Ro's recording of the unrecorded, her writing about deaths from AIDS-related illness, similarly offers a space for recognition across fragmentary and unified generations of queer Irish activists. In these Irish and queer diasporic novels, death offers the potential for affective bonds to strengthen and for generational conflict to be repaired. Curiously, too, in both novels, death and dying connect to time and, more particularly, to a narratively rich unfolding of queer temporality that offers readers the opportunity to trace their own reparative potential in these Irish diasporic tales.

⁶⁹ Tóibín, *Blackwater Lightship*, 81.