

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

A Changing Home:  
Displaced Trauma, Madness,  
and the Specter of Nation in New Irish Literature

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

Literature

by

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2018



The Dissertation of Danielle Loree Hammer is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California San Diego

2018

## DEDICATION

For  
Rowan, Aoife, Joshua,  
Mom, GG, Mike, Pie,  
and those who have gone ahead—  
you haunt me in the best possible way.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

A Changing Home:  
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In this dissertation, I look at how the strains of post-colonial nationhood manifest in the haunted homes and mad families of new Irish literature. This nation is shaped by long years of struggle under a colonial force, and this imbalance of power marks the individuals in these post-independence works. Each symbolic strain indicates a traumatic mark on the national identity

itself. However, the manifestation of national trauma is rooted in the various gothic depictions of the home and family. I begin by looking at the supernatural, but my focus is truly on the social structures and traumatic moments that shape the families in each work.

I assert that the traumas of this developing nation manifest in the gothic themes of the modernist inspired literature written in the decades after independence. The personal responses to these traumas appear in the literary depictions of haunting and madness. Here the ghosts signify both shared traumatic events and the personal trauma-related pains that are too socially taboo to express. In contrast, the symbolic presence of madness is a transgressive expression of the individual's responses to a trauma. Authors use this literary madness to call out the social strains of the long process of reinventing a national identity after colonial occupation.

The time period for the works ranges from publication dates in the 1940s to around 2016. Yet, the individual pieces are set as far back as the start of Irish independence. In effect, this is the Irish looking back on the moments that haunt them as a culture. The traumatic reshaping of a post-colonial national identity comes down to a matter of the family. Each individual in these works deals with the consequences of displacing the individual response to strain for too long, and the family and home are where this haunting realization appears.

## Introduction

That the Irish are a mad people in a haunted land appears to be the consensus of modern Irish literature. It does not seem to matter that modern Ireland has no higher rates of mental disability than any other European nation.<sup>1</sup> Nor does it matter that many of the ghosts are rooted in the long and traumatic history of British colonial rule. Ireland and the gothic themes of madness and haunting are a common pairing in both historical and literary works. The question is then, what can we learn from the ghosts and mad figures that stalk through Irish literature? I contend that these characters represent a series of national traumas that are integral to understanding the development of family structure in new Irish literature. These pains echo in the broken homes and fractured souls present in the literature of the decades following independence. The underlying thread that unites these new works is strongest in the mad and haunted characters that populate what should be loving homes. Ultimately, these gothic representations of traumatized families signify both a deeply marked national psyche and the sometimes-earth-shattering ramifications of change.

The pains of a nation are vast and varied, but these moments comprise a small part of the force that shapes each community and home. My interest is in the families that echo these shared moments of suffering in every dysfunctional line and act. Not every unhappy family comes from a historical trauma or a problematic social institution. However, the numerous instances of shared national trauma shape so many families in new Irish literature that it is difficult to eliminate the nation from this discussion. Family is where the movements of a nation are truly apparent. An institution like the Catholic church plays a pivotal role in Irish national policy, yet

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<sup>1</sup> Brendan D. Kelly further discusses the rates of mental disability in his article, "Psychiatric Admission in Ireland: the Role of Country of Origin." *Ethical and Legal Debates in Irish Healthcare: Confronting Complexities*

the traumatic potential of this institution comes out clearest in the dynamic of the home.

Likewise, a national strain like the recent recession seems like only a matter of money, until we see what misery the losses of the period created for so many families. Therefore, I look at how some shared traumas shape the family structure and ultimately transform it into something frighteningly new.

This discussion of independence-related suffering requires that we first consider what a traumatic event is historically. A trauma, by definition, is a large-scale event that is so violent or out of the course of human experience that an individual is unequipped to deal with it. I discuss numerous types of stresses and pains throughout these chapters, but these events taken on their own amount to the mere difficulties that any individual might suffer from in an unequal social system. The little moments of pain combine to form something closer to what we understand as a traumatic event. These small aches represent how the struggles of a nation can trickle down to the home. Yet these insidious pains are only just becoming recognized as traumatic events.

Historically, our understanding of trauma is associated with Jean Martin Charcot's research on how the previously feminized concept of hysteria was actually a part of the physical and mental repercussions of a traumatic event. These are the large-scale events that we would traditionally understand as a trauma. Charcot found that what was considered to be a physiological issue actually had psychological roots. This is a part of the early link between external strain and the seemingly unrelated manifestations of symptoms in the individual. Charcot's student Pierre Janet theorized that the individual's responses to a traumatic event were directly linked to how this individual perceives the event. Sigmund Freud also followed Charcot's work and came to the conclusion that these physical symptoms had psychological

roots. Both Freud and Janet concluded that one of the key tendencies of the traumatized individual is the reenactment of the original trauma in an attempt to change this past event.

This reenactment of past suffering comes up in many examples of modern Irish literature. Throughout this dissertation, I focus on both the large and small moments of pain and suffering that are a collective part of the traumatic re-birth of a nation. The process of gaining independence after over 800 years of colonization is a shared cultural moment that is as full of violence and trauma as it is joy. I will hereafter refer to the smaller collective moments of suffering as insidious or daily traumas. I acknowledge that these moments on their own do not amount to a trauma, but when combined they form a strong argument for the damaging potential of the daily pains of a life lived in struggle and only small gains. In contrast, I refer to the more traditional traumatic events as overt traumas.

I focus on the manifestation of pain in the family sphere, so the concept of historical trauma is also important here. This term typically refers to the long-term cultural effects of events like genocide. Yet the loss of culture that takes place with colonization is also a historical trauma. In effect, this shared strain can wound a culture for generations to come. One instance of extreme trauma can start a generational cycle of pain that includes child abuse, substance abuse, or even poverty. The grand emotional scope of both overt and insidious traumas manifest in physical, emotional, and mental responses that may not be obviously linked to the initial event. These expressions of pain are often culturally frowned upon, and this results in a repression of any physical or mental responses to the strain.

A traumatic event is never processed enough by the individual to be consciously ignored; however, the individual's responses to this pain *can* be repressed. I claim that this repression leads to a displacement, or relocation, of the personal responses to suffering. This displacement

is what damages both home and community alike. What this means is that the individual tries to ignore the physical and mental responses to a given strain. Repression does not mean that the responses go away; rather, these consequences of an initial trauma or strain grow exponentially without acknowledgement. These pent-up feelings and physical symptoms are then displaced into a wide range of forms. I deal primarily with the displaced forms of haunting and madness in this work.

The gothic features of these novels and films can be subtle, but these symbols of trauma always reappear eventually. Thus, the literary representation of madness and haunting are complimentary manifestations of the personal responses to both overt and insidious traumas. I focus on how shared national pains shape the Irish family structure in the decades after independence. I am working from the premise that the haunted families and mad relatives in each work are a manifestation of larger social issues that come along with both a national legacy of colonial rule and the long Irish struggle for independence. These gothic figures are convenient symbolic markers for the larger social issues taking place in the works.

The ever-present literary figures of ghosts are ephemeral reminders that pain has taken place, but these specters are not the only reminders of suffering in the texts.<sup>2</sup> These authors use haunting to allude to the repercussions of the large-scale repression of suffering. However, the transgressive counterpart to haunting is in literary representations of madness. Unlike the silent specters, these symbolic mad men and women openly rage about their suffering. The pain that these damaged figures shout about is rooted in the inequalities and difficulties created by the

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<sup>2</sup> I base my discussion of haunting on Avery Gordon's work *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*

Irish struggle for independence. Each mad response is a part of the movement away from older and highly binding social ideals

### **The Nation at Home**

It might seem odd to include nation in a discussion of family trauma, but each grand scale movement of a country has a profound impact on the home. Ireland has struggled through both British colonial rule and the long fight to stabilize the newly independent land. Of course, not every pain in a family *is* necessarily related to the process of independence. However, these fictional families are broken in such substantial and symbolic ways that it is difficult not to see some larger traumatic force behind each novel. The concept of nation is a way of justifying the overabundance of unhappy and broken families in new Irish literature. Each work ultimately centers on damaged families that are caught up in the inherent traumas of a nation breaking free from a legacy of colonial rule.

These works are all written after Irish independence and loosely related to the traumas of the nation, but I am choosing to group them according to literary trend, rather than date. The repercussions from a traumatic moment might not manifest in a given society or literature for years after the event, so it is difficult to pin down a specific historical date for this study. Instead, I refer to these works as “new” Irish literature. The actual span of time that I am looking at here ranges from publication dates in the 1940s to around 2016. However, the symbolic period of the works stretches back to the start of Irish independence. This literary trend focuses on how the pains of the recent Irish past shape identity and family structure in the present. Some of the tensions that I discuss are related directly to difficulties that came up in the years after

independence; however, I have also chosen to include some colonial influences that continue to traumatically shape modern Irish families.

The clerical abuses in the Irish Catholic church are a key example of institutional trauma in new Irish literature. The Church is not wholly a product of colonialism, but it is difficult to argue against the idea that the rigid structure of Catholicism certainly made many Irish more tractable to British colonial rule. For instance, the rigid structure of the Church included strictly enforced gender roles that reinforced patriarchal rule and robbed Irish women of many of their traditional social rights. This streamlined the power structure so that the male heads of household answered primarily to the Church. Effectively, this reorganization meant that the British crown only needed to influence the Church to control the Irish people. The social strains and insidious traumas perpetuated by the Church have had a long-lasting impression in contemporary Irish literature. The Church's role in structuring a system of repression needs to be addressed in any study of Irish trauma; however, the other traumatic influences that I focus on are rooted in specific historical moments. The years of widespread Irish emigration to places like America comprise one of the less definable but key periods that I focus on here.

Irish emigration has been prevalent since the Great Hunger, but I look at Irish emigration to America in the years between 1920 and 1935. The emigrants in these years often left to find a better life away from the turbulence of the Irish struggle for independence. However, this period is traumatic because the American recession of 1929 effectively crushed any of these dreams of a better life. This period of emigration was a difficult one for the Irish who came to America, and it is an essential moment in Irish history that needs to be discussed in any current look at Irish trauma. Shared traumas are central to the damaged families and broken individuals in these works.

Unsurprisingly, another traumatic time in recent Irish history is collectively known as the “Troubles.” This period between the late 1960s and the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 was a key moment of trauma in Ireland’s struggle for independence. Depictions of this historical moment are rife with examples of the traumatic losses that broke many families. This period is perhaps one of the most violent and influential in any study of contemporary Irish trauma. The pain and distrust of this time marked the writing of an entire generation. Although the works that I focus on are not specifically set during the Troubles, I argue that there is a definite link between the external tension and violence in these novels and this period. The works in this chapter show how so much violence colors even texts set on the outskirts of these traumatic moments.

In terms of current traumas, the recession that followed the “Celtic Tiger” economic boom was a drastic period where boom-era hopes were shattered by the harsh realities of what it meant for many Irish families to live well beyond their means. This recession hit a nation that finally seemed to be coming into its own, and many families were left with nothing. Yet the despair of this downturn also created the potential for the revision of the rigid gender roles encouraged by the Church. The traumas of independence are present in the literature of the decades after this moment, but the gothic form that these pains take can sometimes be deceptive. As we will see, each gothic moment links back to the ways that the individuals in these post-colonial communities attempt to deal with the insidious and overt traumas inherent in the struggle for independence.

### **Displacement: The Cycle of Trauma and Repression**

Before looking at the specifics in the representations of this post-independence trauma, we first need to establish what trauma is in the context of this dissertation. A trauma is an event

that is too painful for an individual to fully assimilate and acknowledge, so she or he continues to play out the painful moment through various personal responses. Essentially, this is a past moment that is revived, frequently with debilitating side effects, in the present (Caruth 6). Theorists like Cathy Caruth look at trauma as the series of seemingly unrelated emotional and physical responses that a person experiences after said event. However, Caruth points out that her discussion of traumas concerns primarily extraordinary or overt traumatic events. These are instances, like mass bombings or horrific train wrecks, that are far removed from the ordinary experiences of life. A trauma is hidden by definition, so these overt moments of suffering are feasibly represented in the haunting and madness of these new Irish works. However, the pains that I focus on tend to be far quieter moments that slowly creep into each novel.

These small scale traumatic events that I focus on are more closely related to general prolonged strain than an overt trauma. The stresses range from physical and mental abuse to traumas like that of poverty. Lorraine Cates looks at this prolonged distress in the concept that she calls “insidious emotional trauma.” This variation on trauma is essentially the compilation of emotional strain that manifests in a similar way to other overt traumas. The key to this insidious emotional trauma is that the stress either continues for a prolonged period or is a part of the expected range of potential lifetime experiences. Cates positions the body as the storage site for the compiled emotional strains of the mind and shows how the long-term effect of emotional scars can have a physical manifestation. She focuses primarily on the harm that compounded emotional strains can cause, especially in young minds. However, I contend that insidious emotional trauma needs to be extended to also cover the emotional wounds created by more common physical strains like abuse. These long term bodily abuses are the most common kind of traumatic event present in the works that I discuss here, so I will mark these moments as slightly

different from Cates' discussion of mental scarring and insidious emotional traumas by referring to the events that I study simply as insidious traumas. The small strains are far less grand-scale than more overt traumas, but the results can be very similar in terms of the impact on the individual and the society.

In the novels that I discuss, the communal response is to repress the individual reaction to a traumatic event. This silencing ranges from the literal shushing of loud drunken figures to the more malevolent and communal act of ignoring clerical abuse. The repression of pain is a social pressure on the traumatized individuals to keep them from expressing their personal responses to any subsequent manifestations of trauma-related strain. Often, especially in the case of quieter and more prolonged events, the response to a trauma can be so subtle and devastating that it is just absorbed into the individual's character as a matter of course and does not manifest itself as anything more unusual than something like anxiety. The important thing here is that the personal response does not just go away; rather, the individual unknowingly represses the physical and mental strains until they reappear in another form.

The trend in trauma studies is heading towards embracing and exploring the pains of the past. A great deal of this work emphasizes advocacy and helping the victims of different traumas learn to represent themselves and see the past that has shaped them. I attempt this same self-awareness of the past in my work, but I focus instead on how repression of the past shapes the present. The response to a trauma can only be repressed until the act of repressing the event creates enough of a displaced response to pain that it can no longer be ignored by others in the society. As an example, in my third chapter I look at Patrick McCabe's novel *The Butcher Boy*. The accumulation of unaddressed pain is what causes the young character of Francie to snap and murder his neighbor.

Traumas are, by their very nature, too big or violent to be fully comprehended, but the personal responses to them can be repressed and then reappear in seemingly unrelated ways. In general, a person experiences a traumatic event and the physical and mental responses that come with it are often ignored or even forcibly repressed. Over time, this repression manifests in some displaced tic or fear that bears little resemblance to the actual trauma. This is a type of displacement where the pain of the traumatic moment is first absorbed and then channeled into another form that may or may not have a direct correlation to the original trauma. As the term suggests, this displacement is the literal movement of something from one area to another. Although many things can be displaced, the reorganization of power is a central displacement in new Irish literature.

I focus on several different types of displacement; however, the examples are each indicative of a social structure that keeps power in limited hands and discourages the personal expression of pain by those without power. My primary interest is in the displacement of British colonial control and the colonized subject's subsequent displacement of their individual responses to the insidious traumas that come from the abuses of power. I look at the years just after Irish independence, when Irish citizens in this period were still, for the most part, in the position of secondary social subjects. British colonial rule, in combination with the Catholic church, created a rigid system that left the power in the hands of very few. I am concerned with how the power is initially taken from these Irish subjects, how they try to reclaim their social positions, and what this struggle with displacement does to the families in each work.

This negotiation of power begins with the initial displacement wherein the authority, whether the British government or the Church, takes the social power of individuals and then uses this power to reinforce social control. As an example, I spend some time looking at how the

traditional social power of women keening at wakes is taken by both the government and the Church. In place of this traditional power, institutions like the Church emphasize women as the moral centers of their male-run homes. The original power of social speech present in keening is then displaced by social structures like the Church and reorganized into a different role that is limited to the home. The post-independence social structure redirects lost social powers into other means that often perpetuate the cycle of trauma that we see in modern Irish literature. I primarily focus on how less-empowered individuals, like women and children, both respond to the traumas of this unequal power structure. I am interested in how they negotiate their own responses to the inherent strains of this system and what these subtle rebellions mean for new Irish literature.

Although repression is an essential part of the personal response to trauma, the ambiguous term of displacement needs some clarification. One type of displacement comes up in my first chapter with the discussion of the power structure of the Catholic church. In its basic form, this first type of displacement refers to how the Church funneled the traditional social powers of women into a strong patriarchal system, which increased the Church's influence. The redistribution of power coupled with social pressure to repress personal pain left the women with little recourse to express their pain. The strained setting perpetuates unequal power structures and forces those who experience traumas to push down their own responses to these stressful events.

Another essential displacement is the literal movement of Irish who moved to America in the years immediately before and after the start of independence. This physical displacement comes from both overt traumas in the establishment of nationhood and more insidious traumas such as the long-term effects of poverty. While there are many reasons to emigrate, insidious or overt traumas often force the individual to leave her or his home country. The traumatic

repercussions continue with the strains that these far-flung family members experience in their new countries. The various movements of power and people are essential for understanding trauma in contemporary Ireland, but the initial displacements are not my primary focus in this dissertation. Rather, these displaced bodies and their resultant pains are the centers of mad rebellion in new Irish literature. The final form of displacement is crucial to my work. My central claim is that the repression of strain is eventually displaced and reemerges in the gothic elements of haunting and madness.

One of the core foci of this dissertation will be Irish literary representations of madness as symbolic rebellions against suffering. Although my project makes use of the work of some British and American disability theorists, the primary focus for the madness component of this work will be on the symbolic use of mental disability as a literary trope. This strictly literary treatment of mental disability comes up against disability theorists like David Mitchel and Sharon Snyder and their concept of narrative prosthesis. This theory looks at how many authors use disability as a means of furthering a story. The use of disability as a literary device does little to nothing in the way of advocacy for real individuals with disabilities. The use of disability as a narrative prosthesis is problematic for many reasons, including the lack of depth that these characters are often given and the tendency of the works to pick up and discard these characters with seeming ease. Many of the works I discuss feature mad and mentally disabled characters, but this insanity is used as a tool for the authors to engage with the stresses of each historical period in question. The term madness can be quite divisive, but my intent in using it here is to encompass both the past negative associations of the word and the more modern embracing of

madness as an empowering term.<sup>3</sup> The use of these mad characters as literary devices can tell us about how Ireland as a nation has dealt with the strains of finally gaining independence.

### **Literary Ghosts and Mad Figures in New Irish Literature**

I began this introduction by referring to gothic ghosts that populate new Irish literature, but the symbolic use of haunting is a complex and often quite subtle manifestation of repressed suffering. This ghostly presence on the edge of a narrative eventually creates enough tension in the text to make the figure an almost tangible presence. These ghosts can be actual gothic figures, but they are most often persistent memories of past traumas. I refer to these lingering memories as ghosts because the presence of the repressed past is closer to a haunting of the present than the simple presence of a memory in the text. Since these new Irish authors focus on the pains of the past, they also reinforce the “ghost” theme by linking memory and the violence of a traumatic event. These authors remind us that Ireland’s recent history is full of pain that lingers, much like any specter, in the hearts and minds of its citizens.

One theorist I rely on here is Avery Gordon and her work on haunting. Gordon approaches the spectral in a similar way to how Caruth looks at trauma. In short, she portrays these literary hauntings as moments when something that has been long repressed then appears in a spectral form that hints at what lies under the surface of awareness. I agree with Gordon’s approach to haunting as the manifestation of something that has been held back. However, I will add that pain is expressed not only through haunting but symbolic madness as well.

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<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to Margaret Price’s book, *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life*. Her discussion of the efforts to reclaim the idea of madness as an empowering nonnormative state of mind is fundamental to my discussion of the rebellious potential of madness.

A key component of both madness and haunting is that they are a part of the sufferer's inability to move beyond the pain of the past. Therefore, Sigmund Freud's discussion in "Mourning and Melancholia" also figures in this discussion of trauma. Freud outlines the inability of the melancholic to move beyond the loss that they cannot acknowledge. This emphasis on the past shapes many of the haunting stories that I discuss here. In the case of both Freud and Gordon, the important idea is that the present manifestation of haunting or madness signifies a past that calls for attention from the individual or group. This need to acknowledge the painful past is key to understanding why traumatic events are first repressed and then re-emerge in other forms.

The current work on memory and Irish culture has focused more on embracing these historical traumas and acknowledging how they can shape the present.<sup>4</sup> I also incorporate theorists, such as Beata Piątek and Robert Garratt, who are centered on the specificities of this Irish perspective on trauma and memory. These works deal with the cultural preoccupation with Ireland's traumatic past and the ways that this focus is translated into the gothic elements of this modern literature. Additionally, authors like Robert Garrett explain why so many contemporary texts are centered on major periods of trauma like the Troubles.<sup>5</sup> While this text does a wonderful job of looking at the manifestation of haunting in modern Irish literature, I contend that a study of trauma in post-independence Irish literature is not complete without looking at the nearly equal presence of madness in these novels. The constant presence of ghosts in new Irish

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<sup>4</sup> See Lesley Lelourec and Grainne O'Keeffe-Vigneron. *Ireland and Victims: Confronting the Past, Forging the Future* for a multidisciplinary approach to recent Irish trauma studies

<sup>5</sup> See Garratt's *Trauma and History in the Irish Novel: The Return of the Dead* for a full discussion of Troubles-era hauntings.

literature shows how this society both represses personal strain and Others the “mad” individuals who do not keep silent.

The most acceptable means of expressing trauma in a culture that actively represses it is for this personal response to be repressed until it manifests as a kind of haunting that colors the individuals who encounter the ghost. However, these “ghosts” point to the more socially acceptable means of dealing with trauma by repressing it. Haunting itself, at least in the figurative sense, is more of a socially accepted manifestation of repressed strains or traumas. Finding a person with a ghost story, even if it takes a little prodding, is not in itself an uncommon occurrence. This is not to say that haunting itself is a publicly sanctioned act: rather, it is simply not limited as a socially taboo subject. The characters do not consciously choose to be haunted, but they are a part of this haunting in the sense that they belong to communities that actively encourage repression of personal responses to tension.

Literary representations of haunting are a way for the painful past to exist in the present without ever being fully acknowledged. For instance, the character of the dead infant Gerald is a central narrator in William Kennedy’s novel *Ironweed*. Gerald’s family all know that it was the father Francis’s fault that the baby slipped and died, but they choose to pretend that the boy died from natural causes. Gerald haunts the edges of both the text and Francis’ memories, but this presence illustrates that there is something, like the real cause of death, that none of these characters consciously address. Frequently, such hauntings are either ignored or glossed over in the text. However, the almost-presence of these painful shared moments are enough to shape the families and communities in these works. One important difference between these two displaced manifestations of trauma is that haunting is a far more socially acceptable manifestation of suffering. The constant presence of literary hauntings alludes to the fact that these specters are a

more socially acceptable representation of traumatic events. These hauntings make even more sense when we pair them with the equally gothic and omnipresent madness in these texts.

Symbolic madness is haunting's taboo counterpart, enabling characters to lash out against their pain. Literary depictions of madness are then an individual's traumatic response that is translated into seemingly incoherent physical actions and speech. However, a closer inspection of these representations shows that what is seeming nonsense is really a strategic expression of pain and suffering that the dominant culture cannot understand. The traumatic response is first repressed, and then when it can no longer be held back, it is displaced into the physical actions and verbal responses that society considers to be mad. Both haunting and madness begin with the attempt to repress the personal responses to a trauma, but the difference is that the mad characters take the transgressive step of expressing the pain that they have little social means of representing. Symbolic madness is a way for an author to actively push against historical stresses in recent Irish history.

Some characters attempt to speak out against the social structure that encourages the repression of trauma, but this same tendency to shout when society encourages silence ultimately makes these outspoken characters "mad." The most forthright characters in these works are the socially isolated or mad figures. These mad characters shout out their rage over the unfairness of their lives, and they refuse to float around the edges of these texts and subtly remind the others that something painful sits under the surface. Literary madness is the necessary other of haunting in that it represents the unmediated expression of personal traumas.

These mad characters are transgressive because they often publicly confront the demons of their lives. Moments of mad rage are also somewhat common for modern Irish literature. From the mad rant in Samuel Beckett's "Not I" to moments like the citizen's rants in James

Joyce's *Ulysses*, we see men and women railing against the injustice of their lives. The need to speak about an unhealthy pain in one's life would seem like a model of what an individual should do with a traumatic event. However, the tendency that post-independence Irish literature has to rage against trauma is at odds with the social compulsion to repress suffering. These fictional communities are simply unequipped to deal with the expressive nature of the mad characters. In one sense, these transgressive figures are speaking a different language of pain that their communities are unable to understand. These characters voice their pain, and this act is what makes them socially defined as mad.

While it is difficult to generalize about a host of real mental disabilities, symbolic literary madness is often an amalgamation of symptoms that enable an author to enhance a character or situation. I contend that the use of madness as a moment of narrative prosthesis tells us a lot about the way that this culture processes traumatic events. These mad figures comprise the wildly singing drunks, the raging women confined in a Magdalene Asylum, and the mothers and wives who break gender roles in the most horrific way possible. These characters transgress their society's norms with their outlandish actions and words, so their "speech" is seldom heard by members of the community as anything other than nonsense. I look at madness as a means of expressing past pain, but the social structure of these works makes it impossible for the other characters to understand this madness for what it is in the context of each piece.

These works are filled with mad characters who cannot disguise their pain, and this inability ensures that the traumatic past is an open wound for each community. The past is alive and vividly present for these mad individuals. Normative characters repress their suffering, but the mad figures rebel against this standard of silence by actively raging about their own troubles. The traumatic event is ever-present for these characters. However, this awareness of the past

does not necessarily mean that the characters escape the inherent inability to see a traumatic event. The mad individuals are those symbolic figures that consistently tell the characters around them the truth and call out the pains of the past.

There are certainly many elements that one might argue are post-modernist in these works, but the modernists themselves shape many of these products of memory. Specifically, many of the works echo authors like T.S. Eliot by centering on both the very modernist need to escape the confines of established institutions and a disillusionment with what has come before. Eliot's best-known poem "The Waste Land" shows a search for meaning coming from a polyphony of voices. This need for unity through disjointed parts is present in the attempts of many post-independence Irish authors to come to terms with the emerging nation. The modernist formal operations provided an ideal way for Irish authors to depict a modernizing and independent nation. Literary modernism rejects many past traditions in an effort to better depict a changing world, but the traumas and joys of nation are difficult to shrug off in such a way.

One flaw with many discussions of modernism is the tendency to eliminate nation from the conversation, and the remedy for this oversight has only recently begun. There are general traits that span both British and American modernism, and this similarity contributes to the discussion of this period and style as a kind of international phenomenon. Yet this view of modernism doesn't take the post-colonial position of Irish modernism into account.<sup>6</sup> National identity can influence many different social aspects, so the influence of postcoloniality on modernist literature is reasonable to assume. Furthermore, modernist formal strategies provided a

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<sup>6</sup> I am indebted to both Gregory Dobbins's article "Constitutional Laziness and the Novel: Idleness, Irish Modernism, and Flann O'Brien's 'At Swim-Two-Birds'" and Denise A. Ayo's article "Modernism, and Mass Media: An Irish-Inflected Transatlantic Print Culture" for a part of this discussion of the differences in Irish modernism.

way for authors to deal with Ireland's struggle for independence. The attempt to depict a rapidly changing world is in-keeping with the Irish break from British colonial rule and the attempt to make sense of the nation in the wake of this brutal transition. The parallels between the historical moment in Ireland and the literary movement are lost if we don't consider the role that the nation plays in Irish modernism. Many of the novels that I look at here take the trauma of modern life in a newly independent nation and turn it into something that is both bleak and humorous. This approach to pain is picked up by Irish modernists like James Joyce and Samuel Beckett and then transmitted through the modernist-inspired novels under consideration here. Furthermore, the same tragically comic approach to trauma is used by many of the later authors that I discuss.

Irish modernism takes the theme of physical and mental alienation farther by incorporating symbolic madness. I contend that this madness is essential for understanding both the Irish modernists and the works in this dissertation. There are many types of madness, but my reading is that this symbolic mental disability is a way for these postcolonial authors to negotiate agency in an emerging nation. This madness can even be extended, to some degree, to the alienation and loss that Irish authors like Samuel Beckett incorporate. Finally, it is impossible to discuss the theme of madness without further connecting this work to the modernist preoccupation with mental disability, as seen in authors like W.B. Yeats and Beckett, among others. These traditional modernists are not the focus of my argument, but I do contend that the works that I discuss are subtly influenced by the modernists in both style and theme.

### **The Chapters in Detail**

Religion can be a balm for the wounded soul; however, the way that Irish Catholicism structures family hierarchies illustrates a social foundation rife with traumatic potential.

Therefore, in my first chapter I focus on how the Church's social influence contributed to both a rigidly patriarchal social system and to the cycle of trauma. It no longer seems to be a matter of debate that the Irish Catholic church perpetrated numerous abuses against congregants. My intent is not to further vilify the Church; rather, I look at the cycle of trauma that this organization has undoubtedly aided. In this first chapter, "A Mad Silence: Trauma and Alternative Voice in Peter Mullan's Film *The Magdalene Sisters* and John McGahern's Novel *Amongst Women*," I discuss how the Church contributed to the strict Irish patriarchal system that has confined and traumatized so many women. Specifically, I demonstrate how the Church both enforces the normative family model and punishes the women who are unable or unwilling to conform to this idea.

To accomplish this goal, I first look at the intra-familial framework of John McGahern's novel *Amongst Women*. This novel follows an aging patriarch, Michael Moran, whose rule over his family is matched only by his inability to let go of his past actions as an IRA fighter. Moran instills a rigid compliance in his children that is so complete that it endures beyond his death. This novel illustrates the rigid social and intrafamilial structure that, in part, makes the traumas of the following chapters possible. I then take McGahern's somewhat critical depiction of Moran's patriarchal rule and look at the unequal power structure of this social system. Specifically, I focus on the Magdalene Asylums, or working penitent laundries, that the Catholic church ran in Ireland from roughly 1765 until 1990.

The abandonment and abuse of the socially transgressive women in Peter Mullan's 2004 film *The Magdalene Sisters* captures both the insidious and overt traumas of the Magdalene laundries. This film is a large-scale example of the same microcosm of patriarchal control that we see in McGahern's novel. These women are committed by their communities, but the effect

of the Church displacing both the social power and the literal bodies of these women remains the same. These two works are seemingly dissimilar, but they both deal with how individuals cope with the insidious trauma of an oppressive atmosphere. My belief is that these works show how the influence of anti-woman spaces like the laundries spread out to create more micro or insidious traumatic atmospheres, as we see in the heavily patriarchal setting of McGahern's novel. Each text in this first chapter features female characters who must negotiate, either through expression or repression, the distressing events and oppressive atmosphere created by a controlling patriarchal social structure.

Beyond a rigid social system, there are several clear periods that must be addressed in looking at madness and haunting in Irish literature. Another post-independence traumatic influence is illustrated in the lives of Irish immigrants in the years shortly after Ireland's transition into new nationhood. Emigration is not a social pressure that is exclusive to the years after independence, but the period after the founding of an Irish Free State marked an increase in Irish Republican Army dissidents who opposed the treaty.<sup>7</sup> In short, those who emigrated to America in these years were often already stressed individuals who came with their own traumas related to the fight for independence. As if leaving Ireland was not difficult enough, these individuals often found life as Irish American immigrants stressful and isolating. Therefore, in my second chapter I focus on the experiences of the down-and-out Irish American immigrants in several works set in the years after the establishment of the Irish Free State.

In my second chapter, “‘Lubricate Your Soul:’ Drunken Fools and the Expression of Trauma in Early 20th Century Irish American Novels,” I examine narratives about Irish

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<sup>7</sup> See Seamus P. Metress and Eileen K. Metress' article, "Irish Emigration to America" for a discussion of the major periods of Irish emigration to America.

American characters that are outcast from their already isolated immigrant communities for their transgressive speech and actions. Specifically, my focus for this chapter is on the outspoken and peculiar drunken figures in William Kennedy's novel *Ironweed*, Mary Curran's radical tale *The Parish and the Hill*, and Frank McCourt's ubiquitous memoir *Angela's Ashes*. These symbolic drunken characters laugh and cry in the face of this social injunction to repress personal responses to traumatic events. My contention here is that these drunken characters are expressive to a degree that makes them socially outcast and figures.

William Kennedy's 1983 novel *Ironweed* covers the wanderings of the former baseball player turned vagrant alcoholic, Francis Phelan. Francis is haunted by his tragic life and the people that he has killed along the way. These same figures appear to him as both ghostly apparitions and reminders of how his drinking has cost so much for himself and others. Francis' alcoholism in this work is both a source of his trouble and a way to distance himself from his lost life and family. Frank McCourt's memoir, *Angela's Ashes*, also incorporates a drunken fool who symbolically expresses the insidious traumas of immigrant life. This immigrant story involves yet another charming but troubled man who shapes the lives of those around him, namely the young narrator. Mary Curran's 1948 novel *The Parish and the Hill* follows three dysfunctional generations of Irish Americans in New England. The novel offers a detailed look at the class divide between the poorer "shanty" Irish immigrants and the middle class "lace curtain" Irish Americans. Pain is a prevalent theme in each of these works, and these drunken characters are the ones who voice the suffering that so many around them leave unspoken.

These novels each focus on the pain and isolation of life on the fringes of society, but this is an insidious trauma that the central communities each try to displace. Each of these families experience a similar level of isolation and strain, the tendency for the normative characters is to

push the pain down. These normative characters each exhibit a kind of “carry on” mentality that could be described as optimistic or survivalist but is ultimately an act of repression. The normative characters look away from the pains in their lives as a kind of survival mechanism. If this refusal to look directly at trauma is repression, then we can conclude that the personal responses to these pains will manifest in another form. This alternate representation comes from the expression of pain by the socially outcast characters. These drunken characters refuse to contain their pain, and their public performances of grief also keep their communities from truly forgetting the insidious traumas of their lives as immigrants.

The drunken figures go so far beyond social transgression that their wild drunken rants put them on par with the old tradition of the truth-speaking court fool or jester. These seemingly superfluous characters are central to our understanding of trauma in the texts because they are the characters who call out the pains of their lives as Irish American immigrants. These figures rage against the insidious traumas of their lives. One of the most interesting parts of this railing against pain is that these pickled souls use the high language of established poetry and song in their public displays of grief. The drunks in question are archetypal fools that serve a distinct and performative role that embraces everything tragic and expressive about drunkenness. Their drunken recitations are then performative moments wherein the character of the drunken fool expresses the grief that the rest of their communities have repressed.

One of the most common post-independence periods of trauma for contemporary Irish literature is the prolonged period known as “the Troubles.” The conflicts that erupted in Northern Ireland in the 1960s were intensely violent altercations with groups like members of the Irish Republican Army fighting against British forces in Ireland. The fact that the violent conflict between these factions continued sporadically until the Good Friday agreement in 1998 means

that an entire generation came to consciousness in a world colored by violence. Furthermore, the viciousness of this time was not confined to military conflict, and civilians were often pulled into these intense altercations. The involvement of civilians in the violence of the period means that even children were subject to the violence of the times. While I use the Troubles as a traumatic framework for my next chapter, “Broken Playthings: Displaced Childhood in Patrick McCabe’s *The Butcher Boy* and Eimear McBride’s *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*,” I focus primarily on what happens to the children who grow up in extremely stressful homes and environments that bear a striking resemblance to this time. The historical period from which both authors emerged is more of an influence on the tone of the novels than a direct historical anchor.

*The Butcher Boy* and *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* each involve stories of children who must grow up quickly and often in quite violent settings. Both coming-of-age stories are brutal accounts of children who grow up in broken families and hostile environments. These traumatic settings roughly mirror the violence of the historic period of the Troubles. While these children are victims of their circumstances in many regards, their power lies in the fact that they express their pain with the innocence of a child and the madness of a person who has been long under the thumb of an unacknowledged pain. My assertion is that these child characters mark the psychological damage that long term external strains create.

*A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* is the coming of age story of an unnamed girl whose childhood is shaped by the insidious traumas of her life. We follow this narrator from her birth and watch her spiral out of control in a fragmented way that mirrors the unpunctuated jerkiness of the writing style. The central trauma in this character’s life is the terminal illness of her older brother, who forms the other half of her innermost self. In contrast, I also use Patrick McCabe’s disturbing novel, *The Butcher Boy*. The young character of Francie Brady comes of age amid an

inundation of both insidious and overt traumas. Francie lives a life of poverty with a lay-about drunkard father and a depressed mother who eventually takes her own life not long before the father himself dies. Francie blames the neighbor Mrs. Nugent for his many losses, and he takes it on himself to kill this woman who he sees as the source of all his trouble.

Lost innocence is a key theme for this chapter, but the central characters are not meek about their childhood-ending traumas. These children are shaped by their pains, but they also symbolically speak out against their own suffering. The performances of these characters are mad acts that set them apart as constant social reminders of the traumas that the rest of the community tries to ignore. Whether the mad violence that they express is against themselves or others, these child-like characters show the high cost of the long-standing violence of the period. However, the depiction of twisted childhood hints at an over-arching trend towards the destruction of the family structure established in the first chapter of this dissertation.

In my last chapter, “Lost Homes and Stolen Lives: Displaced Trauma and Social Change in Tana French’s *Broken Harbor* and Louise Phillips’ *Last Kiss*” I look at the damage created by the Irish economic recession that began in 2008 and continued until roughly 2013. The insidious traumas of the recession contributed to the diminishment of the traditional family model, so this period is essential for a discussion of trauma and the family. Lives and dreams were ruined during this recession, and these same losses are present in the mystery novels in this chapter.

The brutal consequences of the recession appear in the haunted homes and destroyed families of Tana French’s mid-recession novel *Broken Harbor* and Louise Phillips’ psychological thriller *Last Kiss*. Both novels center on over-burdened women who snap and kill those closest to them. While these novels do not always deal directly with the recession, the atmosphere and focused tensions of these novels can be considered a reaction to this period in

Irish history. These novels mirror, to an extreme degree, the losses of the recession. Both works use the theme of economic and social devastation to break down the traditional family. Such complete destruction clears the way to rebuild something new from the ashes of these unequal family structures.

The gritty hopelessness of these noir detective novels reflects the pains that so many families experienced after the recession. These works are an ideal way to explore the traumatic aftermath of the recession on Ireland's modern national identity. The intrafamilial murders in these works represent the way that so many recession-era families were destroyed by the instability of such an unequal family structure. Essentially, these detective novels function as a comprehensive way of discussing the long-range traumas that came with Ireland's independence from British colonial rule. Furthermore, the gothic elements of both texts enhance this same sense of lingering trauma through picking up on the idea that the murders in these novels are the product of past strains.

The flawed heroes and sympathetic villains of noir fiction are the clearest in Tana French's 2012 novel *Broken Harbor*. In this novel, Michael "Scorcher" Kennedy and his new partner Richie are investigating the attack on a family that leaves two young children and their father dead and the mother in intensive care. On first appearance, the family appeared to be the model of Celtic Tiger-era success. However, this is a brutal story about the conflict between Celtic Tiger-era ownership and the limiting family models from Ireland's patriarchal past. The post-boom recession made it impossible for many families to keep up a model of both success and strict gender roles. Furthermore, the push to urbanize rural areas left semi-developed and often defunct housing establishments haunting the edges of cities and the fringes of society's consciousness.

In contrast, Louise Phillips' 2014 novel *Last Kiss* subtly deals with a female murderer who is split between her role as a wife and the embodied life of her own childhood traumas. The novel follows the story of Sandra, a housewife plagued by forgetfulness, the objects moving around her home, and the strong sense that her husband is having an affair with a woman who wants her dead. This gothic story line mixes with a detective novel to create a new crime fiction that captures how the traumas of the past shape the present. As the story unravels, we find that Sandra has Dissociative Identity Disorder and her alter ego, Cassie, is killing these misogynistic men and plotting Sandra's "demise." Although this novel does not deal with recession-specific traumas, it is still very much a work of the period that deals with the de-familiarization of the home and the family.

These murderous women both killed their loved ones in the confines of their homes, but the strains of both gendered social expectations and the losses of the recession are what haunt these homes. My view is that these haunted homes reflect the insecurities caused by the recession by calling attention to everything that many Irish individuals lost when the property boom folded. That these women murder loved ones suggests a hopelessness about the future that mirrors the social anxieties about the Irish future. Both works echo the losses of the recession by reminding the reader that home and family do not always equate to safety. These women each violently break with our expectations of what a wife and mother should be, but these murders are extreme acts that unsettle cultural assumptions that are deeply entrenched in Irish society. In the end, this undermining of the patriarchal concept of family means that there is space for both a questioning of these values and the construction of something new.

My objective is to look at the long-term ramifications of the tumultuous years after Irish independence by considering the broken families that are prevalent in new Irish literature. The

struggle for national independence and stability was one that many new Irish authors saw first-hand, and the proximity of this kind of trauma is bound to appear in the literature of the modern period. Each damaged family tells us a little about the development of both modern Irish family structures and the post-independence national identity. I also hope to add to literary trauma studies by establishing madness and haunting as the quintessential means for a society to express both personal and communal responses to traumatic events. Authors like Avery Gordon have established haunting as a clear representation of trauma, but I contend that madness has been under-looked as the counterpart to this spectral manifestation of trauma.

Since I focus on symbolic madness, I do not put this dissertation forward with the hope of contributing in a meaningful way to disability studies. Likewise, I do not think that there is practical application here for those who suffer from actual traumas; rather, I am making a predominantly literary intervention. I believe that if we understand how real-life historical traumas can creep into a period or a nation's literature, then we begin to see some of the ways that literature can help individuals cope with these nearly unnamable experiences. Understanding the manifestations of an individual's response to trauma means that we are better able to understand the social tools that are in place for expressing both personal and communal suffering.

The stories in this dissertation abound with gothic hauntings that range from literal manifestations of ghosts to the subtler haunting of historic traumas that these communities are fully unable to let go. This is the point where the repressed personal response to trauma manifests in the form of haunting. Whether these hauntings manifest as an actual ghost or a constant haunting reminder in the text, the point is that it comes up without the conscious consent of the individual or community that produced it. In contrast, authors often coopt madness

as literary signifier of rebellion against an unequal social system. As a result, the mad individuals in these works are frequently the only ones who can fully speak out against the oppression of these distressing historical moment. However, both madness and haunting are ultimately necessary components in understanding the cultural expression of trauma in a contemporary Irish literature context. There is no doubt that new Irish literature is haunted by the recent tumultuous past. The gothic signifiers of these traumatic times also remind the reader that new Irish literature is forging ahead into a changing world, as madly revolutionary as it might be.

Chapter 1. A Mad Silence:  
Trauma and Alternative Voice in  
In Peter Mullan's Film *The Magdalene Sisters*  
and John McGahern's Novel *Amongst Women*

Belief is a powerful force of good for many individuals, and it can shape everything from daily choices to life goals. However, the power of faith is dangerous when the same social confines that give structure and meaning to some are used to restrict others. For example, the patriarchal structure of the Catholic Church in Ireland contributed to minimizing the social voices of underrepresented groups like women and children. The traumatic potential of this unequal power structure is represented in many works of new Irish literature. This presence is especially felt in the literary depictions of how the Catholic Church helped to shape modern Irish familial structures. Even though the families in these works are often united by their faith, some of the same dictates that bind them are as limiting and painful as they are rewarding. The combined impact of so many small pains creates an insidious trauma.<sup>8</sup> In this chapter, I focus on two noted works that depict the varying traumatic experiences of Irish women in the Church's modern moral heyday of pre-1960s Ireland.

John McGahern's 1990 novel *Amongst Women* is an example of how the Church contributes to displacing the traditional social voice of Irish women by encouraging a strong patriarchal structure in both society and the microcosm of the home. This system of belief both unites individuals and creates a rigid environment filled with little daily traumas that begin in the home and ripple out into society. The women in this novel begin as minimized characters who follow the leadership of the father and husband Michael Moran. While this power dynamic

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<sup>8</sup> See Lorraine Cates's article, "Insidious Emotional Trauma: The Body Remembers . . ." in the *International Journal of Psychoanalytic Self Psychology* for a full discussion of this kind of trauma.

changes with Moran's failing health, the novel still centers on his years of near tyrannical rule over his new wife and children. McGahern's work shows how the shift in familial control created an atmosphere of insidious trauma for many women.

The heart of this chapter lies in how the marginalized characters express their pain due to the inequalities inherent in the religious social structuring. In these works, the heavily patriarchal structure of the Church leaves many women at a substantial social disadvantage. The dominant patriarchy of this religious institution means that these women cannot overtly express their pain without calling attention to the imbalances in the system. As a result, the women must channel, or displace, their responses to the insidious traumas of their lives. The unspoken social injunction to hide personal distress means that the pain that we *do* see is in such an altered form that it is labeled as madness by the normative characters.

In Peter Mullan's 2004 film, *The Magdalene Sisters*, the character Crispina's tragic life as a cognitively disabled penitent in a Magdalene asylum highlights both the familial structure created by the Church and the non-conforming, or insane, backlash against this distress. McGahern's female characters deal with their distress by quietly haunting the edges of this patriarchal social system with their sadness, but figures like Crispina take a less socially acceptable response to trauma by channeling suffering into the literary trope of truth-speaking madness. The women in these works exist in a system that is structured against them, but in the different responses to the strains of their lives we find the underlying rebellion in both the characters that seem to accept their fate and those who madly rebel against the traumas of their lives. I use the term non-conforming to describe the characters who defy socially expected behaviors by actively rebelling against the confines of their situations.

My intent is to show how seemingly unrelated literary elements like symbolic madness and haunting can provide a way for disempowered characters to express underlying personal responses to traumatic events. A key to understanding these responses is in acknowledging the way that they are displaced, or channeled, into alternate forms. Displacement is also a central concept in understanding the stance that this chapter takes on trauma. If we work from Cathy Caruth's discussion of trauma as a delayed response to a distressing event, then displacement is itself the way that these personal responses manifest in alternate ways. The primary manifestations of trauma that I will focus on are haunting and madness.

My own intercession in this dialogue is to combine several trauma-oriented approaches to bring to light the rebellious voice of characters like Crispina, who have been doubly silenced by the intersection of the abuses of the Church asylums and the social stigma of mental disability. Both the insidious traumas of Irish culture and the way that individuals respond to this system illustrate the individual negotiation of power in such stressful circumstances. The madness of those who openly rebel against this system illustrates the often-overlooked voice of characters who are multiply oppressed, much like the disabled figure of Crispina. My discussion of Crispina's agency would not be possible without Elaine Showalter's work on anorexia as a form of self-expression. Showalter's study is essential to the understanding of alternative agencies. However, to truly understand both haunting and madness as displaced responses to trauma, we first need to look at who is considered a socially transgressive individual in this system.

### **Penitent Bodies: The Traumatic System of the Church**

The concept of trauma has been established in the scope of this project, but the kind of suffering that the Church both creates and perpetuates presents as a less obvious kind of pain. Rather, these extreme moments of suffering tend to be the exception when discussing the social

role of the Church. Most of the pains that I discuss are insidious and everyday traumas. These are small pains that do not equal a trauma on their own. The repetition of suffering has the effect of an overt traumatic event. Whether the root of the pain is an insidious or overt trauma, my primary concern is the way that these communities handle trauma.

The responses to a trauma differ from the actual event in some key ways. A traumatic event is never absorbed enough to be repressed, but the responses to traumatic events can be both actively and passively pushed-down. The paralyzing fear experienced by an individual who encounters someone who resembles his or her abuser is a secondary response to a trauma. This response can be repressed by either the individual or through social pressure. In short, a person might refrain from displaying any physical or mental response to an initial traumatic event. This withholding might be due to the individual's conscious acknowledgement that what he or she is experiencing is not the original event, or it might be because he or she does not wish to socially transgress by "making a scene." Repression of the individual response to a trauma does not mean that the response goes away; rather, the response to trauma is displaced and emerges in some other form.

Some of the displaced manifestations of suffering are, ultimately, what are read as madness by a society. This discussion centers on madness as a literary trope. Symbolic literary madness is the manifestation of non-normative social behavior. The exclusion of individuals for non-normative behavior is especially important when we consider the later Victorian application of madness to women who deviated from standard gender roles. Since this view of madness positions the term as a socially constructed way of categorizing those who cannot, or will not, adhere to social standards, we will also extend the definition to include women who transgressed against Church doctrine by having sex, willingly or not, outside of marriage. These transgressive

characters are labeled as mad by their communities, but this madness is also a means of dealing with strain.

The displacement of reactions to a readily-present trauma can be a coping mechanism for a disempowered group or individual. The community in question might ignore an offense because they cannot, or will not, redress the issue. A mad response can come from any number of traumatic events, yet there is a shared, and painful, national experience in the many cases of clerical abuse against children entrusted to the Church. In his work *Moral Monopoly: The Catholic Church in Modern Irish Society*, Tom Inglis explains that, “[i]t was not so much that the members of the clergy were shown to be guilty of the sins of promiscuity, adultery, fornication, pedophilia, rape and buggery, but that for centuries they had been castigating these... as the greatest of sins” (Inglis 217). The clergy were set up as the ultimate moral authority, but many of them were as guilty of these sins as the congregation to which they preached. The clerical sins were often worse than anything that the Magdalene penitents had committed. This hypocrisy only highlighted the way that people like the Maggies were scapegoated for the transgressions that so many others had also committed. The clerical abuses were a part of a long-standing history of transgressions that were also greatly repressed by this society. These abuses were so wide-spread that they were a kind of shared public secret.

My focus is on the displacement of the responses to the traumas perpetrated by the clergy, rather than the reasons behind the traumas. The overwhelmingly patriarchal structure of the Church, and the abuses that this structure enabled, are at the root of my discussion. The repeated images of clerical abuse in new Irish literature shows how these traumas are part of a social chain reaction that grows with each attempt to repress the individual and communal responses to the initial event. The clerical silence around the abuses are also a part of what I will

call a social legacy of the displacement of trauma. This inheritance is not solely based on clergy-perpetuated abuses; rather, the abuses referenced here are a part of the many historical traumas in Irish history. The profuse number of events in this culture's past have made the displacement of reactions to trauma a necessity for survival. Because of this legacy of transposition, even the attempts to express individual pain come first from an initial, and often automatic, displacement of the primary disturbing event. Understanding this long history of displacing the responses to suffering first necessitates a closer look at some of the historical, and often traumatic, influence of the Church.

The Roman Catholic Church's influence on Irish culture is present in so many aspects of the society that the country is seldom discussed without some reference to the Church. The history of the Catholic Church in Ireland is beyond the scope of this project, but the role of this institution in this society cannot be ignored. The integration of the Church into Irish society took an immense leap in the recent past. Some of the Church's influence in Ireland came with the decline of the more provincial belief system during the Great Famine that occurred between 1845 and 1852. The massive human losses during this period resulted in women losing many of their traditional social powers, including the ability to redress wrongs through communal displays like keening at wakes. My focus is on the modern legacy of the Church in Ireland, but these early movements of the Church certainly had bearing on the later role of this institution in Ireland.

The Church was then able to insert a more Romanized version of the Catholic faith into the social void caused by this period of loss and strain, and it was this new social structure that contributed to putting Irish women at such a social disadvantage (Whelan 139-42). This revitalized belief structure was so important up until the diminishment of the Church in the 1960s that, "Excommunication...made the victim into a social outcast...it was a threat held over

people which could be enacted at any time...it is necessary to appreciate the faith of the Irish [and] their acceptance of the priest as mediator between God and the individual” (Inglis 140-1). The Church took on an essential role in Irish culture, and this process required the establishment of new authority figures. Inglis writes, “[t]he method by which the Catholic Church in Ireland helped people develop a new morality and civility was to foster a formal, rigid adherence to its rules and regulations” (141). The earthly figure of the priest is imbued with the divine power in that he represents God’s word on earth, and this same system contributed to the unequal power dynamic faced by the women in the work in question here. This strict adherence to the Church doctrine has changed in recent years, but the importance of the Church is clear in the works we will discuss. The bond between Irish individuals and this institution is still a legacy in Irish culture, and this is especially true of the works that focus on the modern period before the 1960s.

A part of the Church’s rise in power also came from support from the British-run state system that held control of Ireland during the long colonial rule, for this state-structured support helped reinforce the patriarchal system of the Church. In short, the British used the Catholic emphasis on control of the body to regulate Irish citizens. Due to this need for control, the Church became firmly entwined with the structure of the state as a source of power (Inglis 113). The Church was essential to this historical process of categorizing and restraining bodies, so this same control over the individual is pertinent to this discussion of displaced trauma in this context. The rigid regulations of the Church were backed by the State’s desire to control Irish citizens, and this union between Church and state is the basis for the traumatic manifestations in the works in question here. Ultimately, how the clergy maintained power is central to the social structure that women like Mullan’s character of Crispina rebel against. Belief, for many Irish Catholics, is an essential part of daily life, and the rituals that govern this system revolve around

the concepts of sin and redemption. The difficulty in this is that the inherent focus on masculine authority and morality creates a traumatic atmosphere for the women in both works.

The moral accountability of the confessional contributes to the traumatic social structures by defining sin, assigning it, and forcing the individual to atone for her or his wrongdoing. The system of confession forces penitents to regularly report their sins to the stand-in father figure of the priest. This system sets up an unequal social power dynamic where the sinning penitent is supposed to account to the priestly “father.” Such spiritual maintenance forces the penitent bodies into seeming docility through constant observation. Furthermore, this system sets the stage for possible traumas in that the individual in question is socially obligated, through the long-standing association between Ireland and the Church, to submit individual power to the authoritarian rule of the priest. However, this need to defer to a fatherly figure is not left in the confines of the Church. Therefore, this project will focus on how the depictions of the Church reinforces the rigidly patriarchal social system through rigid control of both the individual body and behavior. Nevertheless, we cannot neglect to mention the role of the state in even a brief discussion of the Church’s influence on the negotiation of power in modern Irish society.

Another essential component of this patriarchal structure is the domestic infantilizing of the female characters in the works under discussion here. In McGahern’s novel, the figure of Moran imposes his aggressive influence over his three daughters and new wife by emphasizing his role as the father. In addition to the concept of sin and priestly redemption, the regression needed to return the women in these works to a child-like state that is compliant with patriarchal rule is accomplished through a regimented system of rules and labor meant to disempower the individual. The structural powerlessness of women like McGahern’s subservient daughter Rose is clear in that women were often, “...deprived of possessions, unable to contribute to the income

of the household, and having no formal occupational status...[i]t was the priest, and later the nuns, who were the only light at the end of this dark tunnel of powerlessness” (Inglis 192). The institution of marriage contributes to rendering these women powerless, and the inequality of this system is central to the power of men like Moran.

Moran’s rule is so complete, and the threat of physical and emotional abuse so strong, that his wife and daughters live to anticipate his needs and desires. This reinforced role of the father even comes down to Moran’s wife Rose referring to him as “Daddy” (McGahern 87). The overwhelmingly patriarchal structure of this household ensures Moran’s power through imposing a father and child dynamic. Additionally, these women are referred to as daughters, or girls, and so this infantilizing meant that they are unable to truly represent themselves as fully functioning and sexualized adults (McGahern 1). Characters like Moran capitalize on this same structural inequality to create miniature kingdoms in their homes. Although the traditional powers of women diminished in the post-famine period, the Church further shaped Irish society by instilling women with the power of keeping Church doctrine alive in the home.

One fundamental component of the unequal power structure perpetuated by the Church is the moral control over the individual’s body. This means that, “[t]he shame and guilt about the body, created through confession, sermons, and in the schools, needed to be maintained in everyday social relations. The primary mechanisms undoubtedly operated within the family” (Inglis 169). The Church’s control over the minds and bodies of parishioners was then a process that was reinforced in the home. We might view this as the Church contributing to the diminished power of women in the home while supplementing the lost influence of these women with spiritual authority in the home. This means that the disempowerment of women in both Irish

society and the microcosm of the home benefitted the Church by grooming women who were willing to perpetuate the doctrine to establish a form of social authority.

The Church-sponsored interference in the home was a way of strengthening the institution's moral values; however, this focus on moral living also displaced the power of these women by making the Church the arbitrator of acceptable social behavior. The spiritual power of men like Moran is a more realistic source of power than the domestic authority of the mother that was encouraged by the Church. While the mother of the household ruled the spiritual lives of the children, she was ultimately subject to the authority of her husband and the patriarchal system of belief that he represents as an empowered male figure. A woman's socially acknowledged virtues often centered on strenuous religious practice and righteous living. This same emphasis on impossible virtue shows the undermining of the domestic power with which the Church imbued women. "The model of modesty, virtue and humility...was maintained in the home through a growing devotion to Our Lady .... She was a mother figure who was at the same time completely desexualized" (Inglis 194). The emphasis on the value of desexualized motherhood is part of what reinforces the patriarchal power in the works we will discuss. While this engagement from the Church was a seeming negotiation of power for married women, a closer inspection of examples like the child-like treatment of the Moran women shows that the power these women received did not negate the infantilization that occurred both in the home and in the patriarchal society.

The text that represents the normative control of the Church is John McGahern's 1990 novel *Amongst Women*. This work focuses on the lives of the Moran family over the course of many years. The family welcomes a new step-mother in the form of the town spinster named Rose. Slowly, one by one, each of Michael Moran's five children moves away from him to begin

their own lives. The title of the novel refers to both the fact that Moran, with three daughters and a new wife, is surrounded by women. However, the title can also refer to the line from the Hail Mary prayer that states, “[b]lessed are thou amongst women” (Mayer 25). While we will later see some of the possible implications of associating the title with the prayer, either possible referent calls attention to the traumatic situation that is established here. Although outnumbered, Moran rules these women with both his iron will and his power as a household representative of the Church. The difficulty of this story is in the conflict of Moran as both the abusive tyrant and spiritual leader of his family. Considering the tension between Moran’s love and harshness, the novel is a microcosm of the abusive relationship that the Church, signified by Moran, has with Irish citizens, who are represented by the rest of the Moran household.

Research on *Amongst Women* and on McGahern’s other writings centers on the inter-familial relationships and the domineering patriarchal structure imposed by both the father and the Church in this novel. My hope is to use this piece as a framework for understanding the Church’s role in perpetuating an unequal social structure. Furthermore, I assert that the cycle of trauma that is created and continued by the Church is essential for understanding the depiction of displaced trauma in post-independence Irish literature. This context is essential for understanding both the saturation of trauma in Irish culture and literature and the voice given to the characters who attempt to speak out against their wrongs.

Family is a given tenet of Irish Catholicism, the practice being centered on the notion of God as the Holy Father, so the social emphasis on strong family unity and leadership is understandable. In McGahern’s novel, the patriarchy of the Church is reproduced in a smaller scope as a means of unifying and controlling the family. As Whyte explains, “[w]ithin the family, the authoritarian influence of the church is wielded by the father, who, like the priest in

the wider community, enforces the unquestioning submission of other family members to religious observances” (105). This family structure revolves around obligations to the family and respect for the father and his role as the religious leader of the household. This authoritarian rule comes up when Moran’s grown daughter Maggie comes home late one night. As we see, “Maggie was even more startled to find [Moran] alone when she came in...’You’re very late,’ he said...’did you say your prayers on the way home?’ ‘No Daddy. I’ll say them as soon as I go upstairs’” (McGahern 55). Here Moran asserts his authority as a spiritual figure in the home and forces Maggie into the child-like position of answering to her father. This example, much like the system instilled by the Church, is a structure focused on the father’s inherent right to the rigid control of his household. The religious emphasis on the father then ensures the patriarch’s power as head of this spiritual process, and this same familial structure disempowers the women in the examples under consideration here. Yet not all of the women in this chapter adhere to the definition of compliance put forward by the clergy.

The containment of non-normative bodies in an asylum is central to the control of individuals who do not adhere to the moral standards of the Church. Clergy-based institutions like the Magdalene asylums evolved, in part, from the general structure of insane asylums. Starting in the Victorian era, the early and quite brutal insane asylums began cultivating a religiously inspired focus on isolating and refining non-compliant bodies (Showalter 42-5). The establishment of gendered labor incorporated the individual into the highly gendered machine of society, and a failure to integrate based on these social standards was read as a kind of madness (Showalter 8-10). While Showalter’s study of this specific transition was centered on England, it is reasonable to assume that, with Ireland still being an English colony at this point, that these values were also transmitted to the smaller island. Thus, we have the foundation for homes like

the Magdalene asylums being drawn, in part, from a long-standing tradition of confining wayward bodies.

The transition towards gendered labor as a path to sanity reveals a rigid social standard of social behaviors that leave women few choices other than Church-sanctioned marriage and motherhood. The emphasis on gender roles helped to qualify which bodies could adhere to social standards of behavior, and, more than this, gendered labor as a treatment for madness may have helped to reinforce the idea that failure to meet gendered social expectations was a kind of madness requiring committal. The gender identity for well-bred women during this era focused on the virtues of motherhood and childrearing, which reduced women to their reproductive capabilities and their ability to successfully instill religious and social ideals in any offspring (Showalter 125-29). However, this forced vision of acceptable femininity forms part of the traumatic atmosphere of these works.

The contrast between social expectations for virtuous women and the non-normative penitents in the Magdalene laundries repeats the same system of domestic control that positioned the Church as the savior and moral guide for straying women. The Magdalene laundries began as charity houses for reformed prostitutes, hence the reference to the biblical prostitute Mary Magdalene, but the homes quickly grew to house women who had transgressed by having sex outside of marriage. This is not to say that this was always a *forced* dumping ground for deviant females. Although women were frequently sent to these asylums by their families and local clergy, it was also common for them to commit themselves to the asylum to avoid a scandal.<sup>9</sup>

The stigma attached to a woman having sex outside of marriage was great enough that these women often had little choice but to go to the asylums in order to survive the trauma of

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<sup>9</sup> I am indebted to Rene Kollar and her article, “Magdalenes and Nuns: Convent Laundries in Late Victorian England Anglican and Episcopal History” for this discussion of the historical origins of the Magdalene Laundries.

social ostracism. Asylum penitents were often grouped into categories such as: “hopeless,” “mentally defective,” “remand cases,” and those guilty of infanticide (Smith 72). However, these bodies represented sexual sins ranging from childbirth outside of wedlock to risk of sexual corruption to infanticide by criminalized women who attempted to circumvent the social stigma of being unwed mothers (Smith 31). The fact that these institutions were run by the Church implied that the path to reform was through adherence to moral guidelines.

These women were promised the slight possibility of redemption and social inclusion if they committed to both the moral rule of the Church and the brutal labor of the laundries. However, this is ultimately a case of these transgressive women choosing between the labor of the asylum and the definite trauma of social ostracization. In terms of structure, the work-oriented format of the Magdalene asylums mirrors the productive unit of the home that we see in examples like McGahern’s novel. The committed “Maggies” of both the historical and the fictional Magdalene asylums were expected to keep up a level of production that is reflected in the cohesive structure that Moran imposed on his children to shape them to his moral ideals. While the Magdalene asylums are traumatic enough in and of themselves, we also need to consider how the home structure that they mirror is stressful enough in its own right.

One example of motherhood and displaced trauma comes through in the brief scene where Rose and the Moran girls find a dead mother bird in the hewn field. The hen that they find has stayed so devotedly on her nest that she has had her feet cut out from under her by Moran’s tractor (McGahern 159). The emphasis on the hen’s devotion to her nest epitomizes the devoted mother as a product of nature. Thus, this brief scene illustrates the implied “naturalness” of extreme motherhood. However, this implication does not suggest that this is a healthy devotion; the refusal to abandon the eggs led the hen to being mown down by the domineering figure of

Moran. The death of the hen is clearly a traumatic moment for Rose and the girls. The implication in this scene is that the push for women to be so consumed by the idealized motherhood of the patriarchal structure of the Church is ultimately a self-destructive act.

The brief scene with the hen eerily links motherhood and death, but the scene also establishes one of the key displacements of responses to trauma. At the core, this scene is an example of the haunting manifestation of displaced trauma. Haunting is a form of expression in that the individual or the group allows the third party, the ghost or the haunting atmosphere, to represent the displaced traumatic event through a more socially acceptable manifestation. As Avery Gordon explains, “[t]he ghost or the apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible...makes itself known or apparent to us...haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening” (8). The author’s focus on the women and their grief for the hen is a subtle reminder of what happens to females who are subsumed by domineering men. Still, these women remain socially acceptable figures since they do not try to openly vocalize their oppression.

The lack of vocalization keeps McGahern’s female characters within the realm of acceptable behavior. As we find in Rose’s family’s meeting with Moran, “...though her mother disliked him, the custom of hospitality was too strict to allow any self-expression or unpleasantness” (McGahern 29). We see throughout the beginning of the novel that the village clearly knows of Moran’s repressed violent nature. The terms of acceptable behavior require that Rose’s mother refrain from expressing dislike, even if it saves Rose from a future with such a questionable man. Instead, the focus here is on upholding the rules of hospitality. Perhaps the clearest example of the domestic absorption of abuse is in the character of Moran’s friend McQuaid and his visit to the Moran home. The narrator relates that in McQuaid’s own home life,

“[t]here was never a hint of a blow. So persistent was the [abusive] language that it had become no more remarkable...it might well have been one of the many private languages of love” (McGahern 13). This verbal abuse, both in the case of McQuaid and Moran, is so normalized in the novel that it haunts the tone and the terse and fragile interactions between the characters in this work. The importance in each of the domestic examples here being that the woman upholds the virtues of the home, even if this means ignoring abuse. The normalized social response to abuse means that this stress is pushed to the edges of the texts.

One definition of the home is that it is a productive unit where everyone is shaped to work towards the good of the family. This same concept of unity is a virtue in the post-independence Irish social context. In terms of the Church, “[i]dleness was portrayed as the vehicle which passions used to express themselves. Consequently, if a mother was not cooking, tending her garden, cleaning the house, or mending clothes, she should be praying” (Inglis 190). This standard uses the concept of the docile productive body and turns it into an essential component in the continuation of the family. The person-turned-component then works towards the greater good of the family and the community. Presumably, these families are also geared towards the doctrine of the Church, so the success of the family unit furthers the success of this social institution. The ideal productive family body is apparent in the Moran girls’ preparation for the fabled family celebration of Moran’s big military moment, which his children call Monaghan day, “[s]ince morning [Moran] had been in and out of the kitchen where Maggie and Mona were cleaning and tidying and preparing for the big meal....but as soon as their father came in they would sink into a beseeching drabness, cower as close to being invisible as they could” (McGahern 8). Here Moran shapes his daughters into the industrious bodies that he

requires for his celebration. In this sense, he perpetuates his idealized form of the family that is centered on such scenes of domestic obedience.

Much like the structure of the home, the laundries provided a Church-guided cleansing of sin through physical labor. However, this shaping relies on long hours of difficult labor and isolation, and so it is also a rebirth through suffering for the penitents. Effectively, the laundries are a ritualized space for the Maggies to atone for their own “filthy” sins through the difficult labor of hand washing dirty laundry. As the character of Sister Bernadine explains, “[i]n our laundry they are not simply clothes and bed-linen - these are the earthly means to cleanse your very soul...” (Mullan 16). The work of the laundries is really the symbolic washing away of sins to achieve acceptance. In this process the penitents mold themselves into ideally productive female forms. There is an added sense of scapegoating in that the women wash the filth of others. The Maggies serve their penance for sins centered around sexuality, and in cleaning laundry these same women gain insight into the sexual and reproductive activity of the community. The penitents atone for sins that the rest of the community commits as well. This process of toil and reformation is an added traumatic situation produced by the unequal power structure embraced by the Church. Yet the responses of these non-conforming women can also be viewed as potentially revolutionary reactions to trauma, rather than the silenced actions of doubly oppressed women.

### **Non-Repentant Bodies: The Magdalene Sisters**

The primary example that I will be focusing on for my discussion of Irish social transgression and the madness of attempted social voice is the 2002 film by Peter Mullan called *The Magdalene Sisters*. This film is a fictionalization of the stories of four Irish women who

were imprisoned in a Magdalene asylum in the years from 1964 to 1968. This dramatic account follows the backstories of several girls who are unjustly confined to this institution. The offences of the women range from Rose having a child out of wedlock and Bernadette's crime of being too pretty, to the cognitively disabled character of Crispina's confinement for the dual sin of being disabled and having a child out of wedlock. As unwilling penitents, the Maggies are members, and victims, of this highly patriarchal system from the start.

The exception to the dramatic confinement is the character of Crispina, who is present in the asylum when the three other women arrive. The film follows the abuses that each woman suffers in the institution, and in each case, we see how they escape from the asylum. While the character of Margaret is eventually rescued by her brother, other characters, like Rose and Bernadette, must escape and forge new lives far from the control of the asylums and their families. This is fundamentally a story about the survival of a group of women who are subject to extreme silencing and abuse, but, as we will see later, the survival and redemption of each character is also rooted in defining who is considered worthy of salvation.

The film itself was initially met with harsh criticism by the Church for the physical and mental abuse that it portrayed, but this institutional trauma is an essential part of any discussion of Irish patriarchy. The opening of the film also coincided with other accusations of clerical abuse, and the movie only served to raise more questions as to how such an institution could have ever existed, especially for so long.<sup>10</sup> The film itself is a dramatized account of the 1998 Steve Humphries documentary film, titled *Sex in a Cold Climate*, which documented the lives of four women held in the asylums over a varying range of years. This documentary is important for research on the Magdalene laundries since it was a part of the revival of interest in what

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<sup>10</sup> See James Smith's work *Ireland's Magdalene Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment* for a full discussion of the public response to the abuses in the laundries.

occurred in these asylums. Some of the primary scholarship on the laundries is in works like *Ireland's Magdalene Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment* by critic James Smith. In this work, he traces both the lineage of the asylums and their dramatization, like Mullan's film *The Magdalene Sisters*. Smith's exploration of the film is insightful for his construction of the multiply oppressed subaltern, but we might take this work further and look at the specific rebellions of characters in this film like the disabled figure of Crispina.

The symbolic reduction of the Maggies to children both allows for a metaphorical rebirth and, perhaps more importantly, reinforces a controlled and insidiously traumatic environment. The rigid regulation of this system invalidates any potential voice which the penitents might have had in response to their "mothers" the nuns. The same unequal power dynamic that we saw in McGahern's novel is echoed in institutions such as the Magdalene asylum in the film. As one critic explains, "[t]he penitents, some of whom were unmarried mothers themselves, are rendered childlike once inside the Magdalen asylum" (Smith 38). These women were expected to complete the work of a grown adult while simultaneously reverting to a compliant and child-like state before the "sins" of social transgression were committed (Smith 38). One instance of this mother and child relationship occurs when the penitents in the film are given a festival day complete with sack-races and joyful giggling (Mullan 74-5). This limitation on the bodies of the women forces the Maggies into the subservient role of children to the parent that is the Church.

The penitents were forced to deny their own reproductive capabilities through the symbolic daily process of cleans stains, such as menstrual blood and semen, from linens. The drudging labor of cleaning sheets tainted by the leaking body of adulthood echoes the way that the penitents strive for symbolic purity. However, this regression is not complete without the figures of the nuns to stand in as mothers to the penitents. While the rule of the asylum nuns in

the film may seem matriarchal, it is important to note that the nuns themselves are led by the patriarchal structure of the Church. In this sense, these women are a part of the same artificial divvying of power that we see in the alliance between married women and the Church. The nuns are delegated a moderate amount of power over the infantilized figures of the penitents, and, in exchange for this power, these holy women submit to the greater authority of the Church.

The film and the novel also highlight the irony in a female role model who is a productive “mother” that does not give birth. In the film, the nuns’ chastity ensures that they are not removed from the sphere of productivity by the physical requirements of motherhood, such as the need to birth and feed an infant. Instead, the penitents are “delivered” as grown children passed through the regressive process of incorporation into the laundries. The nuns, although chaste, are symbolic mothers in that their job was to be gender appropriate role models and to train the penitents to be free of the sexual sins that led them to the asylum.

This focus on an impossible standard of female chastity is a part of the unequal power structure in modern Irish society. Here Smith suggests that, “the paradigm suggested here offers a model of motherhood for the nascent nation: self-sacrificing, loving all children, confined, and morally pure” (38). This model of ideal femininity is best summarized in the devotion directed towards the Virgin Mary. Inglis writes, “[i]t was through a devotion to Our Lady that [a woman] fostered a devotion to herself and motherhood in general. But most important of all, she developed a notion of the chaste mother” (204). This idea that the values of both the Church and society could be reproduced in the penitent preserves both the purity of the symbolic mother-nuns and contributes to the general labor pool, without taking time out for the reproductive process.

The emphasis on non-sexualized motherhood is also clear in the novel, for the stepmother Rose is a near-sainted figure who mothers the household without the actual task of birthing the children. Her perfection is clear in the revelation that, “Rose...was able to organize her day so that even though she seemed to be less harassed than Maggie, the meals were always delicious and on time” (McGahern 48). Rose Moran, although presumably sexually active, maintains an air of virtue through her somewhat sterile position as a super-efficient replacement mother in the household. A part of Rose’s virtue then comes from the fact that she does not birth these children herself. Nevertheless, this drive to be both a nurturing mother and a virtuous figure like the nuns is an impossible standard for most women to attain. Therefore, this idealization calls out the impossibility of achieving womanhood through natural motherhood.

A social system like the Magdalene asylums emphasizes virtuous, or sexless, motherhood. The Maggies birth children for other “sexless” mothers to adopt. The penitents then spend their time in confinement cleaning the stains and sins of the community. They essentially function as social scapegoats who enable other women to uphold an ideal of purity through the adoption of the sinful products of their transgressions. However, the desire for feminine perfection also involved the contradiction between the social press for a new childhood and the physical actuality of the adult female body. The idealized women in these works show that the process of maturation is itself a traumatic moment when the woman must face the demands of both motherhood and the idealized picture of female virtue.

The social push for the female characters in these works to be virginal mothers is an insidious social trauma. Mullan’s fictional Maggies are each a symbolic scapegoat for this conflicting social expectation. Theirs is a traumatic experience of what it means to be an openly sexualized female in this male dominant context. In contrast, Moran’s wife and daughters try to

live up to the standard of virtuous womanhood, but they end up internalizing both the patriarchal desire for perfected female virtue and the institutionalized abuse that is perpetuated by demanding men like Moran.

The Moran women are portrayed as virtuous domestic angels who eventually branch out to start their lives, but the divide in social expectations of both male and female behavior is clear. McGahern sets his female characters to revolve around the hard-hearted moral center of Michael Moran. What this means is that, “. . . the authorial narration—the voice of the father’s world—is established as the superior reality which orders the multiple discourses of the novel into a hierarchy and confirms the subjectivity of the female in the father’s kingdom” (Whyte 215). The sexuality of these virtuous women is drastically understated in the novel. This omission is clearest in the fact that the relationships of these women are quickly glossed over, while their youngest brother Michael’s affair is described in detail (McGahern 114). As Maggie says of her brother’s dates, “Girls? . . . [Michael] doesn’t seem to mind who he has as long as they have skirts. And they go for him as if he was honey” (McGahern 132). The difference between the responses to female and male sexuality sets up an unequal power structure in Irish society. In short, “[s]ex was a sickness that could never be cured. It could only be monitored and controlled by a priest. It was such a dreadful disease that the penitent . . . could only be told about it in vague terms” (Inglis 146). Although this view was theoretically true of both men and women, it is the women who are punished for sexual transgressions, and not the men. In this sense, being born female is an insidious trauma for women who must deal with such social expectations. Yet Mullan’s film makes a point of showing that not all Irish women are able to conform to the social need for female virtue.

A non-conforming woman like Crispina is a prime example of the many victims of the Magdalene laundries, yet she is also a symbolic response to the inherently traumatic social structure. Crispina is so resistant to normalizing change that she is best described as the revolutionary figure of this work. Both her disabilities and her mad accusations against the priest show that not all bodies can conform to the ideals set forward by this religious institution. Crispina is ultimately defined by the insidious traumas of her short, but symbolic, life.

Crispina is linguistically noted as a non-conforming character by the denial of her birth name and her sexual jibe of a nickname. In the film, Mullan has Crispina casually recount that she was renamed by the nuns upon her own arrival. This renaming robs her of both her familial identity and any social position that this name might have held. Crispina explains, “[i]t means girl with the curly hair...But it’s not my real name. Sister Bernadine gave me it. She took one look at me and said “you’re a Crispina” (Mullan 31). The fact that Crispina’s new name translates to “girl with the curly hair” is suspicious on a straight-haired character. Yet a following scene shows all of the Maggies being forced to shower and be judged by the nuns. The moniker, and the abusive atmosphere of the laundries, is clear when Crispina wins the award for the most abundant and curly pubic hair. Sister Clementine taunts, “No. Biggest titties have to go to Cecelia . . . Bernadette, you’ve got more hair down there than you do on your head, but I have to say the winner is Crispina” (Mullan 52-4). This scene sets the abusive atmosphere of the laundries, but the moment is not without its potential for resignification. As Mikhail Bakhtin explains, “The grotesque body...is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never complete; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body” (317). The bodies “awarded” by the nuns are those who emphasize an open and sexualized system that exchanges fluids, like sexual transmissions or even a mother’s milk, with other bodies. These leaking bodies

also share socially taboo sexual knowledge with others. Crispina's cognitive disabilities make her an open and sexualized figure that perpetually breaks the Church's social standards for women.

The grotesque body implies a figure that extends beyond itself, so the flagrantly pregnant bodies and leaking breasts of the unmarried Magdalene penitents extend beyond the individual to become grotesque social symbols for their moral unacceptability in the film. These transgressions are also what make the characters so revolutionary. Bakhtin explains, "[The grotesque] is looking for that which protrudes from the body, all that seeks to go out for that which protrudes from the body, all that seeks to go out beyond the body's confines" (316). Pregnancy and lactation are generally acceptable extensions of the female body, but these bodily functions are socially grotesque when performed outside the sanctions of marriage. Matrimony is a sanctioned way of rendering natural body function into something both sacred and socially acceptable. The film critiques both the insidious trauma of this social structure and the abuses of the clergy. However, Mullan hides his true revolutionary characters in the penitent bodies that cannot adhere to this normalization of insidious social trauma.

Crispina's haunting power comes from her willingness to embrace the same bodily sins from which so many of the Maggies run. One interesting moment of this symbolic bodily excess is when Crispina offers to wash some bloody laundry for Bernadette. Crispina exclaims, ". . . have you any bloody ones? I'll do them for ye. Some of the girls hate the bloody ones, but it doesn't bother me" (Mullan 26). Semi-socialized characters like Bernadette react with disgust to this familiarity with blood. We might interpret this reaction as a rejection of the grotesque over-extension of the individual by a more conforming body. Crispina's readiness to touch blood is a symbolic moment where we also see her extending beyond herself in a Bakhtinian moment of

the grotesque. The fact that she is symbolically connecting with others through blood is revolutionary threat since she is both verbally and cognitively impaired. Bernadette's revulsion might represent a fear of contracting Crispina's fundamentally non-normative position. However, there are some added ways to read this scene. The size and oblong shape of the cloth also suggest that it is a sanitary napkin covered in menstrual blood, and this sexual association reinforces this fear.

Crispina's association with this menstrual blood is also transgressive in the sense that she links herself with the blood of an unfertilized woman. Her joy in taking the menstrual rag is potentially a kind of reveling in the free female body. This is a body that is not adhering to the proscriptive Catholic drive for women to produce as many children as possible. Crispina moves beyond herself in this grotesque moment and reminds the viewer that not all bodies adhere to the doctrine of the Church. Yet these images of menstruation and potentially unsanctioned fertility are not the only links between disability and blood in the film.

The other disabled character, Katie, is linked with blood in her transition into death and an ultimate exit from the power system of the asylum. Katie walks up to a nun and states, "I was wonderin' if I could go and lie down. I'm feelin' a bit dizzy" and the stage directions go on to tell us that, "Sister Clementine sighs and looks up at her. There stands Katy with blood pouring from her nose and ears" (Mullan 82). Here Katie represents the death that the ever-productive bodies of the asylum are never fully allowed. While the women in the asylum that succeed in the process of refinement for social incorporation can escape this pattern of work, non-conforming women like Crispina and Katie live and die in this system, and so they are productive up until their deaths. Although blood signifies alternatives for disabled characters like Crispina and Katie,

these images are also a haunting reminder for the normative Irish society that not all bodies will happily live and die in this social system.

McGahern's novel negates the distinctly feminine regenerative potential of blood by focusing on the memory of violence as the hallowed domain of men. As Moran explains, "we didn't shoot at women and children like the Tans but we were a bunch of killers. We got very good but there was hardly a week when some of us wasn't killed..." (McGahern 5). The violence and death of innocent victims by recruited British constabulary forces, the Black and Tans, are a dreadful counter for the sacrificial revolutionary blood that Moran and his comrades spilled in the quest for independence. As an ex-IRA man, Moran is associated with the blood spilled in the revolt and the years of violence; however, this is a more sterile association that focuses primarily on the memory of blood. In short, "...though Moran may have disdained to kill women, his association of intimacy with violence included his daughters... Monaghan Day has acquired for them something of the aura with which Patrick Pearse hallowed Easter 1916: it is 'large, heroic, blood-mystical'" (Quinn 6). Unlike the film, the novel's emphasis is on the righteous spilling of blood in war to achieve Irish independence.

Blood is accepted in these works only when it is a means to preserving the Irish ideals of freedom and the virtues of the ideal family structure. The novel centers on a group of women, yet the bodily function of menstruation is patently absent in the work. These women are almost like the pure white sheets washed by the Maggies in Mullan's film. Here, blood is the revolutionary domain of men. Women are only represented as victims or witnesses for the recollection of the glorious victory, and so they need no symbolic link to the blood in this novel. Moran's rule in his household is complete and a part of a new free Ireland, so the active presence of blood is not needed in the novel.

Characters like Moran have already fought their battles for freedom, and so the bloody imagery becomes a displaced reminder that haunts the text and reminds the characters of the past. This novel is hardly a traditional gothic tale, but the sanitized references to past violence certainly lingers the edges of this fictional family. Moran is far from any classic vampire figure, yet he drains the women of their power and life and leaves behind the eerie reminder of his potential for violence. This novel is redolent with blood and anxiety. However, the true horror of the work is that this blood has already been scrubbed clean by the well-trained domestic angels of Moran's home. Moran's tight rule of the home shows that the only acceptable speech is that which upholds the patriarchal social structure.

Spiritual authority is the only socially legitimate speech that unites these two works. McGahern shows that the acceptable form of social speech is comprised of a loyalty to the patriarch and a devout expression of belief in the overall social framework of the Church. The daily recital of the Rosary prayer is a large part of the novel, even down to the title of the novel. The prayer is a moment for Moran to force his wife and children to submit to his domineering rule. While the Hail Mary might be considered more of an embrace of female power, Moran co-opts the entire Rosary as a way of solidifying his own power in the house. All members of the family need to know their parts in the recital of the Rosary and respond in a succinct manner.

The domineering control of official speech even comes down to the very moment of Moran's death. He exclaims from his deathbed, "[w]hy aren't you praying? . . . They immediately dropped to their knees around the bed. 'Thou, O Lord, wilt open my lips,' Rose Began" (McGahern 180). Here Moran is nearly a literal stand in for God, for it is his outburst that starts Rose praying, thus he is the "Lord" that "open[s] [her] lips." There is also a vaguely sexual, religious, and patriarchal implication in this association between Moran and his

daughter's speech. If we read the line about lips as representing the daughter's labia, or lips, then Moran, as the spiritual and literal leader of the family, has an enormous say in who his daughters and to whom they will lose their virginity, or "open" their sexual "lips."

General social acceptance in this novel requires adherence to the majority moral code of the Church. The narrator tells us, "[i]t was as if [the Moran women's] first love and allegiance had been pledged uncompromisingly to this one house and man...and now, as they left him [buried] under the yew, it was as if each of them in their different ways had become Daddy" (McGahern 183). The internalization of Moran's patriarchal rule, the idea of becoming Daddy, is the ultimate sign that these women have become idealized social figures in that their devotion to their father overrides any personal ambitions. In both works, social inclusion, and ultimately sanity, is determined by whether an individual can use an appropriate social voice, in this case the dominant voice of the Church.

Some semi-conforming characters in McGahern's work achieve social legibility through translation by an accepted member of the community. The adherence to both the father and the Church is what makes a person a person legible in the context of the novel. It is easiest to see the illegibility of the non-conforming character in the figure of Luke. This seemingly wayward son excludes himself from the Moran household. As one critic explains, "[t]he viewpoint of the alienated son—in this case, Luke, who believes his father is 'crazy'—is marginalized and forced to compete with the more sympathetic view of his daughters and wife" (Whyte 166). Here, the only socially legible voice is that of Moran. Any speech that his devoted daughters have is sanctioned by Moran, and Luke's lack of conformity excludes him from this true representation in the novel.

Luke's rejection of Moran's domineering rule forces the younger man to his own self-imposed exile in England. This move is a telling break with the Church sanctioned family structure. This symbolic rejection of Moran's values should be a revolutionary moment, but it is contextually read as madness. The discrepancy in power between Moran and Luke makes it impossible for Luke's actions to be read as a valid form of speech. Moran himself expresses this idea when he refers to Luke's absence by saying, "[t]here's not a natural bone in that gentleman's body" (McGahern 51). This patriarchal structure requires that Luke respect the wishes of his father above almost all others. The only legible form of social voice here comes with the strict adherence to the values of the Church, and Moran is the representative of the Church in this family. The young man's rejection of this order makes him an unnatural being.

The gossip in Mullan's film takes the idea of acceptable social speech and turns it around. The life-long penitent Katie seems to embrace the asylum and functions as an informant for the nuns; however, her speech revolves around what is and is not acceptable in the system of the Church. As she tells the other penitents, "...they've asked me to sit in for her as her nerves are all shot to blazes." She continues by shouting to Sister Clementine, "I'm givin' them a right earful now, Sister! All right?" (Mullan 26). Katie's temporary power comes from her willingness to stand in for the missing sister, thus she aligns herself with the Church sanctioned speech and behavior. Characters who are unable, or unwilling, to conform to these standards of expression are also often those who are labeled as mad.

Crispina stuttering attempts at communication ultimately lead those socially above her to label her as insane. In one notable scene, she loses her words when she tries to use the language of the socially incorporated people around her. Crispina attempts to explain to Rose about her St. Christopher medal acting as a "holy telephone" for her to symbolically communicate with the

son that she has never met. Crispina exclaims, “. . . this is a . . . a . . . a . . . holy . . . holy . . . holy . . . I’m sorry, Sister. I’m sorry. What’s the word . . . I just can’t think of the word” (Mullan 34). Crispina later clarifies this scramble for words by shouting the word “telephone.” The irony of her losing this word in her attempt to communicate does nothing to make her more legible to the nuns. The symbol of the telephone and the socially legitimate image of holiness combine to imply stable connection and acceptable communication. Crispina, as a Maggie, falls short of holiness and her word-loss further shows that she is unable to fully assimilate into the nun’s world of official speech.

Mullan shows Crispina interacting with the people around her, so she is able to express herself to some degree. The difficulty is that she must make herself legible to the nuns through more normative speech. Her failure is read by the other characters as a kind of socially inept madness. The nuns and penitents around Crispina express confusion and bewilderment, and in this response, is the social perception of alternative speech as insanity. Critic James Berger writes extensively on the way that speech impediments and disabilities reflect cultural insecurities.

As he explains,

. . . in the wake of perceived damage to the symbolic order, people may try to imagine modes of human life removed from symbolic-linguistic behavior altogether—in other words, try to imagine modes of transcendence. . . As I have been arguing, portrayals of cognitively and linguistically impaired people—the dys-/disarticulate—have played crucial roles in helping European and American cultures to come to terms with social traumas that are perceived to have damaged not just persons and institutions but ways of thinking, feeling, and living in a world constructed and mediated by symbols, especially language.

(Berger 107-8)

Crispina’s linguistic impairments are a way for the cultures, as represented through the authors, to express insecurities and underlying traumas. These dys-/disarticulate figures point to

something that cannot be described using the dominant social order. Crispina tries to express her pain by speaking to the socially acceptable symbol of a personal religious icon. However, she is unable to express what the medallion means to her because of her speech impediment. Crispina's stutter is part of the same social othering that places her beyond the signs and symbols of her society. The moral standards of behavior make Crispina the offending party, not the victim. This attempt at communication is ultimately read as an insane act. Her madness needs to be confined to restore normative order to the story. Her society is unable to understand this dys-/disarticulate language beyond what is socially acceptable, and so they must label her as insane to make sense of her seemingly incoherent ramblings.

In contrast, the character of Luke in McGahern's novel is an incomprehensible mad figure because he rejects Moran's rule in the home. Moran highlights this socially transgressive insanity when he says, "I wrote him several times and all the answer I ever got was I'm-well-here-and-I-hope-you-are-well-there. Is that natural after all the years of bringing him up?" (McGahern 51). Except for one brief telegram, the only updates about Luke come through the letters and visits with his sisters, so they function as his sanitized social voice in the household. Like Crispina, Luke can only relate to his father by filtering through the socially acceptable speech of others. The Moran girls feed their father presumably sanitized information about their older brother. These women translate Luke's rebellious insanity for their father.

Luke is effectively voiceless when his sisters are not there to translate to Moran for him. Perhaps the clearest example of this silencing is in Luke's return home for his sister's wedding. Maggie begs, "Please don't upset Daddy" and Luke replies, "Of course not, I won't exist today" (McGahern 152). Luke is then only able to communicate with his father through a formalized event such as a wedding, for this occasion is governed by Church sanctioned

ceremony. While the official speech of the Church is traumatically imposed on individuals like Crispina and Luke, this does not mean that the social speech of prayer and ritual cannot be an empowering force.

### **The Voice of Madness: Suffering and Self Expression**

Crispina and Katie are profoundly robbed of agency in that they are used as a disability trope in Mullan's film; this narrative choice is a part of the internalized social reaction to disability that contributes to the traumatic structure that these women face. On the surface, Crispina provides a convenient outlet for the filmmaker to induce horror in audiences through looking at the abuses of those who cannot speak out. However, this portrayal is its own form of violation on these disabled characters. They women are examples of narrative prosthesis that are meant to augment a larger story of suffering and systematic abuse. Crispina and Katie are the only characters to die during the film, and this suggests that their primary use is to represent the women who never escaped the laundry system. These characters are denied the post-asylum lives of the other normative penitents. The implication is that these disabled characters cannot continue outside of the structure of the asylum. These women are the only individuals in the work who are portrayed as understandably institutionalized.

Mullan reproduces the violence of the Magdalene asylums for disabled characters like Crispina and Katie. Essentially, he does not account for any world where self-care is feasible. This idea is further reinforced by the fact that, unlike the other characters, Crispina and Katie are present in the asylum at the start of the film. It is as if these two women exist only in the context of the perpetual suffering of the asylum. Characters like Katie and Crispina are symbolically doomed to a life of suffering under the oppressive structure of the laundries. Katie dies with

only hateful Bernadette for company, and Crispina wastes away in an insane asylum. These deaths are shown as bleak and tragic moments. Yet the lack of an alternative ending for a disabled character here implies that these silent and suffering ends are the only possible options for disabled women in this social context. The error in reading someone like Crispina as a voiceless figure is in assuming that she does not try to express her traumas.

Crispina makes several attempts to show her suffering, but her powerlessness ensures that these displays are ultimately read as subaltern madness by her society. The clearest mistranslation of her social voice is in her accusations against Father Fitzroy. Margaret, after seeing Crispina sexually manipulated, whispers to the disabled woman that Fitzroy “is not a man of God” (Mullan 66). Later, Crispina is publicly itching her genitals after the other women attempt to punish the priest by placing poison ivy in his laundered underwear. The discomfort and public signifier of both Crispina and the priest itching their genitals finally cause the woman to snap and try to accuse him of abuse. Repeating Margaret’s earlier words gives Crispina a way to express herself in the dominant social structure. Yet her tone and public place of accusation make this a transgressive moment. This attempt can only be read by the community as the madness of a powerless woman speaking out against an unequal system. The fact that Crispina is committed suggests that she is held responsible for her own abuse. She, as a non-conforming body, absorbs the flaws of a social system that so alienates women. If not, then why is the offending priest not committed to an asylum or to jail himself? Crispina’s attempts to call attention to the abuses of the clergy are so impossible that her society must read her actions as mad.

The disabled characters in this film are problematic, but they do try to use their own vilified bodies as a means of personal expression. These women use their othered bodies to act

out against the system that limits them. Crispina's first act of madness-as-speech is when she attempts to make herself ill and unfit for work. In this scene, Crispina soaks her nightgown and goes to sleep in it in the cold communal sleeping room (Mullan 55). Her seemingly bizarre actions leave her so ill that she is forced to return to her bed for the day. Crispina displaces her reaction to the insidious trauma of the laundries by hiding it in this self-harm. However, the mad act itself is also Crispina's way of railing against this system that she is trapped in.

The madness is then an indirect expression of the personal response to trauma for a socially voiceless character. The excuse of illness was perhaps one of the only ways that an asylum penitent might be temporarily exempted from the arduous labor of the laundries. Crispina's refusal to function is a direct response to the oppressive nature of the asylum and the Church system. The open and leaking physical response of her ill body temporarily triumphs over the regimented system of the laundries. Crispina's choice not to work is revolutionary in that it *is* a choice. The idea that someone could rebel against this system is a haunting reminder that alternate modes of expression are being suppressed by the asylum system.

This idea of the sick body as an exemption from work is echoed by McGahern's novel. Here, Moran's daughter Sheila fakes an asthma attack to escape chores. Maggie exclaims, "She's no more sick than my big toe. Whenever there's a whiff of trouble she takes to her bed with the asthma..." (McGahern 9). Sheila capitalizes on her health problems to avoid both the labor of the household and her father's controlling wrath. In both works, these scenes of avoidance are fleeting moments, but these scenes are also important because these women use their bodies to combat their own suffering. This resistance is not necessarily read as such by the other characters, for this glossing over of struggle suggests the overall trend here of labeling non-conforming speech as madness.

These expressions of sickness and suffering are temporary reminders that there are larger issues of personal agency in each work; however, the other characters read instances like Crispina's illness as a madness-induced inconvenience or Sheila's asthma as covering for fundamental laziness. These small rebellions are socially interpreted as the personal quirks of women who don't seem to see how their social system works. In terms of the narrative structure of the works, these temporary illnesses are meant to show what happens to people too long confined by their circumstances. However, the self-induced illness of the works is also a form of speech.

Non-verbal expression is a primary mode of expression for these characters who have little recourse to social voice in their societies. Many of the responses to trauma in these works are often displaced into seemingly mad non-verbal acts. This bodily expression of both an oppressive situation and the individual responses to stress is clear in McGahern's novel. In Mullan's work, Crispina's needs and desires are channeled through bodily expression. However, this physical speech is read as madness by the verbally and morally oriented power structure. This madness-as-speech comes up again in Crispina's two other attempts to hang herself in the asylum (Mullan 61). Crispina's choice to make herself ill is socially interpreted as madness, but her two attempts at hanging show a profound desire to remove herself from the world of the laundry.

Crispina's later attempts at suicide serve as a lasting solution to what is a hopeless situation for her. If Crispina cannot make herself legible enough to be considered reformed, or socially acceptable to the nuns, then she has no chance of ever escaping the asylum. The supposed point of the laundries is redemption through labor, so Crispina's loss of hope shows that she is incompatible with the social system of the laundry. She is socially insane since she is

a rejected candidate for redemption. While this is the limited interpretation of a social order that refuses to see acts of non-verbal expression like Crispina's illness and attempted suicides as valid forms of expression, the tragedy in Crispina's poetic expression of pain is that it is absorbed by the structure of the laundry.

There is a certain symbolic discourse in Crispina's first choice of methods for suicide, for the attempts at hanging illustrate how she herself is as silenced by the asylum as her neck is nearly crushed by the freshly laundered sheets that she uses as a noose. The other penitents cover up Crispina's suicide attempts to prevent the nuns from learning how "mad" she is, but this silence perpetuates the system that oppresses them all. The Magdalene penitents are pathologized to a high degree for their sexual transgression, and the need to earn redemption by keeping up an average standard of labor implies that the presence of perceived weakness, such as Crispina's suicide attempt, implies that the women are not fit for incorporation into a standardized industrial world outside of the laundries. It is in the best interest of the other penitents to silence Crispina's expression of her misery, lest they themselves be labeled mad or immoral by association. However, there is also a kind of collective effort at conformity that must, at least in theory, be acknowledged.

This unity against a traumatizing system can also be seen in McGahern's novel, for the children unite to keep their brother Michael from falling victim to Moran's wrath over the boy leaving school (McGahern 116). The women of this family work together to mitigate the trauma that would invariably come from Moran finding out about Michael's defecting. Essentially, this is a community safety net that is designed to both lessen traumatic events and to ensure the continuation of the family unit. This kind of agreement might constitute a self-preservation

against a domineering system like the one in question here, but it is also possible to read it as a minor rebellion meant to negotiate power in a seemingly impossible system.

Crispina's most interesting moment of voicing her pain is in her successful death in the insane asylum, for in this moment she joins a tradition of female dissent through bodily expression. The concept of anorexia was once understood in Victorian Britain as the ultimate proof of female delicacy and the ability to live off little more than air (Showalter 129). However, we might see this second interpretation of anorexia as a social projection of feminine ideals onto an actual body. The suffragettes turned this idea around and reclaimed the notion of the body as a site for the expression of internal conflict and unhappiness for those who have no other recourse for a social voice. Like the suffragettes, Crispina uses a previous symbol of feminine delicacy and turns it into a cry against her treatment by the asylum. Crispina's social silence means that her only option for rebellion is in her use of her body as a means of expression. This denial of the body is much like the nuns' denial of sexuality which we discussed earlier: the rejection of the needs of the body imply a focus on some higher purpose; in Crispina's case, this higher purpose is presumably an effort to call attention to her abuses.

The film reveals how this social structure infantilizes the women in these examples, yet this closure of the sexual body is not necessarily a denial of a woman's power. The final scene of Crispina in the insane asylum is her final expression of self, for in reverting back to infancy, Crispina effectively gives the nuns, and her society, *exactly* what they want. Crispina becomes the exaggerated social ideal for femininity in that she is physically an adult female, but her mind has been reduced to a state of purity that is a parody of the childlike innocence that women were expected to exhibit. In Crispina's final appearance she is reduced to a heavily medicated and child-like state that leaves her drooling and sucking on her own fingers in the womb-like room of

her padded cell (Mullan 97). Crispina's method of suicide means that, in the process of dying from anorexia, she lowers her body fat to a level that effectively stops her reproductive capabilities and returns to a childlike state before her carnal knowledge began. Crispina's pain and agency come through in her mad self-reduction to a childlike state.

If we consider the symbolic implications of Crispina's final action, it is far easier to read her suicide as a refusal to comply with the extreme socialization implemented by the insane asylum system. A symbolic death is her displaced reaction to the trauma of the system in which she is trapped. If the anorexia was intended as a failed attempt at conformity, then it would have made more sense for this to be a socially exalted moment when society triumphs over the non-conforming body. The fact of Crispina's death becomes secondary to the way that she chooses to die, so we might infer from this that the death itself has symbolic significance. Had the film focused on the actual moment of her death, then it might have been glorifying the normative bodies that escaped the asylum. The fact that Crispina's story ends with her proactive choice implies that her agency is what was important in the final moments.

Ultimately, this character's death by anorexia provides a parody of the idealized Victorian women, for it takes the notion of the pure and fragile woman and turns it into a symbol of death and madness. In this sense, Crispina's death is a displaced response to her traumas, for she is embracing the ideals that have been forced on her by this system by making them into a symbolic action against this system. Crispina takes her distressing experiences and reorients her reactions to them to form something that is close for speech for such a socially voiceless character.

In the division between the suggestion of past pain in new Irish literature and the attempts to express this suffering we see the kinds of social voice that are acceptable in this context. There

are both acceptable and transgressive displaced social responses to trauma throughout the discussion of these two works, and the mad actions of characters like Crispina show the potential voices of non-normative characters. In contrast, McGahern's novel is normative in the sense that the traumatic events of past are only ever hinted at through the haunting suggestions of violence that pervade the text. These reminders of war in McGahern's piece are a way for the characters and the larger community in the novel to express their own traumatic responses to events like the Irish struggle for independence.

*Amongst Women* shows a patriarchal structure that is reinforced by the Church both in form and in the microcosm of the home. This system that is modeled on the role of the Church in Irish society is also a central force in creating the system of trauma that so many of the later texts for this dissertation will focus on. This clergy-condoned system perpetuates trauma by enforcing a rigid system of patriarchy. Yet the institution of the Church also deals with this same trauma through the unification of the home and community under a spiritual banner. The characters in this novel live and die under the stifling structure of the Church, and our primary hint of the difficulties implied in this life comes through in the images that haunt the edges of the text.

In contrast, Mullan's film illustrates the more controversial displaced response of madness. It is in this second response to the unequal power structure created by the church that we find some of the potential for the negotiation of power in such an overwhelmingly patriarchal structure. Throughout the film, the idealized bodies that the Maggies strive for are expected to exhibit a social verbal cohesion and a rejection of the transformative nature of the body. While many of the bodies are rendered docile enough for incorporation into the productive industrial society outside the asylum, it is the figures who have no hope of escape from confining social structures like the Church who can teach us about the alternative expression of traumatic events.

These characters are the ones that call out the almost unimaginable moments that scar and torture both individuals and communities. In the end, the tragedy in Crispina's figure is that the revolutionary potential present in her social voice can only be read as madness, for she is attempting bodily expression in a world that relies on a system of verbal hierarchy and compliance with the normative social standards that require the repression of personal responses to strain.

Chapter 2. "Lubricate your soul:"  
Drunken Fools and the Expression of Trauma in  
Early Twentieth Century Irish-American Novels

The image of a red-nosed Irish immigrant drunkenly singing about his woes is the stuff of Saint Patrick's Day cartoons and bar-room jokes. Yet this stereotype is a part of the vivid depictions of suffering and persecution in early twentieth century Irish-American literature. The inebriated individuals in these works each have a sad story to tell, but their traumas are buried under gin-soaked layers of song and dysfunction. Central among these twentieth century Irish-American novels are William Kennedy's novel *Ironweed*, Mary Curran's radical tale *The Parish and the Hill*, and Frank McCourt's well-known memoir *Angela's Ashes*. Each novel centers on both the difficulties of a life between cultures and the widespread use of alcohol as a coping mechanism for the insidious traumas of immigrant life.

The drunken characters grapple with their losses in a visceral and often comic battle of self-expression. These pickled souls seem to face only their own demons, but the public displays of drunkenness make these characters a part of an older tradition of court jesters and holy fools. Irish-American jesters use everything from poetry and tearful song to the tragic physicality of snot in order to illustrate the pains of their immigrant communities. The drunken fools protest in slurring voices that echo the socially repressed traumas of many Irish immigrants. Ultimately, the mad actions of these expressive characters show a new way of looking at the omnipresent figure of the drunk in Irish-American literature.

I make some claims here about drunkenness, but it is important to note that the actual disease of alcoholism will not be under discussion. Rather, I focus on the caricatured portrayal of

the alcoholic Irish-American figure.<sup>11</sup> The drunks in question here are archetypal characters who serve a distinct and performative role that embraces everything tragic and wrong about drunkenness.

These characters fall into the social distinction of being mad, yet I am not engaging in a discussion of mental disability itself. Instead, I focus on madness as a symbolic moment of narrative prosthesis that is meant to signify social transgression. As per David Mitchel and Sharon Snyder's concept, the authors that I discuss use madness as a means of moving the story along. The drunken and mad individuals here are frequently reduced to one-dimensional representations of drunkenness and loss. The only depth of character in these figures is when they channel bardic tradition and sing or recite high odes to their losses. However, my interest is in how this drunken madness is reduced to a symbol of oppression.

The drunken figure stumbles and sobs through many works of Irish-American literature, but the often-comic representation of this tragic character should not negate his or her potential as a social commentator. In fact, the authors often imply that drink itself entitles the characters to free speech. As the character of Francis Phelan says to his friend Andy in *Ironweed*, “[h]ave a drink, pal. Lubricate your soul” (Kennedy 209). Here Francis links intoxication and the expression of the individual's innermost feelings. These characters speak the grief that their communities cannot voice, and this transgressive expression links the drunks to the tradition of the court fool.

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<sup>11</sup> I will hereafter refer to these characters as “drunks” and “drunken,” not as alcoholics. Although the term “drunk” can be rather pejorative, I use it to distinguish these socially excluded characters from real individuals who live with alcoholism.

The characters that I focus on are not just fools for their overly physical and seemingly nonsensical performance; there is a clear message of suffering in their drunken songs.<sup>12</sup> The revelations of the drunken fools are not spiritual in nature, but these characters are on a mission. Each eloquent but sodden figure forces the reader to consider the insights of seemingly insane figures.<sup>13</sup> These characters are literary tropes that highlight issues of class and the traumas of immigrant life.

This focus on trauma and the immigrant experience is a part of a long-standing academic discussion about what it means to perpetually mourn an unacknowledged loss.<sup>14</sup> I will add to the critical discussions of trauma, both Irish specific and otherwise, by looking at how these drunken fools act as conduits for the expression of their societies' repressed pains. Studying trauma for an immigrant group like Irish Americans means broaching a wide range of painful experiences. However, my focus is on how the many insidious and overt traumas have shaped Irish American literature. The drunken characters show what it means to be in a disempowered position in American society. Furthermore, I hope to show that not all rebellion against strain comes in the forms that we might expect an opposition to take. Sometimes, the best social commentary comes from those figures that have nothing left to lose. In understanding the drunken fools, we better comprehend the societies around which they stumble.

These fictional communities ameliorate the past by allowing the heroic images of the dead to eclipse any sufferings. In contrast, the drunken figures rage about their pains in public

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<sup>12</sup> A key to the drunken fools is in their physically repulsive natures; therefore, this work will also rely on both Mikhail Bakhtin's theories on Carnival and Julia Kristeva's work on the concept of Abjection. These two theorists help to position my discussion of the drunken fools as contentious figures rooted in socially transgressive bodies.

<sup>13</sup> See Dana Heller for a full review of the trope of the Holy Fool. I will discuss this subject in part, but only so far as it is applicable for this discussion of the insights of the drunken fool.

<sup>14</sup> Both Cathy Caruth's discussion latent manifestations of traumatic responses and James' Berger's discussion of the differences between trauma and disability studies are influential in this discussion of the mourning emphasis of trauma in contrast to disability studies' inability to mourn.

and irrepressible ways. Yet this tendency to speak out about insidious traumas makes these characters socially transgressive. Tragically, the label of madness keeps these fools from ever being fully addressed and understood. The fools drunkenly rant and linger on the edges of our literary awareness, but even social isolation does not keep these fools from raucously singing their songs of righteous indignation.

### **Drunken Fools and Their Songs**

Perhaps the most tragic drunken tale and the liveliest singer is Malachy in Frank McCourt's autobiographical novel *Angela's Ashes*. The critical work on this novel has been on the use of memoir as a kind of altered history. Shannon Forbes discusses how McCourt relives the past through memories that are shaped in the present. Additionally, Forbes looks at how McCourt creates the figure of his mother as a kind of amalgamation of both truth and fiction (477). Although this act of reshaping the past is somewhat salient for this discussion, the fully-fashioned character of Malachy is truly of interest here. This family's decision to move back to Ireland is far from the traditional Irish-American immigrant story, yet this story transcends the destination by highlighting the difficult liminality of the immigrant experience.<sup>15</sup>

Life for Frank and his family in America is hard, and things only grow worse after the family's return to Ireland to find work and to forget the sorrows of baby Margaret's death. Yet life in Ireland is no better for this family. They face daily battles with hunger, poor housing, and the lack of urgent medical care. The tale of this family is told through the filter of their now grown son. However, I focus on the father Malachy, as his drunken songs illustrate his potential

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<sup>15</sup> McCourt's work is intended to be a factual account of his childhood; however, I will be treating the character of Malachy as a semi-fictional figure. While he is based on an actual person, this is also a work of memory. Therefore, elements of this depiction are subjective.

as a socially expressive character. McCourt's depiction of his father as a man sodden with drink and belligerent with sorrow forms the perfect image of the transgressive drunken fool.

The drunken fool is born from the culture of seclusion and persecution that is such an integral part of the Catholic Irish-American immigrant experience. While each of these texts deals with different kinds of personal and communal isolation, this division is most prominent in Mary Curran's novel *The Parish and the Hill*. The Irish-American characters are divided between the "lace curtain" middle class Irish Americans and the working class "shanty" Irish. As poorer figures, these shanty Irish make up the bulk of the silenced or mad characters that I discuss in this chapter.

The pains of these fictional communities are not out-of-line with findings in the field of trauma studies. The traumas in these works are akin to Lorraine Cates' definition of insidious emotional trauma. These small traumas are near-relentless assaults on a person's emotions (Cates 36). While this is far different from the overt violence of something like a train wreck, the physical and emotional impact of daily strain on a person can have a similar traumatic effect over time. One immigration-related example would be the discrimination and difficulty that so many of the characters have in finding stable work. This job insecurity then leads to self-doubt, worries over providing food and shelter, and a general feeling of isolation from the more money-secure members of a community. Over time this has the effect of a kind of loss or strain on the individual, and this insidious trauma is what we most often see among the Irish immigrants in these novels. Since this daily trauma is something that happens over time and does not always have a clear event, it is also a common strain to be overlooked or downplayed by sufferers.

The joyously lubricated songs of these drunken characters are a direct response to the pains that their communities cannot express. These people are restricted from expressing any of

their shared historical traumas because the pain is considered so common that voicing it would be a socially taboo complaint.<sup>16</sup> The sober characters force down their responses to insidious traumas until these pains haunt the edges of the texts in some other symbolic form. The ghostly presence of pain aligns with the semi-seen nature of trauma. As Cathy Caruth explains, “[i]n its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (11). The traumatic history is present in moments like the crushing poverty of the family in *Angela’s Ashes* or the life on the streets that Francis Phelan pursues in Kennedy’s novel.

Both the insidious and overt immigrant traumas come through in Curran’s novel *The Parish and the Hill*. Mary Curran’s 1948 novel tells the story of three generations of Irish-Americans in New England. The tale itself is told through the very perceptive eyes of the youngest child, Mary O’Connor. This story focuses on inter-generational relationships; however, the novel also looks at the class divide between the poorer “shanty” Irish immigrants and the middle class “lace curtain” Irish. The shanty Irish in this work are generally treated with the kind of contempt and social isolation that would be akin to insidious emotional trauma. There is little indication in the novel, but the likelihood is that many of these shanty Irish immigrants were a part of the more socially isolated second wave of Irish Catholic emigrants. Another insidious trauma is in the treatment of Mary’s uncles after their emotionally damaging experiences in World War I. Mary’s uncles, and later her brothers, are social outcasts who fall into a cycle of addiction and social shame that ends in death. The scholarship on Curran’s novel centers on the

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<sup>16</sup> I focus on Avery Gordon’s discussion of haunting in *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* to explain the more socially acceptable manifestation of repressed events.

discussion of class and the female narrative voice.<sup>17</sup> Comparatively little has been written on the expressive nature of drunkenness in this work. The drunken men are some of the most eloquent and socially isolated speakers in the novel. The sloshed ballads and raging songs of this work are then the symbolic voice of these drunken fools.

The fool is typified by seemingly erratic and silly behavior that sets him or her apart from the community. This isolation is also associated with an alternate view of society that, in some cases, can set the stage for rebellion. “The jester can turn the world on its head, making people see the ultimate insignificance of many of the things they hold dear, perhaps showing them their priorities from a different angle or a wider perspective” (Otto 99). The fool’s literal function is that of a multi-faceted entertainer and comedian who specializes in biting social commentary. Yet it would be a mistake to limit the fool to jokey physicality. In short, “[o]n a most general level, that which tricksters, clowns . . . holy fools . . . have in common is an *active* rejection of consensual reality. They behave in ways that outwardly manifest the reversal of consensual reality” (Feuerstein 204). The jester, or fool, is a character who, through clowning, can point out some greater issue or truth. The tradition of the jester is found in a myriad of cultures and periods, so it is difficult to say exactly where this performative truth-teller originated (Otto 10-7). We might see the court-like conditions as a way of looking at the heavily class-dependent lives of this immigrant group. The dominant American social structure forces these communities to adhere to a normative standard of behavior, but the fool character is designed to upset hierarchy. The drunken fool is different from this more traditional figure, but this essence of topsy-turvy social chaos is a character trait that transfers to the Irish-American figures of these novels. The drunken fool calls out the traumatic structure that defines the lives of many Irish immigrants.

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<sup>17</sup> See Sheila C. Conboy’s article, “Birth and Death: Female Tradition and the Narrative Voice in Mary Doyle Curran’s *The Parish and the Hill*.”

Irish immigrant characters are often figures of ridicule or pity, but the drunken fools have something more to tell us. As the character of Kirkpatrick in Curran's novel says of a group of drunken Irishmen, "“Oh, I'm just a spectator of the great Irish *debacle*, that's all. As long as I have a drink under my belt, even I can stand Pat and Mike”" (211). This observation links the foolishness of drink with a greater insight into the conditions of Irish-American immigrants. While Kirkpatrick might be implying that one must be drunk to deal with drunkenness, this comment also implies a greater insight provided by the drink. Thus, the drunk is an outlandishly enlightened figure with some wisdom to impart about immigrant life.

Insight through alcohol links these drunks to the long tradition of holy fools and court jesters. While the "holy fool" is much in line with the court jester in the sense that he is outwardly ridiculous or seemingly mad, the holy figure has a higher sense of purpose than just causing temporary upheaval. Unlike the traditional fool, this spiritual character focuses on acting foolish and childlike to make themselves open to both receiving and teaching God's message. The first noted reference to this kind of fool is in the new testament writing of Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians. Here Paul uses the term "fool for Christ" and starts a long tradition of associating faith and drastic spiritual truths with the performative madness of the jester or fool (Poulakou-Rebelakou et al. 100). This performance is playing the part of the fool or outsider as a means of enacting lasting change in the individual, and by extension, the group. In summary, "[t]he fool stages this play, a simulation of madness, for the salvation of himself and others." (Heller 6). The holy fool focuses on a greater goal and a higher way of understanding. This same righteous dedication to a higher and more painful truth is what I want to capture in these novels. Yet these stories of drunken foolishness are also tied to the experiences of many real Irish immigrants.

The historical realities of alcoholism and poverty for Irish American immigrants are essential to this discussion of the symbolic potential of drunken foolishness. Social isolation and poverty were a regular part of the lives of many Irish Americans, but these difficulties were often rooted in political and religious differences. Not all Irish immigrants faced the same levels of social isolation in American society. Many Presbyterian Irish, or Ulster Irish, emigrated to America in the period before and immediately after the American Revolution. These individuals formed strong communities and tended to incorporate successfully into American community and industry. However, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the influx of many Irish Catholic emigrants. These later Irish settlers were excluded more for their Catholicism than their ethnicity.

A part of the prejudice against these later emigrants comes from their tendency to adhere to “premodern” ways. Often these judgements revolved around how these immigrants practiced their faith, but the tendency to give up production time in favor of leisure activities like drinking also contributed to this idea.<sup>18</sup> Regardless of the reason, the reality of this social exclusion was that many of these later Irish immigrants had little in the way of social or financial support. This adversity led many individuals to seek refuge in drink; however, the pubs also provided a kind of community.

The reality of the drinking culture in this period is important in understanding why the drunken characters are so socially transgressive. The definition of alcoholism is a socially subjective issue, but the model that America used to define what was an issue in the early twentieth century was based on the restrictive British model of productivity and drink. Alcohol

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<sup>18</sup> See Susannah Ural Bruce chapter, “‘An Irishman Will Not Get to Live in This Country’: The Irish in America, 1700–1860.” In *The Harp and the Eagle: Irish-American Volunteers and the Union Army, 1861-1865* for a longer discussion of Irish Immigration.

was a highly regulated substance deemed counterproductive to the workday. Americans adopted this model as a standard, so immigrants from other more alcohol permissive societies were outcast for their un-American penchant for alcohol and the escapist nature of this pastime. Many Irish Catholic immigrants then faced the difficulty of being socially excluded enough to be under the poverty level *and* being seen as drunken for their liberal attitudes towards alcohol. This was then an insidious social cycle where these immigrants were seen as lazy and drunken, and this perception pushed more people into joblessness and the already permissive Irish Catholic drinking culture. These factors combined meant that the later Irish immigrants tended to have greater rates of alcohol related illness and social transgression.<sup>19</sup>

Social exclusion and the freedom of the pub culture link to create the revolutionary potential of the drunken performances. The communal nature of the pub setting brought together many unhappy workers in a setting where their speech was greatly lubricated by drink.

In short,

Workers could meet there after long and grueling hours in the factory or mine, relax, play cards or billiards, look at newspapers, collect mail and write letters, possibly bowl or dance, and use a public toilet, was considered a contribution to their morale. As the labor movement became better articulated, however, employers' perceptions changed: saloons came to be seen not only as a breeding ground for crime and corruption but also, and more alarmingly, as a protected space for agitators to stir up "communistic" trouble

(Schneider 123).

The pub culture initially focused on the needs and leisure activities of workers, but it was also a place where these immigrants could bond over the difficulties of life on the fringes of American society. The melancholy of Irish Catholic diaspora found a home in the pub. Mass gatherings of discontented individuals also meant that the pubs were a space for the potential discussion of

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<sup>19</sup> See Jane Schneider's chapter, "Abstinence and Power: The Place of Prohibition in American History" in the anthology, *Empirical Futures: Anthropologists and Historians Engage the Work of Sidney W. Mintz* for a full discussion of prohibition and immigration in early 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century America.

rebellion. Therefore, the association between drink and revolution is far more common than the outlandish examples that I discuss here. The drunken characters are representations of real individuals who struggled and found some means of escape and expression in the drinking culture.

Many Irish Catholic immigrants in these early twentieth century novels struggle with hunger, but the character of the drunken fool frequently calls attention to this difficulty by subsisting on copious amounts of alcohol. While starvation offers a blatant example of someone that is having a difficult time, there is also a tension in these novels between images of meager feasts and periods of famine. An instance of this feasting and famine is in McCourt's work, when Frankie and his brothers feast on bananas. He recounts that, "...what am I to do with the twins bawling with hunger in the pram? . . . I make sure no one is looking, grab a bunch of bananas...[t]here are five bananas in the bunch and we feast on them in a dark corner" (32). The juxtaposition of this moment of plenty with the understanding of the alcohol-fueled root of this hunger that makes this a triumph over the struggles of life. However, this banana feast also echoes characters like Samuel Beckett's Krapp and his obsessive feast on the bananas that plague his bowels in the play *Krapp's Last Tape*. The fact that McCourt's feast comes in the wake of so much perpetual hunger for the family suggests a momentary triumph over the general pain of their lives. However, much like Krapp experienced in his constipation, the bananas that the boys feasted on would alley their hunger but cause greater pain later. This feast is then a triumph and a painful foreshadowing of the fact that there will be more pain to come for the characters. As Mikhail Bakhtin explains, "[t]he popular images of food and drink are active and triumphant, for they conclude the process of labor and struggle of the social man against the world" (Bakhtin

302). A feast is a symbol of triumph over struggle, but it is also a reminder that the respite is temporary and the struggle always waits.

Interestingly, the drunken characters are seldom the ones doing the actual feasting in any of these works. In Kennedy's novel, Francis passes on several meals to allow others, like the homeless family, to eat. Additionally, the character of Malachy frequently abstains from eating and allows his family to have their meager feast (McCourt 101). There is an implication that these men give the food to others because they are saving room themselves for the drink that they so need. However, this only illustrates the point that these drunken fools live only for the alcohol that enables them to express themselves. Food would only dull the purity of their drunken madness.

This single-minded focus on drink implies that the insights of the moment are more important than taking enough into the self to live for another day. In short, the drunken characters master the pains of life by giving others their nourishment and imbibing instead the temporary madness of drink. Although alcoholic characters like Malachy often take the family's food money for drink, this perpetuation of trauma is a part of the performative nature of these characters. As tropes, these fools are more symbols than they are literary representations of actual people, so by stealing from their families they also show the internal division in these families that must contend with the strain of the world around them. These drunken characters are bound to their bodies in ways that the normative people around them are not.

### **The Bodies of Fools: Physicality and the Openness of Expression**

The gross physicality of the drunken characters is a narrative element that marks them as symbolic voices for their communities. The grotesque and leaking nature of the drunken bodies

suggests some of their ability to upset social norms by highlighting the limits of immigrant lives. As Curran's character Mary says of her uncle, "[h]e lifted his other hand to steady the cup, but it still shook violently, and the coffee slopped over the tablecloth and his suit. Swiftly I glanced around . . . the other six strange men were looking at me. I dropped my eyes—ashamed of something I did not understand" (116). Here the bodily manifestation of the uncle's alcoholism is present in his detoxification tremors.

The image of the coffee slopping over the rim of the mug and staining the fabric also makes this a moment of physical foolishness, for the spill is akin to something that a child would do. Each knowing glance of the other uncles shows that this is also an instance of a greater understanding that is beyond the depths of the child narrator. However, for the reader, the uncle's tremors suggest the traumas of the war and a long history of alcohol abuse. Fighting in World War I was not an uncommon traumatic event for many men of the period. The added isolation of many Irish immigrants would have likely compounded their traumas. The uncle's shaky hands are a part of the essential physicality of the fool, and this mix of physical comedy and tragedy is how these characters subvert the normative social order.

This physical upheaval comes up again in Kennedy's description of the drunken character Helen's Karaoke performance. He describes her as "...still wearing that black rag of a coat rather than expose the even more tattered blouse and skirt that she wore beneath it, standing on her spindly legs with her tumorous belly butting the metal stand of the microphone..." (56). Here Helen's tragic foolishness is captured by the motley of her garments and her deteriorating physical bounds. She stands at the microphone to share her love of music, but the ridiculousness of her body eclipses her intent to sing. She is a woman who has fallen into drink and despair, and

her figure is made darkly comical with the description of the thinness of her legs supporting the tumorous parody of pregnancy that is her belly.

Helen foolishly desires to relive her past, and the physical reminder of her sad life highlights the disparity between the past and present. However, this same overt physicality that also connects her to the long line of holy fools. Volkova writes, “The fool's naked, dirty, ugly, strange and indecent appearance was a metaphor for humankind's soiled, “naked,” sinful soul that has lost its “wedding garments,” its innocence.” (155). Helen’s plight through in both her torn and dirty clothing and the clear signs of the cancer that is killing her. As theorist Mikhail Bakhtin explained, “Carnival's hell represents the earth which swallows up and gives birth, it is often transformed into a cornucopia; the monster, death, becomes pregnant. Various deformities, such as protruding belly, enormous noses, or humps, are symptoms of pregnancy or of procreative power” (91). Helen is a temporary fool in the comic tragedy that is the carnival of her life. She puts all her tragedies on display for the bar audience’s amusement and sympathy. The drunken characters are heavily rooted in their imperfect and utterly human bodies, but this makes them ideal characters for the expression of the repressed trauma of their societies. This narrative focus on the physical bodies of the fools highlights their potential for social upheaval, but grief is also another revolutionary feeling that they use their hyper-physical bodies to express.

What makes the unruly body a symbolic expression of grief is that this exaggerated performance suggests the shared nature of this pain. Each drunk uses her or his body to liberally express the underlying sorrow of other Irish immigrants. Physical grief and awkward drunken displays make these characters comic stand-ins for the pain of so many Irish immigrants. This weighty performance is illustrated in McCourt’s drunken character Malachy. The narrator Frank tells us, “He blubbered, ‘Och, poor Angela. And poor wee Margaret and poor wee Oliver . . . My

face was wet from his tears and his spit and his snot and I was hungry and I didn't know what to say+ when he cried all over my head" (77). Malachy mourns both the fate of his recently deceased children and the life that he has provided for his wife Angela. These pains are real, but the physicality of his grief makes it a moment of awkward foolishness that both Frank and the reader experience. It is difficult to take Malachy's grief as seriously when we see it expressed through the image of connecting strings of viscous snot.

This open grieving with the whole body comes up again in Kennedy's novel. Francis recalls a drunken friend named Oscar singing of his lost love and life. "Oscar's voice quavered with beastly loss on a climactic line of the song: Blinding tears falling as he thinks of his lost pearl, broken heart calling . . . Francis turned to Helen and saw her crying . . . weeping richly for all the pearls lost since love's old sweet song first was sung" (51). Here, both the drunken Oscar and Helen weep foolishly over what they have lost. The fact that this is literally a public performance means that these characters effectively share their pain and their past traumas with the world, and it is this same shared grief that makes these characters so revolutionary.

The off-putting physicality of these drunken fools extends the sodden individual beyond him or herself; this same grotesque connectivity echoes Bakhtin's discussion of the regenerative power of the grotesque body. He says that, "[t]he grotesque body . . . is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds another body" (317). The drunken bodies in these works continually drip, ooze and expand, but it is the comic and disgusting connectivity of this act that makes them both performative fools and revolutionary drunks. While these connections between bodies are not necessarily intentional, these fools connect to others through the flagrant spread of snot and tears. They share their emotions and excretions with the world.

The spreading bodies of these fools are depicted as in such a repellent way that the reader is unable to look away. Stories cling to these tragic and disgusting characters with an almost hypnotic draw, and a part of this is in the way that the drunken fools call attention to the part of their audiences that are also angry about their own abuses and humiliations. Perhaps the best way to understand how these fools can be both repellent and compelling is to consider Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject. She writes, "[w]e may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it—on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger" (Kristeva 9-10). The abject, or that which is the loathed other, is rejected but can never be fully separated from the ego because it is a part of the self. These drunken fools are constant textual reminders of what it means to struggle and fail in establishing a life on the fringes of a new country. Men like Malachy and Francis struggle against their grand dreams of success in America and the reality of a life of degradation. Poverty and loss are just an accepted part of their conditions as Irish-American immigrants in this period, and these men are social outcasts for their lack of resilience in accepting this fact.

In contrast, characters like Mary's uncles try for acceptance but only find more social stigma when picking up the pieces of their war-damaged lives. Lost hopes are not a new theme in immigrant narratives, but the characters in these novels are also isolated by cultural assumptions about Irish-Americans and alcoholism. The drunken characters here embrace this model, but many of their counterparts live with this as an erroneous cultural assumption about them. Although these men appear to be social outcasts, they cling to their communities in such a dedicated way that we might also deduce that they are never fully rejected. If the experiences of these men were so uncommon, then they would likely not have these lingering associations with

their communities. There is still a thread of common experience that links these damaged characters to their communities.

These fools are a part of each functioning community member in that they share the same outrage and fears over their poor treatment as working-class immigrants. The primary difference between the fools and those around them is that they express the pain that the others try to repress. Thus, these figures pull others into their caricatured world by unnervingly reminding them of their losses with each drunken performance. The greatest subversive trick is performed while we are entranced with the seemingly senseless drunken performances.

These drunken and prophetic fools mix high language and inebriated outbursts to force the reader to consider the meaning behind the outlandish performances. The young narrator of Curran's novel explains that, "[t]he political poetry of the Irish is full of demonic fury. I can still hear Smiley's voice, loud and full, roaring out the angry syllables, exciting the vowels into live and real anger" (Curran 130). Uncle Smiley appropriates the voices of ancient Irish poets in a thinly veiled drunken rant against his own circumstances as a discarded veteran and former shanty town Irishman. This same combination of the poetic form and blurred edges of drunken rage is what makes his performance so compelling. As a drunken fool, Smiley's righteous performances require the maddening freedom of drink.

The mix of high poetic speech and base experiences comes up again with Francis Phelan from Kennedy's novel. Francis drunkenly thinks of his future, "and it won't be long now till the snow gets gone again, / And the grass comes green again. / And then the dance music rises in Francis' brain, / And he longs to flee again, / And he flees" (Kennedy 147). These words are an unspoken performance that express the pull of the road and his need to flee from the pain that he

caused. Poetry is a vehicle for expression, but each performance of high poetry or song is made more memorable by the fact that it is coming from characters who are deep into alcoholism.

The verbal skill of these drunks is another historical parallel in that traditional court fools were also often renowned for their ability to recite poetry and other skilled forms of entertainment (Otto 7). Like these jesters, the drunken fools mix the formal speech of the courts with base and ridiculous performances of the body. However, the drunken fools use their bodies to tell very personal tales of social inequality and suffering. These characters juxtapose tales of heroism with their own sad and often cowardly lives to highlight the pains of the present. The stark disparity between the lives of the drunken fools and the stories that they tell only highlights the more pressing differences between their dreams as immigrants and the harsh truth of social inequality that many of these characters experience.

There is a tendency in the drunken performances to mourn the traumas of the past as a means of highlighting present suffering. Focusing on the past is nothing new in post-revival Irish literature, but the fact that the stories of these tragically heroic figures are coming from men in such low circumstances only serves to highlight the difficulties of these immigrant lives. In McCourt's novel, Malachy's favored form of drunken expression is through song and declarations of devotion to Ireland. As he sings one night, "*Up the narrow street he stepped/ Smiling proud and young/ About the hemp-rope on his neck/ The golden ringlets clung, / There's never a tear in the blue eyes/ Both glad and bright are they, /As Roddy McCorley goes to die/ On the bridge of Toome today*" (McCourt 28). Here is a juxtaposition of the youth and beauty of the rebellious figure of Roddy McCorley with the brutal reality of his imminent death. The tone of the song is one of mourning the lost innocence, or "golden ringlets," of the past from the harsh

realities of the present. The song parallels what we can assume is Malachy's understanding of the injustices that he himself experienced and then rebelled against as an IRA man.

These drunken songs allow men like Malachy to express their own suffering through the pain and glory of rebellious historical figures.<sup>20</sup> This escapist vision of the past is also in the drunken and dying figure of Helen in Kennedy's novel *Ironweed*. Francis stands over her dead body and ponders how it is "[t]oo late now to see any deeper into Helen's soul. But he would continue to stare, mindful of the phonograph record propped against the pillow; and he would know the song she'd bought, or stole. It would be 'Bye Bye Blackbird,' . . . and he would hear the women singing it softly as he stared at the fiercely glistening scars on Helen's soul . . ." (222). The song referenced here is the 1926 classic by Mort Dixon, and it focuses on the singer leaving a place of sadness for some unspecified better life. Helen's passing is expressed through Francis' reminiscing about the song. Francis' act of reminiscing about Helen's favorite song implies that this borrowed music is way for these drunken figures to express both pain and joy by keeping the happiness of the past alive in the present. For both Malachy and Helen, alcohol enables them to cling fiercely to songs that express their inner truths.

These drunken figures display raw and socially unacceptable feelings of extreme grief and anger in each unofficial performance. This expressiveness makes these characters potentially revolutionary figures. These men and women are characters on the fringes of their societies, and, unsurprisingly, they suffer much of the abasement and neglect that comes with being socially outcast. As social pariahs, many of the poems and songs that these drunken figures choose also tend to incorporate images of oppression. The literary recitations tend to revolve around either

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<sup>20</sup> Ballad and tales a long-standing part of the Irish Bardic tradition, but the acknowledgement of this tradition is only just starting to re-emerge in Irish literature. For a full discussion, see Seán Golden's article, "Traditional Irish Music in Contemporary Irish Literature."

historical battles in the long Irish war for independence or more recent events immediately before and after the start of home rule. The Celtic literary revival explains some of these modern references to the works of the past, but this embracing the talents of the past is also indicative of the same need for cohesive national identity that we see in these Irish-American works. The references of past ballads both express the traumas of the present and connect the speakers to a long line of Irish performers.

Most of the drunken characters adhere to the theme of reliving the past as a means of expressing and simultaneously burying the pains of the present. As McCourt's narrator recalls, "[w]hen the farm money is gone [Malachy] rolls home singing and crying over Ireland and his dead children, mostly about Ireland. If he sings Roddy McCorley it means he had only the price of a pint of two. If he sings Kevin Barry, it means he had a good day, that he is now falling down drunk..." (95). The dead children are referenced in immediate proximity to Malachy's tendency to sing nationalist songs of Irish liberation. Malachy's patriotic songs are understandable since he was a former IRA man, but the fact that these songs come paired with his mourning his children suggest that the well-known songs stand-in as an established social voice. Old Irish songs enable Malachy to grieve for his children by mourning a less personal social pain.

The liberating power of drink directly relates to the amount that these men and women drink. In other words, the divine madness of drink requires an amount of excess appropriate for a true fool. The amount that Malachy drinks determines the depth of mourning that he can express. Less alcohol results in him singing of historical figures like Roddy McCorley and his role in the United Irishmen rebellion and later execution in 1800. The song about this distant figure is, in a sense, a safer mode of expression for the only partially intoxicated man. This historical reference is far enough removed from more recent Irish struggles for the song about him to be less socially

perceived as a threat. However, in the second example shows some of the liberating power of Malachy's drunken state. When Malachy has a "good" day he comes home singing of the recent rebellion figure of Kevin Barry, who was executed in 1920 at the young age of 18. The youth and historical proximity of this figure then work as a proxy expression for the loss of the contemporary character's family. When he is fully mad with the drink, he comes as close as he can to expressing his own pain. This means that the "drunken fool" combination of the madness of drink and the fool-like poetic expression of the self creates a moment where personal expressions of trauma are also possible. While social rituals like wakes for the dead are a moment for the bereaved to express their pain, often through the medium of drink, this is still a structured event with a clear beginning and end to the grieving. The drunken fools socially transgress by grieving in the streets and making their pain a shared event. This communal expression of suffering is a part of what makes these fools so revolutionary.

These drunken characters function as expressive symbols of the immigration-related traumas that have been forcibly repressed by their communities. Ironically, one of the key themes that these drunken figures sing of is the political state of Ireland. The important thing to note here is that these characters are, to some degree, Irish-American immigrants that are often quite physically distant from this struggle. Furthermore, characters like those in Curran's novel are second and third generation immigrants, and they have even less in the way of immediate ties to Ireland, except as a touchstone for their feelings and identities.

The references to Ireland then enable the drunken fools to express the pain of their immediate circumstances through easily identifiable instances of shared suffering. These historical moments enable the drunken fools create a shared moment where a specific historical instance of mourning is generalized by proximity to cover less concrete suffering. As Malachy

tells his children, “. . . Up boys, up. A nickel for everyone who promises to die for Ireland. *Deep in Canadian woods we met/ From one bright island flown./ Great is the land we tread, but yet/ Our hearts are with our own*” (McCourt 25). His performance is a communal instance of mourning since the Irish struggle for independence was something that most of the Irish-American community would have understood. This song also potentially expresses the pain of the Irish-American immigrant experience. This parallel is in lines like the reference to being, “*from one bright island flown,*” for this line could refer to either the men away at war or to the difficulties of emigration. It is more socially acceptable to mourn Irish national losses than it is for Malachy to speak of the pains of his life and the lives of the other Irish immigrants around him.

This focus on ballad and the expression of communal or national identity is not a new theme in Irish literature. A primary example of this tradition is with James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and the focus on ballad and song throughout the novel. The performative element of these characters is also seen in many modernist Irish works like James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Joyce uses song throughout this novel as a way to signify important narrative elements in the lives of the characters, especially in regards to their trials and pains. For instance, the song “M’appari” in the “Sirens” chapter aligns with Leopold and Molly’s lives. The song is a moment where the pains and joys of the past are a cover for the experiences of the present. This identity is fought for and celebrated through poetry and song, and the drunken characters here channel this same depth of feeling.

Another instance of the emotional role of these fools is when Curran’s narrator relates how her mother told her that her uncle Smiley, ““fights windmills, standing on street corners reciting revolutionary Irish ballads, shouting Irish songs in barrooms, smashing heads to prove

how strong an Irishman he is” (Curran 133). He rages against the injustices of life through the medium of poetry. Smiley momentarily becomes a raging prophet who channels the bards of old through the medium of drink. As one historian explains, “In Ireland the poet has always enjoyed high status, and in the past the power of his words meant he was as much feared as revered, descended as he was from the Celtic bards” (Otto 13). While Smiley is himself an alcoholic and mentally unstable veteran, he can temporarily join with the bards of old to channel their authority through the poems. Since the position of a bard held great respect, this instance implies that Smiley has the ear of others. This is a comic moment because the setting for this grand stand is a bar. It is the very fact of Smiley, as even the irony of his name suggests, momentarily becoming a drunken fool that makes him an empowered yet accessible spokesman for the suffering of those around them. Of course, not all the drunken characters that we see are quite as outspoken as Malachy and Smiley, but this does not make them any less symbolically powerful drunken fools than these men.

The character of Francis Phelan in William Kennedy’s 1983 novel *Ironweed* is one of the more understated fools that I discuss. While more physically discreet than his counterparts, he still captures the drunken eloquence that typifies this modern fool character. This novel is a depression-era story of Francis’ vagrant wanderings near his home of Albany, New York. He is a troubled man who flees from both his failed career in baseball and his role in accidentally killing his newborn son Gerald. Francis’ later return to the town sets off his own personal chain of introspection.<sup>21</sup> The novel itself is a story of both the strength of characters like Francis and his dying girlfriend Helen and the myriad of ways that individuals act to destroy their own

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<sup>21</sup> The primary research on this topic centers on the concept of memory and class in the work. One key theme in the articles that have been written about this novel thus far is the idea of memory. Authors like Liam Kennedy look at how ethnic identity is constructed by altering the social perception of history.

happiness. Francis and his friends are intoxicated for much of the novel, yet they often reveal insights into the human condition through their sodden performances.

Most of the novel revolves around Francis's growing distaste for his life and his coming to terms with the fate of the short and brutal lives of his transient friends. By the end of the novel, Francis is again ready to either flee or to return to the long-suffering family that he has abandoned. In either case, Francis and his friends adopt a foolish performance that does more to highlight the difficulties of their lives than it does to undermine their individual characters. These drunken individuals construct a history and identity that is important in any consideration of trauma studies for this immigrant group. My primary focus is on the role of these drunken fools in acknowledging displaced trauma.<sup>22</sup>

Francis and his friends are compellingly eloquent characters, but this fact coupled with their extreme social isolation also creates a biblical parallel that links these fools with their prophetic counterparts. The sodden fools in question are not the typical image of enlightened messengers. Still, there is quite a bit of evidence linking the characters to the tradition of the divine fool. The isolation and social stigma of the holy trope is an important deviation from the traditional court fool, yet this liminal state is a defining characteristic of both holy and drunken fools. In terms of the requirements of a holy fool, "manifestations of divine idiocy have varied—including marked eccentricity, self-imposed poverty, the simulation of madness, perpetual vagrancy . . . all seem to share is a denigrated, outsider status: holy fools and divine idiots are despised, mocked, persecuted, disgraced" (Heller 3). The holy outcast, like the drunken fool,

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<sup>22</sup>Christopher Craig has written a well-acknowledged article on the class division of the novel titled, "'Nobody's a Bum All Their Life': Teaching Class Through William Kennedy's *Ironweed*."

combines social exclusion with spiritual insight. This sets both figures up as prophetic and revolutionary social figures.

These drunken figures are socially excluded due to their readiness to speak loudly about their pain. Curran's narrator Mary tells us that her father "tried the impossible feat of getting [the drunken uncles] into the house as quickly and quietly as possible. This worked occasionally with all but my Uncle Smiley, who would come rolling up the street, singing at the top of his lungs the lewdest verses of 'Mademoiselle from Armentieres'" (Curran 98). The father's attempt to hide the uncles suggests the communal embarrassment over their readiness to loudly express their feelings. Smiley sings loud enough to alert the neighbors to not only his presence but his drunken state. Furthermore, the song focuses on sexualized lyrics about a GI and a French woman. Here Smiley symbolically speaks about his traumatic history in the war. The way that the father ushers the uncles into the house implies some social shame over their performance.

Part of the isolation of these fools originates in the repression of trauma that they express in their transgressive outbursts and slurred songs. The social need to exclude these drunken characters comes from the hidden nature of many traumas. As Cathy Caruth explains, "...[t]rauma is not located in the simple violent or original even in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its first unassimilated nature--the way it was precisely not known in the first instances--returns to hunt the survivor later on" (4). It is the later responses to these traumas that form the bulk of what we consider to be "trauma." A victim of a traumatic event may come through the actual event relatively unscathed and experience seemingly unassociated physical and mental symptoms much later. This propensity for the effects of trauma to emerge much later is only compounded by the tendency for these Irish American communities to repress their personal responses to both overt and insidious traumas.

In Curran's work, the inebriated singalong reigns as a moment of communal expression. We hear "A phonograph was blaring loudly; my brother Tabby was singing a brash accompaniment to it . . . 'Don't tread on the tail of me coat! Ha! Ha!' . . . the red-faced people stamped collectively and raised their glasses . . . It was a horrible, unmelodious song, and the spirit behind it was vicious and violent" (220). Here the drunken figure of Tabby serves as a kind of spokesman for the feelings and pains of the group. The lines "don't tread on me," and the crowd's ready participation in the song, likely express the downtrodden feelings of the crowd in the bar. The unmelodious nature of the song and the aggressive response of the singers also suggest that Tabby helps to channel the anger and resentment of the crowd as well. While the varying traumas behind the feelings of this crowd may differ, the significance here is that Tabby serves as a means of channeling the emotions of the crowd. Both the temporary madness of the drink and the ability and willingness to lead others in the expression of their pain lend these drunken fools their prophetic qualities. This transgressive social role is only possible because the remainder of their societies works to repress their traumatic experiences.

### **Foolish Expression in Haunted Communities**

These communities try to move forward without acknowledging their social strains, but this constitutes the same kind of repression against which the drunken fools rebel. However, as Caruth points out, the responses to trauma cannot be erased unless the event itself has been dealt with. What this means is that the responses to a trauma need to find some other form of expression. Perhaps the best explanation for the displaced manifestation of trauma is that, in the examples in question, this trauma comes through as a kind of haunting experience. As Avery Gordon explains, "The ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure . . . The

ghost or the apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there . . . makes itself known or apparent to us” (8). This is not a ghost in the sense of someone having passed away and come back. Instead, the ghost is a signification of something that is lost and has not been acknowledged. The ghost lingers on the fringes of the story as a reminder of that which has not been properly addressed.

The haunting presence of the past comes up in Curran’s character of the mother in her routine ghoulish performance in the home. “She would come creeping down the long hall, saying in a sepulchral tone: ‘I am the ghost of thy father/ Doomed to walk in the night. / If I could be released/ From these prison walls,/ I would tell you a story/ That would make your hair stand on end!’” (82). Here the legacy of trauma, seen in the image of the ghostly father, is designed to terrify the girl with reminders of past suffering. The constant focus on history is a haunting presence that signifies something other than the moment on which the works seem to focus. Thus, the depictions of the distant past are a way to patch over the traumas of the present. Such far-gone stories cover over present pain with images of a history that has already been ameliorated with distance.

Death is a pervasive fact in the lives of these immigrants, but it is a pain that is stifled by the laughter and ribaldry of the wake. However, the ghosts of insidious social trauma linger on the edges of the dark humor in these texts. As Curran’s narrator Mary says of her mother’s love of wakes, “She was continuing a tradition, in the old days in Irish Parish, a wake was social . . . People went to wakes, not to mourn the dead, but to comfort the living. The function of attendance was to give tongue to the dead” (68). A celebration of the dead allows the living to feel that they are moving on from their pain, but this same focus also involves an official moment of subduing past traumas so that the community can continue living. This emphasis on

death and mourning is another way of expressing the pain that the community represses. These images of haunting and death are prevalent, in part, because they are the only socially acceptable means of expressing the near constant losses and strains of the lives of these immigrant families. However, Curran's novel highlights the idea that these wakes were on the decline.

Attendance at a wake was once a communal affair, and the eventual loss of this tradition meant a similar loss in the ability of the community members to express their own pain. This same void for expression is one that figures like the drunken fools come to fill. Curran's narrator tells us that, "...as the times changed, my mother grew more and more apologetic about her constant attendance. MY aunts considered it a scandalous thing to do" (67). Here the mother's attendance is a scandal since this tradition has shifted from a communal gathering to a shameful practice. This loss also means the decline of public forums for mourning. The response of the aunts suggests that this mourning was a subject of shame and scandal. The community is then no longer able to express pain and suffering through cathartic moments like the wake. Thus, the authors of these works are forced to find alternatives to express this pain for the group, and this void is filled by the drunken fool. Drunken fools call attention to the traumas that community events like wakes once acknowledged, but the fool takes over this role in a way that is far more expressive than communal moments of grief like the wake.

This system of displacing trauma comes with its own means of attempting to ameliorate painful experiences. A reimagining of the painful past is apparent in Curran's novel. Mary recounts her grandfather's story of St. Patrick by saying, "clever [St. Patrick] was, and he grew into the greenest tree in all Ireland; shading the land and the people from the hot sun, keeping the harm of the storm from them" (22). This reference is both a connection with the old country and the idea that it is this same heritage which provides a kind of communal protection or consolation

from the “storms” around these characters. While the story that the grandfather relates is one of hope and the protection that St. Patrick offers, there is also a ghostly reminder of the pain and trauma that the saint is protecting the faithful from. Although not a traditional expression of haunting, these texts each focus on the act of telling stories of mythical trials and successes of the past. As Curran’s narrator Mary explains, “[i]n telling the stories, there was always one man or woman who was favored . . . The one with the longest memory was best, for he could tell visions that . . . belonged to those dead ones whose names were forgotten” (5). Here the narrator invokes the idea that the one of the primary skills of the storyteller is the ability to incorporate these stories, and presumably the lessons, into a tale for the present. The past effectively lives on in the present of these novels and reminds these individuals of what they have suffered.

Poetry and songs can express difficult emotions, but the stories of men like Mary’s grandfather do not deal with enough of the traumas of the past to ever truly fulfill a cathartic role in the present. In contrast, the songs of the drunken fools drag these past traumatic events straight into the present and force the community to deal with them. Drunken characters are usually met with pity or scorn, but the counterpart epic stories are repeated throughout the generations. For instance, McCourt’s narrator recounts distressing family histories through the studied shelter of the present. Curran’s novel incorporates these same stories by having figures like the venerable grandfather tell his granddaughter Mary the legends of old Ireland. However, except for Mary, these stories are studied works that seem to be ignored by the other characters.

In contrast, the poetry and song of these works function as the emotional counterparts for the stories, and this same expressiveness makes them ideal for expressing the pains of the drunken fools. While there are many instances of this emotional outpouring through stylized form, one key example of this is from *Ironweed*. “Oscar sang into the bar microphone and, with

great resonance and no discernible loss of control from his years with the drink. . . the man was singing a song that had grown old not from time but from wear. The song is frayed. The song is worn out” (Kennedy 49). A minor character like Oscar channels his feelings openly through the drunken performance of song. The song embodies the qualities that, presumably, are also a part of the sad life of this drunken figure. The joy and sorrow of the communities come through these characters. As Mary recounts, “I remember all of [my uncles] as ill-dressed, happy men, full of song and beer . . . They sang a great many Irish ballads” (Curran 117-18). In short, the emotion of these songs is the expressive counterpart to the more studied form of storytelling in the texts.

These poems and songs channel such feeling that they are effective mediums for the drunken fools’ expression of traumatic events. These characters take the high form of the poem and song and turn them into bar room performances. The fool character is renowned for taking revered social symbols and turning them topsy-turvy. As Dana Heller illustrates, “[Fool] speech turns high into low, the sacred into the profane...by blurring all categorical boundaries between law and lawlessness, morality and immorality” (9). These drunken figures are transgressive voices for the repressed pain of their communities. Yet even their respective voices are formed by the songs and poems of others. These drunken fools take on the tradition of the old Irish bards and turn it into an emotional expression of pain and performance. Past traumas come up in the form of raging drunken characters that wander through the streets, and like the emotions that they force their communities to deal with, these fool characters can be hidden. However, these drunks remind us with their poetic declarations that they have a message and that they are ultimately too loud and riotous to be denied forever.

The deep alcoholism of these characters implies that they drink with frequency and vigor, and this same dedication emphasizes how they are in the same prophetic tradition as the holy

fool. This dedication to their vice allows these figures to adopt the temporary madness of alcohol and turn it into something that is more akin to the prophetic madness of figures like the holy fool. As we see with Francis in Kennedy's work, "[h]e drank all the time and he did not vomit. He drank anything that contained alcohol, anything, and he could always walk, and he could talk as well as any man alive about what was on his mind" (5). Francis' perpetual drinking doesn't impair his ability to speak about what is "on his mind." He transcends the debilitating impairment of alcohol and moves on to a kind of state where he can truly express himself. In this moment he becomes a kind of super human figure of great expressive ability.

This is not to say that these are kind or loving figures, rather, these drunken fools are meant to be semi-terrifying reminders of repressed communal emotions. We might also consider the transcendent state of the drunken fools in the case of uncle Smiley: "I would sit in his lap, smelling the stale beer breath of him, while he sang with all the pathos and terror he could muster about the little boy who was playing ball in his back yard and had been enticed out of his yard and . . . kidnapped and tortured" (Curran 128). Here Smiley channels emotions, like pathos and terror, through the medium of drink. While this moment is not necessarily an instance of prophecy, we can argue that Smiley is teaching the narrator of the harshness of life outside of the protection of the family. We might then consider this considering the figure of the holy fool. "The holy fools look the way human beings really look in a spiritual sense. They become spiritual symbols - strange and almost disgusting in appearance, but tragic and attractive from a spiritual point of view. The holy fools' disgraceful behavior carried the message of judgment" (Volkova 155). From this, we can see how these drunken figures become representatives for their communities by committing to their drink with the same devotion of the biblical prophets who became fools to better serve their God. These literary representations of drunkenness highlight

both how far these characters have fallen in life and the general baseness that they are attempting to move beyond.

While many of these drunken figures are parallel with the depiction of comic jesters and holy fools, these outspoken drunken characters fall somewhere between these figures. Since they come from a traditionally Catholic culture, it is difficult to divorce these drunken fools from an association with religion, yet these characters are not themselves religious figures. This liminality is apparent since, “[i]n American literature, the divine idiot is a hybrid concept which grows out of the crossings of numerous discursive currents and traditions, both secular and non-secular, none of which are themselves utterly monolithic or unified” (Heller 4). Like this discussion of the divine American idiot, the drunken fool is an amalgamation of both secular and non-secular bits, and this position between viewpoints makes these characters ideal figures to represent this period in Irish immigration.

These are liminal characters who are neither a part of their communities nor fully excluded from them. In a similar vein, these characters also permeate the border between comedy and tragedy. One clear example of this otherness is in Kennedy’s novel, with the transient character of Rudy’s song. “‘On the Big Rock Candy Mountain,’ Rudy sang, ‘the cops got wooden legs.’ He stood up and waved his wine in a gesture imitative of Francis; then he rocked back and forth as he sang . . . ‘I wanna go where there ain’t no snow, where the sleet don’t fall and the wind don’t blow, On the Big Rock Candy Mountain’” (Kennedy 203). While the song focuses on the perils of life on the streets like the elements and police corruption, the tone of the song is one of a light wish for a fanciful place. Furthermore, Rudy’s action of standing and waving his wine during the song is also such an outlandish image that it borders on comical, and yet, Rudy’s life has essentially fallen apart. Another way of looking at this

liminality is that, as Beatrice Otto writes, “[t]he physical defeat of an oppressed being can still be a certain moral victory if he is able to laugh at his persecutors, forcing them to see that there is a part of their victim’s battered armor that apparently is impenetrable...” (133). Although the drunken characters here are from the fringes of their societies, they perform in a manner that makes them both tragically comic and essential members of their communities. The fact that many of the characters play along with the comic element of their characters means that they gain a certain victory over their circumstances. In making a mockery of themselves, these characters invite their communities to also mock the oppression that has led to such dire situations.

The drunken fool exists to unsettle the repressive social system under which these Irish American communities labor. The individuals here deal with many of the insidious and overt traumas of immigrant life on a regular basis; however, these communities also collectively repress these same distressing events. Yet even repressed traumatic responses must emerge from some displaced manifestation. If this displayed form is further restricted, then figures like the drunken fools need to balance this system of trauma and repression. Throughout each of these novels we see the manifestation of trauma in the focus on death, haunting and the historical past. However, this emphasis on the past does not necessarily alleviate the trauma itself, since the distressing event is never fully acknowledged. This inability to fully accept the past is then the hole that the figure of the drunken fool comes to fill. These fools are the outcasts of their societies, but their mission links them to other historical prophetic figures.

Unlike the socially acceptable repression of trauma that haunting represents, this fool character transgresses her or his society by fully addressing the traumatic events of the past. The drunken fool calls out the past through responses that are highly emotional and physical in form.

These characters rage and pull others into their lubricated process of mourning all the losses of their lives. The drunken fools bring a message to their communities that the past cannot and will not be denied, and they do so by making the bardic forms of high poetry and song into something that is fit for a dim bar room or a cold alleyway. These fool characters turn their societies upside down by forcing them to look at the pain that most individuals in these communities try to hide away, and this holy mission makes these tragically comic drunken figures so essential to understanding the trials and triumphs of Irish-American literature and life in the early twentieth century.

Chapter 3. Broken Playthings: Madness and Childhood Rebellion  
in Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy* and  
Eimear McBride's *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*

Literary depictions of childhood are often filled with carefree innocence, but some children are the products of violent or tragic surroundings. These children form their stories by reproducing the pain of their lives, and, in doing so, they become symbols of social trauma. External sources of strain are essential in shaping the dynamic of the home. The twisted families of new Irish literature are often shaped by the pains of a nation in transition. These families move beyond simple loving bonds and into the realm of traumatic literary representations. The children of such troubled spaces have much to teach us about the personal cost of Ireland's long struggle for independence and stability.

Both the twisted narrator in Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy* and the unnamed girl from Eimear McBride's novel *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* are the products of broken homes. However, these characters are more than the traumatic sum of their lives. Each twisted performance of childhood is also a symbolic reminder of lost innocence and the potential for rebellious change in post-independence Ireland. In the end, the parallels between these damaged souls and the development of this post-colonial nation are poignant and unmistakable. These child narrators absorb and reproduce the pain of their lives in ways that remind us, quite violently, of the long-term implications of social unrest.

These novels are set in communities rife with violence and tragedy, and true childhood is only an ideal haunting the edges of the works.<sup>23</sup> The central children are shaped by insidious traumas that rob them of their innocence and leave only broken and child-shaped figures behind.

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<sup>23</sup> I will be using Avery Gordon's concept of haunting for this chapter. In this application, childhood is not a literal gothic haunting but an ever-present reminder of what the central characters lack.

Yet these warped images of childhood are also a way for the authors to signify, either consciously or not, a certain cultural loss of innocence. It cannot be coincidental, given the prevalence of the depictions of pre-independence Ireland as a maiden or mother, that the theme of distorted childhood comes up so often in new Irish literature. If Ireland as a nation is a symbolic mother figure, then these characters are the lost and damaged children of a world gone awry. These narrators are never truly children; rather, they are a tortured reminder of some greater innocence lost in the overt violence in the tumultuous years after independence. However, the child narrators show that there is a way forward, but it is filled with difficult—and sometimes maddening—change.

These child narrators lash out against their pain in seemingly mad ways; however, their actions are seen as insanity because these disempowered figures are themselves subaltern characters. If, to paraphrase Gayathri Spivak, the subaltern cannot speak, then the attempts that these socially disadvantaged children make at speech can only ever be perceived by the dominant culture as madness or nonsense. I argue that their madness is more rebellious social commentary than any true pathology. The pain of these children and families tells us much about the inherent social strains in this developing post-colonial nation. Likewise, the carnivalesque rebellion against these traumas shows us what it means to fight against seemingly impossible odds. Yet these are transient rebellions that upset the normative order but effect no real change. The narrators fight against the traumas of their lives, but their fictional communities only ever see this symbolic violence as madness.

It can be difficult to find a common source of suffering for the many unhappy families that we find in new Irish literature, but there are some general areas of mass social trauma that likely influence some of the violence in these novels. Although neither of these novels are

considered “Troubles-era” works, both authors grew up in border towns, and the novels capture a feeling of pervasive violence that is in keeping with the period. This cultural strain is present in the haunting air of viciousness in both novels. This does not mean that the traumatic events in these works are directly linked to the Troubles, but this period is a public source of violence in and around the times of the novels. The period of the Troubles, from 1969 to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, saw many families in the north and around the border areas ruined by violence and mistrust. The destroyed families and the seemingly random threat of violence captured in these works certainly evoke this traumatic period of which these authors likely had some first-hand knowledge. These texts are less focused critiques of a specific period than they are a reflection of youth stolen by overwhelming external strain. In the end, the external strain in these works is more about a social loss of innocence.

These novels focus on the theme of distorted childhood and destroyed families, and this un-mourned loss is a central theme in many new Irish works. Lost childhood is effectively the destruction of the family through the twisting of the child from external traumas. Yet these characters are still playful in a disturbing and symbolic way. McCabe’s character Francie Brady and McBride’s unnamed girl both lose their childhoods due to different familial strains, but the central themes here are the destruction of the family as manifest in the brutal destruction of childhood and the ultimate mental breakdown of the narrators. This symbolic madness alternately mourns and rages over the potential of a youth that has been corrupted by needless traumas like abuse and addiction. However, the potential for innocence haunts each of these texts. The lingering presence of childhood reminds the reader of a greater social need for peace in the years since the struggle for Irish independence.

Contrary to appearances, these are not the stories of true hopelessness; instead, the two narrators rage against the pains in their lives. Both characters display signs of depression and occasionally psychosis, but their true madness is in transgressing social standards of behavior and trying to speak out against the injustices of their lives. Madness is way for these authors to show the destruction of childhood innocence due to external strain. Francie's life is one of delusional fantasies and homicidal rage over the loss of his family. In contrast, McBride's girl breaks down until she is little more than her rage, pain, and a deep love for her dying brother. Her suicide is a socially transgressive madness that combines these remnants of herself. While each of the narrators displays a different kind of madness, it is a symbolic performance that highlights the pain that the normative characters try to repress. These narrators show us that their communities are broken and even the fundamental structure of the family is distorted.

The young narrators respond to their difficult situations in unfiltered ways that call attention to social issues, like abuse, that other adult characters are more likely to repress. These children are still learning appropriate social cues and often respond in ways that are more direct than their adult counterparts. Each mad outburst expresses pain in a way that defies the repressive atmosphere of adulthood. The rejection or confinement of these characters is a way for the communities to hide the blatant reminders of their pain. In terms of suffering, I refer to both insidious and overt traumas in this chapter. These events range from overt violence like the murders in *The Butcher Boy*, to insidious traumas like the sexual abuse in *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*. These events do not *need* to be related to the process of independence, yet the specific traumas in these novels parallel some of the overt periods of violence. Social conflicts and external strains trickle down to affect the families in these works. On closer inspection, these tensions often relate to large-scale strains in modern Irish history.

## The Novels in Time

In terms of the familial toll of external trauma, Patrick McCabe's troubling 1994 novel *The Butcher Boy* focuses on Francie Brady's coming of age in a world of senseless violence. Traumatic stories often focus on the destruction of innocence. Yet, Francie refuses victimhood and actively toys with the community members that he feels are responsible for his sorrow. His hatred of the judgmental neighbor Mrs. Nugent implies that each of his tragedies is a burden for which the whole community needs to atone.

At home, Francie deals with an abusive and alcoholic father and a depressed mother who eventually commits suicide. However, the insidious traumas keep coming. Francie is then sent to an industrial reform school where he is sexually abused by one of the priests. Even Francie's attempts to get a job in the local slaughterhouse and take care of his father backfire when his father dies and his body decomposes in their home. Francie's increasingly mad responses to his sad life even drive his only friend Joe into the arms of Phillip, the well-off son of the neighbor Mrs. Nugent. This idealized family is the perfect foil for the sad home that Francie has, and he rages against them for this transgression. However, other than some snobbery and hard heartedness, Mrs. Nugent's primary sin is that she is the kind of mother that Francie daydreams about. Killing Mrs. Nugent also means that he kills the illusion of familial perfection.

Throughout the novel, there are indications that Francie's choice of victim has a greater underlying social relevance. To begin with, there is the clear class division between the Brady and Nugent families. Phillip carries the latest comics and wears both well-made and well-tended clothing. In terms of dating McCabe's novel, there are references throughout the work to both prominent 1960s TV Westerns and to the boys' reformatory where Francie was sent. Most of the reformatories had closed by the 1960s, so this is likely the unspoken period of the novel. The

derision in Francie's references to the Nugent family as having recently returned from England also suggests that British sympathies might be an issue between the two families. Thus, Francie's hatred of this family might have something to do with external social pressure. Overall, the feel of both the period and the violence in this novel parallel the start of the Troubles. Although there are some clear environmental factors that root these novels in the period of the Troubles, the madly child-like fragmentation of these narrative styles makes it difficult to ever fully pin these novels in a specific time.

The other tale of childhood sacrificed on the altar of traumatic experiences is Eimear McBride's 2013 novel, *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*. The story covers both the unnamed narrator's sad life and her older brother's battle with a fatal brain tumor. Her life as a healthy sibling in a strained single parent home is further complicated by her rape and later semi-consensual relationship with her uncle. The narrator quickly throws off any pretense of childhood and spends the rest of her teens and early twenties drinking and having sex with random (and sometimes violent) men. She is initially a passive character who is infantilized and used by others. Her brother's death sends her into a downward spiral that ends in her suicide. Death allows her to briefly express the pain that she spent a lifetime repressing. She is a nameless and traumatized "girl," but her rebellions mark her as a symbol of something larger than her quietly ended life.

As for the period of McBride's novel, her work seems to be dated sometime in the late seventies or eighties, judging by some of the references that the girl makes. There are several instances in this work that depict the violence in the streets in a rather roundabout way. McBride provides historical details that establish a timeframe sometime between the late 1970s and the 1990s. She does this through dated cultural references like Walkman music players. These subtle

period references link the novel the Troubles. There is also overt violence on the streets of this work. Foremost, there is the gang of men with which the girl has repeated sexual encounters. She is later raped and beaten by one of these men in a graphic scene that both calls out her own self-destructive tendencies and suggests that the streets themselves are a place full of potential violence. Again, this is not overtly a Troubles-era novel, but this tumultuous time creeps into the novel in its own way. This work is certainly a part of the new Irish focus on the transformative potential of the painful past.

The fact that both novels are vague in their periods is another haunting reminder that suggests that the ambiguity about time does in fact point to the importance of the period and place which formed both authors. These authors are looking back at moments that are filled with both pain and potential. We see one novel set before the start of the Troubles, and although there are clear social tensions in the work, there is no reference to what is soon to follow historically. In contrast, the second novel follows the coming of age of a girl whose 1980s-tinged world seems colored by external violence. My belief, therefore, is that these novels mirror the violence and uncertainty that took apart so many families during this period of overt violence and social unrest. However, the ambiguous period of the novels is also one of the many ways that these authors play with the dynamic of these works. Much like a child's perception of time, these novels never have a clear reference for the period.

The orphan-like status of these symbolic children implies a lack of structural support that is akin to a disturbance in a nation. It can seem like a stretch to link neglected children to the people of a nation in turmoil. Still, Ireland has been often enough linked to the figure of a woman or mother in peril that we cannot discount the parallel between the parent and the nation. Both child narrators are shaped by their absent, abusive, or even negligent parents. Francie pines for

his mother after her suicide, and he struggles to make up for the inadequacies of his abusive and drunken father. In contrast, the girl in McBride's work is raised by a distracted and grief-stricken mother without the presence of her father. These characters are perpetually unrestrained children that run wild and act out the frustrations that the rest of their communities try to hide.

The novels also slip conventional form with the nearly punctuation-free narratives. The style of these novels mirrors both the whims of a child and the damaged piecing together of the life of a trauma victim. The form captures how these narrators are trapped between childhood and the trauma of an adulthood shaped by violence and sadness. In McBride's novel, the girl is both an amalgamation of her younger girl self and her struggles as a grown woman. These conflicting personas result in a detached and almost lyrical approach to such a traumatic world. This detachment is clear when she recounts her sexual encounters by saying, "I met a man. I met a man. I let him throw me round the bed, and smoked, me, spliffs and choked my neck until I said I was dead. I met a man who took me for long walks" (McBride 96). The scene in question has an almost nursery-like rhythm in its use of short sentences with full stops, and in this style, we see some of the narrator's pull between the damaged woman inside who seeks abuse from strange men and the performance of the pure and dutiful daughter that she maintains as a façade for her mother.

The child-like distance in the narrative style creates a slippery symbolic space between the words. This space is filled with carnivalesque rebellion in the sense that the girl upsets our expectations for adulthood through a childish recollection of her sexual encounters. She reminds the reader of how her uncle raped her in her youth. Yet the violence of her later sexual encounters also reinforces the idea that, like the carnival, even her rebellion is limited. The dangerous nature of the girl's acting out ensures that this cannot continue forever. The distance

between her child-like performance and the content of the narrative is not the only narrative technique that the authors employ to empower these traumatized child narrators.

In terms of McCabe's novel, the narrative drags the reader along on Francie's traumatized road to adulthood by creating uncertainty about both time and the legitimacy of events. McCabe's fragmented sentences and rambling narrative force the reader to see through Francie's eyes, and from this vantage we see how Francie's world is shaped by the traumas of his life. However, the stylistic presence of trauma does not mean that Francie lacks agency in the very form of the novel. The hazy awareness of time and the lack of punctuation should be read as a social upheaval, as well as the overthrowing of grammatical rules. As Mikhail Bakhtin tells us, "[t]his language cannot be translated in any full or adequate way into a verbal language, and much less into a language of abstract concepts..." (*Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* 122). The language of Carnival is too full of potential to be captured by any one phrase or concept. Likewise, Francie's tale is often chaotic and fantasy-filled, as if there is too much life in him to be contained in one story. His narration is carnivalesque in that he uses a frantic style and limited punctuation to hint at the potential for rebellion against the strains of his life. This style also mirrors a child-like perspective since the lines run wildly and then make sudden stops. Both of these novels combine childhood and violence in a disturbing way that highlights the loss of innocence. The unexpected addition of child-like elements is part of how these narrators fight back against the violence of their lives.

Francie toys with the concept of childhood even while he simultaneously attempts to maintain the façade of innocence. To begin with, his child-like performance is evident in his fascination with playacting and television. This obsession with pop culture allows him to retain essential childlike qualities and transform his tragic world into one of make believe. Francie's

imitates others to express his own desires, and he even filters his understanding of other characters through his childlike obsession with television. He describes Mrs. Nugent by saying, “[s]he was nice looking Mrs Nugent when she was young, with a white rose pinned to her hair and cupid’s bow lips like you’d see on an old time film star” (McCabe 51). Francie’s refusal to give in to seriousness and reality contributes to making him a rebellious and perpetually child-like figure. Francie balances his world by forcing humor into serious situations.

The ambiguity of time in McCabe’s novel is even present in the narrator’s account of the events of the story, and this need to freeze or play with time indicates both a rebellion and a fear of the future. Francie’s warped perception of time is transgressive because it emphasizes the childhood that he cannot have. This character maintains a traumatized notion of time that keeps him from ever moving forward from his childhood pains.<sup>24</sup> Francie’s child-like mentality is echoed in his perception of time. Francie recalls his story by saying, “that was all a long time ago. Twenty or thirty or forty years ago, I don’t know” (McCabe 214). Francie is frozen in the mental state of the child that he was when his life fell apart. This refusal to grow up might also be seen as a fear of acknowledging his bleak future without any form of familial support. If this novel is situated shortly before the outbreak of violence of the period, then this desire to hide in the past might also represent an understanding that life for many families will not improve in the future.

The academic response to both novels is not inconsiderable, but it is one that needs a greater investigation of the symbolic destruction of childhood in these painful experiences.

McCabe’s novel itself is a well-established subject of study for the themes of trauma and

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<sup>24</sup> Critic Clare Wallace describes this focus on the past by saying, “Francie’s stated desire to please his mother, to retain a static childhood friendship...reflects his unstated desire to prevent change, to avoid loss and to arrest time. This desire activates his disengagement with the ‘sane’ adult world and the creation of an alternate reality” (160).

madness.<sup>25</sup> Applying reason to Francie's seemingly mad acts is part of the long critical legacy of the novel.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, this research does not delve deeply into the greater social symbolism that a mad child narrator might have. Contrastingly, McBride's recent novel has gained some substantial critical attention. Yet the critical analysis of this novel does not focus on childhood trauma in the social issues of the novel. My focus is on how the breakdown of the family and the larger social expression of suffering come through in the madness of these novels.

As children, these protagonists lack the agency of most adults, yet Francie and the girl's status as unformed figures gives them the social freedom to express their own traumas. These young characters represent the potential for social speech in seemingly voiceless, and ultimately powerless, lives. Their madness is key to this expression. I refer to these narrators as "mad," but this is a symbolic madness that reflects both their social isolation and their potential for rebellious social voice. The violent actions and tragic lives of the children point to the greater instability of the communities that are meant to protect these innocents. Ultimately, the failure of these communities is represented in the inherent violence and traumatized childhood of each work.

### **Trauma in the Family**

These novels focus on damaged children, but the difficulties and isolation faced by the narrators' families are central to the trauma in these novels. The social isolation of these "troubled" families is part of what makes the transgressive power of the narrators possible.

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<sup>26</sup> The discussion here is in conjunction with critics like Tim Gauthier, who looks at the negotiation of power between the oppressed and the colonizer in his article "Identity, Self-Loathing and the Neocolonial Condition in Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*." My interest here is in the role that the supposedly colonized community has in perpetuating traumatic events.

Children like Francie have a kind of power because they are forced to take on both the stigma of familial issues and the obligation to correct these problems. Francie hints at his understanding of this social judgement when he says, “I knew what [Mrs. Nugent] was saying but I don’t think she knew I knew. She crinkled up her nose and said in a dead whisper: [Francie] *just stands there on the landing and lets the father do what he likes to* [the mother]” (McCabe 11). Francie accepts both the judgement of the neighbors and the domestic violence implied in the statement about his father. This young boy is set apart from a community that clearly sees his family’s suffering. Such isolation perpetuates many of the insidious traumas that Francie experiences. However, this othering also makes Francie the ideal character to point out the flaws in his community. While Francie and his family are outcasts in a social cycle of suffering, this isolation also highlights the issues in a community that represses acknowledgement of abuse rather than dealing with it outright.

These dysfunctional families are socially excluded, but this isolation also enables the narrators to point out the errors and hypocrisies of their communities. This shunning implies that the eventual destruction of these families occurs with the consent of their communities. In McCabe’s novel, Francie comes from a home shaped by taboo subjects like alcoholism and depression. The community separates itself from issues like alcoholism and abuse by ignoring or looking down on the family.

The Brady family is a literary representation of the long-term results of a community that is colored by violence and a lack of empathy. This story revolves around Francie’s descent into madness and murder, but the failure of those around the Brady family is why he is forced to grow up quickly and in such a twisted fashion. Ultimately, killing Mrs. Nugent is a way for the narrator to lash out against the community that has failed him so deeply. Socially, Francie and

his family represent issues like substance abuse and mental disability, but these are not the only reasons why the families in these novels are isolated.

In contrast, the family in McBride's novel is secluded through both the brother's illness and the father's abandonment. While illness seems like a poor reason to mark a family as "other," the brother is an unwanted social reminder of a young life cut tragically short. Furthermore, the narrator has the dubious social distinction of being the child of a single parent. The girl even daydreams of what a father's love should be. She questions, "[w]here's that father? Mine? Who belonged to was part of me? I think of. Where is he? Imagination of fathers sitting by me on the bed. Stroking my hair you're my girl, belong to me pet. I have heard of seen those things somewhere on the telly?" (McBride 29). The father should have formed a cornerstone in this narrator's childhood; instead, she is left to cope with both his absence and the social ramifications of being raised by a single mother. This insidious trauma forces the narrator to face the harsh world at a very early age. Likewise, the fight against the environmental stress of bullying and social violence rob her of her childhood. Troublesome family ties are a common theme in contemporary Irish literature, and this focus on the family sets up who belongs in the clear social boundaries and who is clearly other. The obliteration of these familial boundaries leaves McBride and McCabe's narrators without anyone to stop their madness before it erupts into their socially transgressive acts of murder and suicide, respectively.<sup>27</sup>

McBride's girl, as the healthy counterpart to an ailing brother, functions as a social patch that allows both the family and the community to ignore the pain of reality. A replacement child fills the hole left by a deceased child and enables those around the child to continue as if suffering has not occurred. As one noted trauma theorist explains of this familial role, "[p]arents'

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<sup>27</sup> See Caitriona Ni Laoire's article "Children, Cousins and Clans." In *The "Irish" Family* for a comprehensive discussion of the importance of these familial ties in Irish society.

attempt to replace their dead child with another child, even if only in fantasy, entails a refusal to mourn” (Shwab 124). McBride’s narrator takes on the role of a healthy foil to the sick brother, and, in this health, she reinforces the social silence surrounding traumatic events like his illness and their father’s abandonment. While a typical replacement child comes after a child dies or is in some other way lost, the narrator in this novel is a replacement *during* her brother’s life. Essentially, she is the healthy child that both highlights the brother’s illness and allows the family to briefly forget about it.

Although socially isolated, these broken families still limit the madness of the narrators. The children’s expression of pain only manifest once the ties of family are broken. In *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*, the relationship between the narrator and her brother is a familial bond that defines her from an early age. She recounts her in-utero concern for her brother’s health by saying, “I know. The wrong thing. It’s a. It is called. Nosebleeds, headaches” (McBride 3). The girl is aware of her brother and his illness before she is barely aware of herself. He is the negative other to her robust female self. As the narrator relates of her mother telling her sick son, “For You. You’ll soon. You’ll give her name. In the stitches of her skin she’ll wear your say” (McBride 3). The life and naming of the narrator are a consolation prize for the sick boy, and his sister is bound to him as a kind of promise of a life that he will never get to live. While the narrator mourns her brother’s death, this also the moment when her familial obligations are cut. She is then finally free to express the pain that has built up inside of her. However, this relation between madness and the breakdown of the family structure is not exclusive to McBride’s work.

Francie’s madness also begins after he loses his family and his friendship with the level-headed Joe. A defining moment of the madness-confining nature of the family occurs when Francie returns to his home to burn it and himself down. He recalls, “I put on the record then I

went in and lay down on the kitchen floor I closed my eyes and it was just like ma singing away like she used to” (McCabe 208). This is the last lingering familial confinement of madness in the novel. The memory, or ghost, of Francie’s mother keeps him bound to the home even while it burns. This arson is a socially transgressive moment where Francie’s pain is on display for the community. Yet the memory of his mother still confines this madness to the literal boundaries of the home. Francie is pulled from the burning home before we find out whether he would have stayed until his death. If this suicide attempt is prompted by her memory, then family again limits the expression of Francie’s madness by encouraging him to a permanent solution for his madness. Only when the fire has finished every vestige of the home and family does Francie lash out and murder Mrs. Nugent. Overall, the erosion of the family frees these damaged children to express their mad grief.

The loss of family structure means that the family unit no longer limits the individual and all the traumas created by these transgressive behaviors come out into the open. These literary families, even the dysfunctional ones, limit the mad expression of individual members. Having no parental structure means that Francie also has no one to limit his socially transgressive actions, like persecuting Phillip and killing Mrs. Nugent. It is not generally socially encouraged to express emotions like rage, but Francie is free to do just this when his parents die. Likewise, McBride’s narrator is only careless in her drinking and sexual transgressions *after* her brother’s final relapse. Without family, these disturbed figures can express both their suffering and the underlying social issues behind it.

Both authors use the absence of family to throw the narrators deeper into the external social traumas around them. This is a moment, in both stories, where the true horrific potential of the other characters is clear. As unformed figures, these child narrators are open for re-

inscription by others. In McBride's novel, this inscription of desire is perhaps clearest in the uncle's view of the relationship that develops between the two of them. She relates an encounter with her uncle and recalls him saying, "...my little girl my little come here to me. Kiss me. Sore face. Wipe my nose. There. What the fuck? I can't say no. I can't say no when I'm with you. I feel the penis on my leg" (McBride 144). This scene between the narrator and her uncle is an odd mix of an infantilization and seduction scene. Here, her youth functions as a blank slate for the inscription of the desires of her uncle. The reference to saying no implies that this is a consensual moment, yet she is clearly transformed into a child-character with no power. The girl is a part of an abusive system, represented by the uncle, that takes and then imagines compliance. This representation of institutional manipulation comes up again in the clerical abuse of McCabe's work.

Francie's social voice is taken and then re-interpreted by the pedophile priest Father Sullivan that Francie pejoratively calls "Tiddly." As the boy recalls, "Tiddly's eyes were the size of jampot lids. I swooned. O Father its [sic] lovely! It was a woman's bonnet with a long white ribbon dangling down" (McCabe 90). Here Francie, as a semi-formed and unprotected character, is an ideal canvas on which higher ranking individuals can express their own desires. These early abuses show how these characters are symbolically written on as alternate space for the needs of others. These moments of institutionally enabled abuse mark these narrators as symbolic accusations against a social system that is losing its innocence in the violent struggle to maintain unity. Effectively, these broken families and damaged children are haunting reminders that something larger, and more traumatic, is happening in the community. The gross parody of adulthood that comes from the absence of familial structure highlights both the traumatic lives of the narrators and their own rebellions against these strains.

## **The Ragged Path to “Adulthood”**

The young narrators have little family structure and no community support, and they respond to this void by jumping into a warped vision of adulthood. This failed maturation highlights both the traumas of their lives and the failures of the community of normative adults that the narrators try to emulate. In a sense, these are both twisted bildungsroman narratives that show the reader the true cost of social unrest and violence. This is a mental coming of age for both the narrators and the Irish nation in its post-independence formative years. These damaged narrators haunt the reader with the reminder that there has been a failure in the social system of care.

The symbolic importance of how these child narrators mature also tells us a lot about the needs that are going unfulfilled in their lives and their communities. In the case of McBride’s narrator, the push to mature involves temporarily taking on a maternal role. This is a position that is not fulfilled in the young narrator’s own life. The girl recounts her and her brother making their mother dinner by saying, “[t]omato soup was made. You opened and only tipped a little...I wiped it in the darkness...I carried it although you were bigger. Not to drop it. I was careful and your hand might slip” (McBride 18). In this instance, the narrator takes on the responsibility of carrying the soup, despite her being the younger and smaller of the two. This is a complex relationship with moments of mutual care, yet this simple act of attention and mothering foreshadows how the girl is forced to become a caretaker for her older brother.

The narrator’s role as a mother figure comes up again when her own mother turns to her to remedy the brother’s behavioral problems later in life. The narrator mentally recounts to her brother, “[Mother] wants I’ll riffle through your flesh. So now go. Ask her. Mammy? Say it out

right. Is something wrong while I'm not around?" (McBride 92). The narrator again pushes down her own youth to care for her brother when he begins to act out during the regrowth of his tumor. This narrator takes on the task of caring for her ill brother who is shaped by his sickness and the cruelty of their community. Both novels center on issues that the parents leave for the children to both absorb and remedy. The fact that McBride's characters are all nameless furthers this symbolic interpretation of this particular novel. These children have little say in the violence and tension that their parents have created. Instead, these narrators try to grow into the vacant roles in their lives.

The role of caretaker forces the narrator to push down her own youth and perform responsibilities that are not truly hers. The mother takes care of her son's basic needs throughout his lifetime, but the taxing emotional component is left to a child who is transitioning into a woman. Like so many characters in new Irish literature, the girl is left to navigate the traumas and strains of her world. Although this emotional pull is one of the ways that these displaced children are forced to mature before their time, we also need to consider the physical strain under which these individuals live. The narrator in McBride's novel manages, to some extent, to keep her family whole with her efforts to fulfill a more adult role. In contrast, Francie uses a mimicry of adulthood to much less success.

Francie tries to compensate for losing his parents by taking on both a domestic role and the patriarchal role of bread-winner. He tries, unsuccessfully, to make himself into a socially productive male figure. His slaughterhouse job combines brute strength and a certain level of emotional detachment. These two physical and emotional elements are then often associated with the stoic father figures in many patriarchal structures. Unfortunately, Francie is too outspoken in his madness to pull off this performance of masculine adulthood. The rapid disintegration in both

the content and the prose of the novel following Francie's employment suggests that he is unable to cope with his new and brutal life. He ultimately fails in his simulation of adulthood because he cannot repress his own pain.

Francie rambles on about this suffering when he says,

I just walked I felt like walking that wasn't Joe I said I don't know who that was but it wasn't Joe, Joe is gone they took him away from me and all I could see was a pair of thin lips saying that's right we did and there's nothing you can do...isn't that true Francis Pig you little piggy baby and I says yes Mrs Nugent it is [sic]  
(McCabe 190).

In this moment Francie tries to cope with Joe snubbing him. However, he deals with this rejection by blaming Mrs. Nugent for luring Joe away. The pain of this broken friendship combines with both Mrs. Nugent's social grudge against Francie and his own twisted conflation of himself with the pigs that he slaughters at work. This mess of emotions combine into a rambling and near punctuation free "conversation" with the imaginary Mrs. Nugent. The prose becomes more jumbled and violent the farther Francie moves down his twisted path to adulthood. Like McBride's narrator, Francie's distorted vision of adulthood attempts to fill a void in his life.

Francie tries so hard to fit into the community view of adulthood that he even eagerly takes over his mother's role after her suicide. He exclaims to the ladies of the town that, "...its not too often you see Francie Brady with a shopping basket...I'm going to be a busy man! I don't know where to start with all these jobs Mrs Connolly [sic] I says" (McCabe 120). Francie joins in the neighborhood chatter as if he is one of the local housewives. He is unable to comprehend how the "productive" levels of his society work. In short, he doesn't adhere to the gendered performance that the housewives expect, so he fails from the start. Francie sets himself

further apart by choosing to perform highly gendered labor in the hopes of proving his worth to the same women that judge him.

Francie's failure to raise his social status by imitating the women comes through in the suggested fate of his father. We see in the second half of the novel that Francie's father had in fact died and begun to decompose while his son continued to care for and "mother" his corpse (McCabe 125-137). The reader and Francie's community are both aware that Francie has failed in his effort to care for his father, but the young man remains oblivious to his own failure to successfully mimic a housewife. Ultimately, Francie is never able to successfully leave behind the traumas of his childhood and assume a functioning adult role. Instead, he performs how he thinks adults ought to be, and he fails miserably at remedying the pains of his life.

McCabe's novel perpetuates the idea that an adult maintains a certain level of productivity to keep both the family and the community running. Francie tells us that his father, "...he said [Francie's mother] was mad like all the Magees, lying about the house from the day they married never did a hand's turn why wouldn't he go to the pubs she had never made a dinner for him in his life?" (McCabe 6). Francie's father clearly blames his depressed wife for his own issues by implying that the fault lies entirely in her failure to perform her duties of maintaining both him and the household. These are gendered expectations that set up a standard of good and bad behavior for young Francie. Socially successful adulthood is then the ability to contribute to the appropriate social sphere of productivity. In the case of the mother, this means keeping up with the domestic duties of a housewife. The failure to do this job implies socially perceived madness on her part.

The damaged families here are socially excluded as representatives of all of the pains that the community wants to repress. Mrs. Nugent sums up the community's sentiments of the Brady

family by saying, "... she might have known not to let her son anywhere near the likes of [Francie] what else would you expect from a house where the father's never in, lying about the pubs from morning to night, he's no better than a pig" (McCabe 4). Francie and his family are relegated by their community to an inferior status because they fail to be productive. The young narrator tries to mimic this idealized model for adult behavior. Francie's failure to be an adequate substitute for his parents reminds the reader that something drastic has taken place. However, these communities respond to insidious traumas by repressing any individual responses to pain.

The fictional communities also control the expression of trauma by determining the social acceptability of the individual. In these communities, normative adulthood is determined by whether or not the individual can conceal personal responses to any insidious or overt traumas. What this comes down to is whether the individual can put aside her or his own responses to trauma in order to keep up a unified social front. The community's role in determining social fitness is apparent in how the townswomen in McCabe's novel "oversee" Mrs. Brady's mental disability. He tells us, "I heard Mrs Connelly [sic] at the door with da and some other women she said ma'd been standing for two hours looking in the window of the fishing tackle shop with the bag on the ground and a tin of beans rolling round the footpath" (McCabe 8). The reference to her standing in front of the tackle window implies that she is not keeping up the expected level of domestic productivity. She wastes food that she could be using to care for her family and instead stands idly in front of a shop window. Francie's existence as a neglected, yet content, child is a constant reminder and challenge to the heteronormative family structure of a working father, productive housewife mother, and obedient son. The community's views of Francie and his family are effectively an overt social displacement that push the Brady family to the fringes of their society.

A pervasive part of adulthood here is the conspiracy of silence that arises when the community is faced with any public awareness of the intimate strains and insidious traumas of a family. Acknowledging that a family might be somehow unsound could jeopardize the overall social structure through the weakness of the smaller group. In McBride's novel, her brother's illness and their father's abandonment are something that she learns early on not to discuss. The narrator recalls the "[s]oft boyish bob on your round face...Such pride and joy in him. Those doctors nurses [sic] said it would not. Dead in follicle dead in root. But there it is she says sprigging away" (McBride 7). Here the mother clearly uses the hair as a symbolic stand in for the boy's overall health. The mother's steadfast refusal to believe that surgery and Chemotherapy have killed his hair follicles amounts to a denial of his impending death. His illness is an insidious trauma in the lives of the family, but true adulthood in this social context requires silence concerning personal pain. Discussing the reactions to a traumatic event would be too close to discussing the social inequalities underlying many of these issues. In contrast, Francie is introduced to the need for the repression of pain through both the veiled gossip about his mother's depression and his father's abuse. Both taboo subjects are outside the expectations of the normative family unit, so any open acknowledgement would presumably force these communities to consider what social failures and external violence have led to the breakdown of the family.

The traumatized lives of the narrators are a haunting signifier that something larger is going on to undermine the essential family structure in these communities. The lyrical speech and the deliberate actions of these child narrators suggest that they represent greater social issues like poverty and abuse. The traumatized characters seldom ever explain that their actions are direct responses to the pains of their lives, so we are left to decipher their mad actions.

## **The Rebellions of Youth- Madness and Social Revision**

The twisted lives of the narrators are emphasized by the haunting presence of normative childhood in the novels. McCabe's work suggests the presence of true childhood through normative children like Joe and Philip. These children are constant reminders of what characters like Francie and the unnamed narrator have lost. This haunting vision of childhood is an unstated expression of something akin to Freud's concept of Melancholia. Essentially, "[the patient] knows *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him. This would suggest that melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness..." (Freud 245). The loss of innocence is internalized as an unacknowledged pain for the community. The narrators continue to act like disturbed children, but this is more a signifier of underlying issues than the true actions of children. The juxtaposition of these disturbed performances with the more carefree children highlights the unspoken losses of the community. These people cling to idealized images of childhood, like that of Joe Purcell and Phillip Nugent, and pretend that the innocence of childhood is safe from external traumas like violence and abuse.

The haunting presence of childhood in McBride's novel is in the contrast between the narrator and her brother. This division between the "pure" older brother and the narrator's perception of her supposed taint is a common pattern throughout the novel. Freud's concept of melancholia is applicable here in the sense that the narrator refuses to mourn the ruin of the purity of youth by internalizing her own lack of self-worth. The girl even says to her brother on his death-bed, "I clean the oil from your skin sore red and tired. For what need? You're more perfect than you were before. I'll wash your face of sacrament. Let sin to sinner return. Like me—for I know it very well" (McBride 183). Here the implication is that he has no need for the

cleansing of the last rites, as he is pure from his life-long childlike state. Furthermore, the brother functions as a symbol of something that the narrator does not have. In losing her brother she loses the other half of herself that might be considered “pure.”

The narrators in these works toy with the notion of childhood. Francie keeps up the pretense of childhood, but he does so in a way that is mocking and calls attention to the difficulties that have led him to such a bleak life. He displaces his own traumas through his childlike act of renaming and filtering his world through film and television. Both this fantasy life and Francie’s desire for change are clear when he fanaticizes, “I’ll click my Time Lord fingers and then what. Streams of children running round the place shouting look at me look at me sliding down the bannister and everything!” (McCabe 177). Francie’s desire to be seen mixes with his tendency to filter the world through television. Here, he fixates on the Time Lord from the popular *Doctor Who* television series. Francie empowers himself through this figure of the Time Lord, but both Francie and the girl rebel against their situations in more overt ways.<sup>28</sup>

The narrators repress their pain, but this attempt only escalates the potential violence of these characters. Whether each of these characters is accepted by her or his society ultimately comes down to how much the character chooses to comply with the social constraints around the expression of personal pain. McBride’s narrator attempts to push down both her own pain and the public acknowledgement of her brother’s illness. While this compliance later changes, it is her initial agreement to silence about such private pain that makes this character more of a socially acceptable figure. Unlike the girl, Francie plays openly with both the expectations of his

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<sup>28</sup> As one critic describes this process, “[h]e adopts for himself multiple personae...[t]he effects of real events and emotions are displaced, disarmed and anaesthetized via this process” (Wallace 2). The act of renaming gives Francie power over these horrible people and events that have scarred him.

community and his own grief through his mad ramblings throughout the community. This expression makes Francie such a socially unacceptable character.

Children usually have little in terms of actual power, but this lack of social voice also makes these narrators the representatives of other disempowered individuals. New Irish literature is filled with children who are overlooked or outright abused, and so it is not a stretch to say that they are also often voiceless subaltern characters in their communities.<sup>29</sup> Francie is an ideal subaltern character since his utter poverty and subsequent social isolation mean that he has no relevant way to express himself to his society, and this position is compounded by his unusually obsessive, and non-heteronormative, relationship with Joe. However, the girl in McBride's work is voiceless in the sense that she has been subsumed by her brother's illness and her own abusive relationships. These child narrators are exposed to traumas on a regular basis, but how they handle their pain is where we see the rebellion in these works.

I argue that speech is possible for these subaltern figures, but their communities can only ever receive this effort as madness. The gap in power between the community and the children is so large that the normative society cannot understand these children. For those in power, madness is the only possible interpretation for non-normative acts. However, both speech and rebellion are present in this madness, if we look closely. Francie, to start, transforms himself from the silenced child into the violently empowered monster of the Butcher Boy. This mad figure murders Mrs. Nugent in a very graphic way, but this same action also calls out the social inequalities between these very different families. Murder is a way for Francie to subvert social

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<sup>29</sup> Gayatri Spivak starts to define the subaltern when she describes this complex figure as, "...the margins (one can just as well say the silent, silenced center) of the circuit marked out by this epistemic violence, men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat" (Spivak 25). The subaltern is more than just an oppressed person; this figure is so marginalized that she or he can only be an absence of the social definitions of personhood.

norms and to express his own oppression, but this is also a moment where he negates the powerlessness of his childhood and becomes a symbol of both mad speech and terror.

Francie is transgressive because he actively addresses the ghosts of his past. This rebellious act forces both the reader and the community to consider the traumatic events that have shaped his life. Up until this point we see how Francie is, in a way, haunted by the memory of his mother. This reminder forms Francie's own socially acceptable response to the trauma of her sad life. One example of this haunting is when Francie says of his memory of his mother, “. . . and instead there was a half-ghost sitting there who had only one thing to say: All the beautiful things of this world are lies. They count for nothing in the end” (McCabe 198). The ghostly presence of his mother hints at her own insidious emotional traumas that are never fully revealed in the novel.<sup>30</sup> It is socially acceptable that he expresses his grief through the haunting visions of his mother; however, Francie is not content to continue living with the reminder of her absence.

Francie's active attempts to eradicate the past show his own mad expression of a traumatized life, and in this acknowledgement and simultaneous rejection of the past shows Francie as an actively transgressive character. Francie describes his own attempts to burn his dilapidated home and the memories that it contains. He exclaims, “I was crying because [Ma and I] were together now. Oh ma I said the whole house is burning up on us then a fist of smoke hit me smack in the mouth its over says ma its [sic] all over now” (McCabe 209). This fire is a renewal that destroys the old world to build something new, thus creating a new social order by destroying the home that is symbolic of both Francie's suffering and the old class structures that ultimately contributed to the destruction of his family. Francie refers to his desire to be with his

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<sup>30</sup> As scholar Avery Gordon explains of images of haunting, “[t]o write stories concerning exclusions and inclusions is to write ghost stories...the dialectics of visibility and invisibility involve constant negotiation between what can be seen and what is in the shadows” (Gordon 17).

mother again, and so this is a cleansing moment where he can symbolically return to a vision of life before his world fell apart.

This fire enables Francie to deal with the insidious traumas of his short life; however, this instance of ridding himself of the past transgresses the social push to represses painful memories. Symbolically, the fire destroys the home that represents Francie's poverty and the old class structures. Even though he tries to let go of his troubles, the idea of a massive fire only calls attention to the young man and his loosening grip on sanity. Furthermore, there is a clear element of cleansing in the symbolic use of fire in *The Butcher Boy*. The implication is that this is a cleansing that goes beyond the protagonist and threatens to take the rest of the town along in a flaming acknowledgement of the past. The use of fire here also shows Francie attempting to wipe the slate clean and return to a state of innocence that is parallel to the purity of childhood. In the final actions of both the narrator and Francie we see how the seeming madness of these child-like figures is a way for the society voiceless child characters to rebel against their pasts.

Ultimately, Mrs. Nugent's murder constitutes madness in the most transgressive sense of the term. Francie attempts to voice his suffering and gain some power with these violent actions. Perhaps the clearest image of this shift in social dynamic is when he gloats that, ". . . they took me off to the [asylum] and stuck me in a big chair with this helmet on my head. . . that was the best part of the lot sitting in that chair. And all these starchy bastards of students with clipboards gawking at you *I hope he doesn't leap up out of the chair and chop us up!*" (McCabe 147). This is not the boy who was trodden on by neighbors and abused by figures of authority. His alter ego is a violently active figure who redresses the wrongs of his own life. These mad acts are something that the normative characters can write off as something that they do not *need* to understand since it is madness.

Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of crowning/decrowning in the Carnival is one way to come up with a violent but empowered reading of Francie's actions. He murders Mrs. Nugent with such outlandish abandon that it is difficult to see this action as anything other than a symbolic moment of decrowning. As Bakhtin explains, "from the very beginning, a decrowning glimmers through the crowning. And all carnivalistic symbols are as such a sort: they always include within themselves a perspective of negation (death) or vice versa. Birth is fraught with death, and death with new birth" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 125). If Mrs. Nugent represents social success, then her murder is a way for Francie to decrown the symbolic "king" of his community. This murder sets Francie up as the new, if temporary, standard of social order. Mrs. Nugent dies so that Francie can be reborn as the empowered "Butcher Boy," but the cyclical nature of the concept assures the reader that Francie too will be decrowned. His eventual capture and institutionalization complete this cycle. In this moment Francie loses his position as king-of-the-moment and the dominant society is again crowned in the act of committing, and symbolically castrating, the "Butcher Boy." Francie lashes out against the society that has helped to rob him of his innocence. However, McBride's violent representation of speech is far more internal than the vision in McCabe's work.

McBride's narrator uses her suicide to symbolically return to some semblance of innocence and freedom. She says, "[r]ise up the lake above me. Take me where the waters go. I'll take your hand. You'll show. You'll show me all my lands and evil heart as you know it. Brother me. Clean here. Show me all the places of a soul. Where I will calm" (McBride 203). The way that she drifts to her death as if going out for a swim is both tragic and somewhat childlike. If we equate the weightless purity implied in this scene with the child-like innocence of her brother, then this moment is the narrator's chance to reclaim something that she has never

had. The transgressive act of taking her own life is socially rebellious in that it forces those left behind to question what drove her to such an end. Her lack of innocence is clear when she repeatedly seeks out degrading sexual liaisons, and only in her final choice of death by cleansing water that we see a rebellious attempt to find a purity that life denied her. While we will see that she is in part a transgressive character, the narrator's successful death by purifying water shows how deeply shaped she is by her crushed childhood innocence. Much like Francie's fire, this death by drowning allow her to symbolically wipe her slate clean.

Although the suicide is a moment of expression for the narrator, it is also somewhat of a quiet instance of speech. Her suicide by drowning in an isolated pond is an act that, although it is a social taboo, is relatively quiet in its scope. While her absence would be felt and her body likely discovered, she, in effect, disappears from her community in her choice to die in silence and isolation. The girl's decision to end her life symbolically returns her to both her deceased brother and to the stolen innocence of her youth. In contrast, Francie actively rebels against the silent position of victim that his community imposed on him.

Francie's grisly act of murder shows the transgressive potential of this twisted child figure. Although he clearly longs for the care that Mrs. Nugent represents, Francie's act of dismembering and defiling Mrs. Nugent's body is also essential for his symbolic destruction of the social control that she represents. Francie laments that, "[i]f only the Nugents hadn't come to town, if only they had left us alone, that was all they had to do" (McCabe 167). Murdering Mrs. Nugent enables Francie to voice his pain and anger over everything that has happened to him, for Mrs. Nugent becomes a symbol of these wrongs.

Francie recalls,

Her hand was reaching out trying to touch me when I cocked the captive bolt I lifted her off the floor with one hand and shot the bolt right into her head... Then

she just lay there with her chin sticking up and I opened her then I stuck my hand in her stomach and wrote PIGS all over the walls of the upstairs room  
(McCabe 195).

Here Francie tries to master the woman who has lowered his social status and judged him to be a “pig.” Slaughtering her like a pig makes Francie into the dominant figure in this relationship.

This murder symbolically blends Francie’s warped childhood and the damaged man that he has become. Such a callous butchering seems like the act of a hardened adult than that of the youth that he is. However, the grisly finger painting with blood is, given a different medium, the act of a child. This one of those moments in the text where the traumatized young boy that Francie shoved down inside of himself comes out to “play.” The murder is clearly a terrible act, but it also has a symbolic purpose for the main character. Francie destroys the supposed source of his trauma by killing Mrs. Nugent, but he takes this action a step further by eliminating any trace of the innocence of childhood.

Francie’s rebellion against the innocence of life, and the childhood that he was denied, comes when his perspective employer asks him to slaughter the young piglet. This was a moment for the boss to show Francie that he is incapable of the callousness of the job. However, Francie rejects the innocence of the piglet and coldly kills it with the bolt gun (McCabe 131). Here Francie kills something so innocent that it is difficult not to associate this moment with him killing a symbol of purity and childhood. Killing the piglet does not mean that Francie is rejecting childhood itself; rather, he rejects the idealized notion of youth and family that he can never have.

The way that the narrators express their grief is one that these societies cannot understand, and so it is ultimately read as madness. McBride’s character commits the unpardonable Catholic sin of suicide, and in this sense, she is read as a mad figure by morally

upright figures like her mother and most of her community. In contrast, Francie moves beyond moral transgression and into the near socially-unanimous insanity of murder. The madness of this act is only confirmed in the fact that Francie is confined to an insane asylum for the remainder of his life. The potential rebellion of these acts is presumably reduced to voiceless madness of individuals without substantial social status. The socially presumed madness of these narrators means that they are never fully able to express the traumas that they themselves have experienced in their lives.

Labeling a character mad is also a way of preserving the social order by ensuring that the voices of less empowered individuals are relegated to the world of fantasy and confusion. The communities here reflexively preserve social unity by silencing the outlying members like the outspoken and traumatized child narrators. However, the acts of the narrators are also a part of the cyclical nature of the traumas in these communities. It is the social repression of these new pains that continues the unintentional social process of traumatizing other children who then must displace their childhoods to cope with this stress.

These mad narrators fight against the loss of childhood and the destruction of the family structure. Sadly, these narrators ultimately continue the traumatic social structures that destroy their families. The children themselves are not exempt from the creation of trauma. The murder and suicide in each of these respective novels becomes an instance of repressed trauma for the respective communities. For instance, what about the pain experienced by the remainder of the Nugent family in the wake of the mother's murder? Does the character of Phillip Nugent also need to put off his childhood to cope with the strain of his mother's murder? Although the narrators in these novels are the victims of traumatic events, they are also part of a cycle of trauma wherein an event occurs, is repressed, and then comes out to haunt the community in

seemingly unrelated ways like we have seen in these works. Ironically, the violent actions of these characters are something that each of the communities must repress in order to move forward. Francie is committed to an asylum, and the girl sinks into oblivion; the social order is ultimately restored in both of these works.

Despite the way that these children hauntingly remind us of these social issues, the narrators also represent some hope for change. The madness that these characters display reminds readers of the potential for socially silenced individuals to find some measure of expression in a world that tries to force them into silence about their pain. These damaged child narrators defy the role of the victim by expressing the pain of their own traumatic lives. At every turn in these novels, these children show that the family system here has broken down due to external social issues. They remind us that the destruction of this family structure also results in the further erosion of any true semblance of childhood. Since these characters are interpreted as voiceless children by their communities, their individual expressions of trauma are only ever interpreted as madness by the greater community. In the end, we are left to trace how these childhoods went wrong and to question the external traumas that have led to such a drastic destruction of both the family and of our notion of childhood.

Chapter 4. Lost Homes and Stolen Lives:  
Displaced Trauma and Social Change  
in Tana French's *Broken Harbor* and Louise Phillips' *Last Kiss*

Home, in the most idealized sense, is a place where loving arms await the weary. This vision often centers on the figure of the loving wife or mother. These dated attitudes about women are slowly changing, but a confining femininity still exists in the symbolic depictions of home in modern Irish literature. This one-dimensional image creates a traumatic atmosphere that forces many women to live up to an unrealistic notion of womanhood. The battle between social expectations and the internal lives of women plays out in the violent madness of the novels in this chapter. The central characters are torn between the numbing daily pains of their lives and the need to keep up the image of the idealized wife or mother.

If the home is depicted as a bastion of love and safety, then the violation of this sanctified space creates some of the most chilling tales.<sup>31</sup> The noir fiction coming out of Ireland in the last ten years hasn't shied away from this taboo of undermining the home and family. I contend that this trend demonstrates a shift in how the idealized social roles of the mother and wife are perceived. Both Tana French's novel *Broken Harbor* and Louise Phillips' novel *The Last Kiss* center on two women whose lives are twisted by both social expectations and insidious environmental traumas. Their homes transform into uncanny haunted spaces and their families become the threatening and strange figures roaming the halls. The ghostly presence of external historical moments, like the recent Irish economic recession, reminds us that these women try to balance both the social pressures of a patriarchal society and the traumas of their lives. The haunted households and disturbed homemakers in these novels show us that the home is not

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<sup>31</sup> I rely on Sigmund Freud's concept of the Uncanny to establish this sense of the home that is both familiar and not.

always a space of security. The shocking nature of these works creates room to revise traditional gender roles in new Irish literature.

The central women in these novels kill their loved ones, but this horrific breakdown in family structure forces the reader to reconsider the familial and social pressures behind these tragic murders. These authors take the losses of the recession and use them to symbolically destroy the carefully controlled family structure. However, this study on home and family also creates potential for revision of the strong patriarchal model in Irish culture. These authors depict the individual responses to the daily minor traumas of the post-boom recession in a way that forces the reader to question what it truly means to be a wife and mother in modern day Ireland. Ultimately, these authors take the trope of Ireland as a nurturing mother and turn it into something that is both sinister and representative of a greater potential for the depiction of Irish women.

### **Troubled Land: Contested Spaces and Strange Homes**

The recession was devastating because it came after a tentative period of hope and economic stimulus. This prior boom, called the Celtic Tiger, occurred between the years of 1995 and 2000. Overall, this time created greater opportunities for wealth, personal freedom, and a strong emphasis on personal ownership of goods and property.<sup>32</sup> However, this historical moment predominantly benefitted those in the upper echelons of society. Many middle-class families caught up in the excitement then found themselves living beyond their means to emulate the standard of living (Maher and O'Brien 5). The “bigger and better” mentality of the boom led to even more drastic lows in the recession that followed. The loss of potential colors these texts,

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<sup>32</sup> See Brendan Geary's chapter “Shattered Assumptions: A Tale of Two Traumas” for a detailed discussion of the traumatic repercussions from the Celtic Tiger period.

whether in the security of the home or the chance of a job and a new kind of life. Yet there is clearly a long-rooted suffering in both the recession and a longer-standing cycle of insidious trauma that each of the female characters face. Often, this suffering is based on the expectations and experiences that come with these characters' identities as women.

Both the crushing reality of the recession and the social expectations for women are clear in Tana French's 2012 novel *Broken Harbor*. In the novel, detective Michael Kennedy and his partner Richie investigate an attack that leaves two young children and their father dead, with the mother in intensive care. The family seems to be the picture of the Celtic Tiger-era notion of success. As detective Kennedy remarks, "[t]his family tried to get everything *right*" (French 25). Jenny was a happy homemaker, and her husband Pat a well-employed and loving provider for his wife and children. The family bought the big home that they were supposed to want and they tried to live like a happy middle-class family, but this happiness evaporated when the recession hit and Pat lost his job. The strain of this loss falls to Jenny, and she is broken by the need to keep up the pretense of happy domesticity while her husband's sanity falls apart.

This brutal story looks closely at both the Celtic Tiger's push for ownership of bigger and better possessions and the stresses created by the post-boom recession. The impetus to develop rural areas left defunct housing establishments that linger on the edges of both city boundaries and society's consciousness. This is the type of housing development that French's fictional family bought into before the recession hit. These ghost estates are housing developments of ten or more homes wherein fifty percent of the homes are unoccupied or even incomplete. The homes were built with the hope that the Celtic Tiger boom would increase both emigration to Ireland and housing demands. However, many developers found themselves with homes that they could not complete, let alone sell. Some of the homes in French's novel are occupied, but

these sparse signs of life are chilling reminders of lost communities and dashed dreams. These near-empty neighborhoods and unfinished homes seem straight out of a gothic novel, but they represent actual losses during the recession. The strains of this period also heavily hit the symbolic notion of home and of the identity of women, like Jenny, who build themselves on being perfect mothers and wives.

The ghost estates are an eerie reminder that something is wrong in the lives of these characters, and these images link to some of the greater problems of the nation in this period. First, there is the conflation of the women and their homes in these works. These are not happy homes centered on domestic goddesses; rather, they are frightening spaces that reflect the strains of the women who occupy them. The new Irish representation of the home moves from an image of loving domesticity and into something uncanny and filled with the mad rebellion of overburdened wives and mothers. The conflicting images of succor and betrayal also link back to the losses of the recession. In short, the violent, but loving, women and their haunted homes comprise the literary representation of a national recession coming on the heels of a boom period.

Dilapidated grand homes aren't an uncommon image in modern Irish history, and the historical parallel of the ghost estates reinforces the familial cost of national strains. The big homes, also known as landed estates, were built on land that was gifted by the English crown to either distinguished Anglo-Irish subjects or English transplants. These homes stood for colonial privilege, and many of these grand spaces were destroyed by IRA members in the years leading up to independence. The ruins of these grand estates still exist as a ghostly reminder of both the strains of British colonial rule and the violent struggle for independence. Both the past big homes

and the present Celtic Tiger-estates tell a haunting visual story of how each movement of nation can scar and shape the family unit.

Both families in these novels hide their suffering by making a concerted effort at appearing overly successful and happy, even though the rising middle-class demographic was hit the hardest by the recession. French uses a blend of both opulent surroundings and violence to capture both the Celtic Tiger successes and the insidious traumas of the economic down-turn. She describes the murdered child Emma's room by saying, "[i]t had been done up in flowery pink and cream and gold to look olde-fashioned [sic]. No blood, no signs of struggle, not a speck of dust anywhere. One small hole, where the wall met the ceiling above the bed" (French 26). This carefully arranged room emulates the gilding of lavish homes of past eras, like the big country estates. The gilded façade of childhood innocence nearly obscures little Emma's murder in this room. Still, the grandness of the now desecrated room mimics the lives of many of these boom-era families with an underlying story of ambition, joy, and crushing loss. The single hole above the bed represents the underlying issues that lead to the murder of this family. Such a small detail highlights both the shoddy construction of this seemingly grand house and the violent absence of the family that should occupy it. The depiction of the home and land is colored by the suffering of the family, yet this pain-marked ground is also a part of a longer historical marking of contested space.

I will not go into great detail here, but the loss of property during the recession is one in a long series of Irish conflicts over the land. The haunted space in French's novel reminds the reader that the defamiliarized recession-era homes are a part of a history of contested Irish soil. As a formerly colonized land, Irish soil has long been a disputed subject between British colonizers and the native Irish. The land was often out of Irish hands during colonization, so both

the post-independence reclamation of the land and the boom-era push to buy marked some of the joy of once-denied ownership. I focus on the years after the eviction of the British from the current Republic of Ireland, but this strong tie to the land is still a theme that persists to this day.<sup>33</sup> This emphasis on owning land is a part of what made the lost homes and jobs of the recession-era so poignant.

Such a long history of colonially contested land adds to the haunted depth of the homes in these works. French's novel shows us this history through the uncanniness of a home that, "should have felt welcoming, but damp had buckled the flooring and botched a wall . . . a place where no one could feel comfortable for long" (French 20). The ominous surrounding of the harbor creeps into this house through the damp and buckling walls. Celtic Tiger housing developments were created to be a sign of human triumph over nature, but the shoddy truth of this supposed dream of urbanization turns out to be as weak and uncomfortable as the poorly constructed walls. Furthermore, the idea that no one would want to linger in this home suggests the underlying uncertainty about this push for bigger and better ownership. While the initial notion of a family home suggests comfort, the actual message in these works is that it is possible to lose even this most basic kind of security. Nothing in the world of these mysteries is certain, but this terrifying thought creates the potential space for the revision of our ideas of home and family.

Both French and Phillips' novels use the insidious traumas in the central characters' lives to transform the protective space of the home into something uncertain and dangerous. These homes are never just a series of walls; instead, they are a shelter colored with the reminder of

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<sup>33</sup> As a formerly colonized nation, the ownership of Irish land has long been a point of contention. For a full discussion of the English control of land and the grand houses of the Anglo Irish, see M M. Kelsall's work, *Literary Representations of the Irish Country House: Civilization and Savagery Under the Union*.

insidious traumas like the crushing debt in French's novel or the physical abuse in Phillips' work. Each opulent and disturbed home shows that the past is never far enough away to truly forget. At the same time, the past traumas are never close enough to call out and move beyond. We might then apply Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny to the homes in these novels. He explains, "[i]t may be true that the uncanny is nothing else than a hidden, familiar thing that has undergone repression and then emerged from it . . ." (Freud 15). The uncanny is then something that is known and has undergone a substantial change in the process of repression. We see this repression in both Jenny's mad refusal to acknowledge her new poverty and her husband's mental breakdown. Uncanniness is also present in the way Phillip's character is split between her daily personality, Sandra, and her murderous alter ego, Cassie. The homes in these novels are never just homes; instead, these are uncanny spaces that suggest underlying social issues. Time and pressure eventually transform these hints of something wrong into something much bigger and harder to ignore. The occupants' refusal to acknowledge repressed pain turns these uncanny settings into mad representations of domestic fantasies turned wrong. These women shift from mothers and wives into mad figures who destroy the symbolically nurturing centers of these homes.

While it is not the primary text under consideration here, Louise Phillips' 2014 novel *Last Kiss* is a recession-era work that subtly deals with a female murderer who hides her madness under domestic bliss. This novel does not deal with recession specific traumas, yet it is still a work of the period in that it deals with issues of class and the de-familiarization of the home and family. In this novel, psychologist Kate Pearson and her partner track a woman who is killing morally questionable men and styling them in erotic tableaux. Concurrently, the novel follows the story of Sandra, a housewife plagued by forgetfulness, objects moving around her

home, and the strong sense that her husband is having an affair with a woman who wants her dead.

However, as the story unravels, we find that Sandra has Dissociative Identity Disorder and her alter ego, Cassie, is killing these misogynistic men and plotting Sandra's "demise." The implied reason for this Dissociative Identity Disorder is due to the horrendous abuse that Sandra endured from her grandparents. This is a novel about the defamiliarization of the home and the family. For instance, Pearson does not catch Sandra/Cassie until the madly liberated alter ego has killed the husband. Ultimately, this story is rooted in both insidious trauma and the economic disparity between Sandra's old life and her new, but shaky, world of economic success.

These works toy with the safe notion of the home and family dynamic through the foreboding depiction of the land and the home. We saw some of this strangeness in the description of Emma's bedroom in French's work, and the uncanniness of the recession-era home also echoes in Phillips' work. Cassie says, "last night, I stood on their front lawn looking at the house, my shape caught in shadow...I visualized the troubled look on [Sandra's] face, part of her already knowing of my presence, and I could almost taste her fear" (Phillips 79). Cassie marks the house with her presence in order to intimidate the normative alter-ego Sandra. This marking is an imaginary act for Sandra/Cassie, but it still signifies repressed trauma in the context of the novel. Cassie represents both Sandra's tortured past and her refusal to be a victim again. This painful past is the spirit that marks the seemingly happy home. In new Irish literature as a whole, the land is a space haunted by the repressed awareness of the traumatic events of the past.

The similarities between French's and Phillips' novels are clearest in how even the items in these homes shift around and make for a frightening space of uncertainty. The moving objects

in both stories are attributed to the lingering presence of people that the central women are unable to acknowledge. However, these movements are minor hauntings that remind the reader that something in these homes is wrong. As Fiona tells us of her sister Jenny, “I ask her how she knows . . . finally I get it out of her: the curtains are hooked back all wrong, and she’s missing half a packet of ham . . . she sounds really freaked out” (French 46). Jenny is terrified by domestic changes that would be overlooked by most people. Jenny does not understand that this “haunting” is the quiet presence of her childhood friend Connor. These displaced objects are a sign of the secrets that Jenny is hiding, namely her increasing madness. Her continued repression of these external markers of her internal suffering eventually leads her to murder her family. These early pseudo-hauntings of seemingly benign household objects suggest that something is deeply wrong in the home. However, the deeper meaning behind these moving objects comes up again in Phillip’s novel.

The movement of household objects occurs again in Phillips’s novel, only this time the culprit is the alter ego Cassie. Sandra exclaims that, “my voice had that shrill desperate tone, especially when I mentioned things moving around the house, and . . . that time I thought I saw a woman’s shadow in the garden” (Phillips 92). Here the primary underlying trauma is in Sandra’s unconscious understanding that there is another malevolent part of herself that threatens her idealized domestic life. This internal threat to the safety of the home is a central theme in both works. The moving objects signify the insidious traumas that ultimately tear these families apart. Furthermore, the denial of trauma renders the sacred space of the home as un-safe or un-familiar. The reminders of the traumas of the recession are found in small moments like these moving objects, but a continued repression of these little hauntings leads to the madness in both works.

Both of these novels upset the patriarchal notion of the devoted wife and mother, and this disruption makes these works significant contributions to new Irish literature. This shattered image of femininity goes farther than the two murderous women. In the case of French's Detective Kennedy, his mother commits suicide and tries to take her young daughter Dina along with her into the waters of the harbor. Similarly, the present crime centers on Jenny's murder of her family. Ironically, the detectives initially discounted her as a suspect because she appeared to be an ideal mother. The dream of idealized motherhood and the pain of reality are also a theme in Phillips' novel. Here the character of Cassie daydreams about both her young mother's death in the woods and the abusive life that her abusive grandparents created for her. Her understanding of both her birth mother and her cruel surrogate is rooted in her memories of the forest as the place where these women died. Each of the central female characters initially represent the warm wives and mothers that are so central to a patriarchal notion of home and family.

These authors use the image of the loving mother gone mad to point out the flaws of this one-dimensional assumption of nurturing. In short, these authors show homes and motherly arms that are, so to speak, broken harbors. Unrealistic social expectations are a key part of what eventually breaks these two women. Both women are torn between the need to keep up the image of a successful family and the inner turmoil that they are not supposed to express. If we consider these women as potential representations of a country in crisis, then the need throughout the texts for the women to repress their own traumas can also be read as a fervent hope that, if the country can move beyond suffering, then something might change for the better.

### **Noir and the Insidious Traumas of the Recession**

These works are shaped by the two distinct types of trauma, and an understanding of the differences between the two is key to seeing the social revision in the madness of these novels. In its most overt form, a traumatic event is a violent or distressing moment that is so large or unexpected that it is beyond the capacity of the individual to fully absorb and move beyond it.<sup>34</sup> Murder is too common to be considered a traumatic event, but the graphic infanticide and spousal murder in these works are extreme enough that they may well border on being defined as such. While trauma typically refers to the event itself, the term is often expanded to encompass both the event and the responses to this moment. Theorist Cathy Caruth's describes trauma as an unassimilated experience that returns later to haunt the individual (4). Per Caruth, trauma also applies to the multitude of responses to the actual distressful event and can occur any time after the initial trauma and may last an unspecified period of time. It would be a mistake, though, to think that only overt traumas can create a lasting traumatic impression in the individual psyche.

The second long-term strain we see is what Lorraine Cates calls insidious emotional trauma.<sup>35</sup> This secondary type of trauma amounts to the slow wearing down of the individual psyche through the repeated exposure to strain. If a traumatic event is something that is outside of the normative daily human experience, then insidious emotional trauma refers to the everyday or constant strains that can, in time, have the same physical and mental ramifications as an overt trauma. Cates focuses primarily on the effect of long-term emotional strain on children, but the type of trauma that she discusses is applicable to a much wider degree. The broader definition of this term refers to a trauma so pervasive and subtle that the individual does not know that she or

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<sup>34</sup> The other key term in question here is that of madness, which is not necessarily referring to mental disability, but to actions and thoughts that are outside the normative standards for behavior.

<sup>35</sup> This definition of insidious emotional trauma comes from Lorraine Cates' article "Insidious Emotional Trauma: The Body Remembers ..." However, the definition of insidious trauma that I am using also includes strain produced by physical as well as mental strain.

he is experiencing strain until the symptoms start to arise (Cates 35). Examples of these insidious traumas are common occurrences, like Pat's job loss in French's novel. This loss is a common occurrence, but it becomes something close to trauma when the stress of the job loss sets off a series of physical and emotional strains that endure over a prolonged period. The constant strain on the individual produces a physical effect like that of more overt traumas. Therefore, the long-term effects of prolonged pains like job and home loss can be very like other traumas.

Trauma pervades these works, and the bleak world that these insistent pains create is key to the noir genre in both novels. The gritty and crime filled world of noir detective fiction captures the hopelessness of both the recession and the confining social expectations that so confine the women in these novels.

As one critic explains,

[Celtic noir novels] grapple with all of the issues on the minds of their readers, both during the years of the Celtic Tiger and now . . . a rapid urbanization and its attendant decline, shoddy construction, and half-finished projects; the changing shape of the family . . . to which are about to be added yet more poverty; and, in a more general way, fear, insecurity, threatened masculinity, and the collapsing structure of religion

(Kincaid 133).

The noir genre captures the hopelessness of the period through showing the urban decay in the half-finished homes of ghost estates like that in *Broken Harbor*. This genre takes the Celtic Tiger image of the rich happy family and turns it into something darkly uncanny that hints at the social cost of the recession. The noir genre enables these authors to address the pain of the period through a time-tested formula. In this world, there are no happy families. There *are* loved ones that break under strain and kill all that they hold dear. The only heroes in these works are the damaged detectives who blur the line between villain and savior. The complexities of this genre

capture the crushed hopes of the recession era, yet the noir elements also show the overwhelming desire for a solution to these problems.

The Irish take on noir is somewhat different from earlier detective novels, and this variance echoes many of the issues that came up in the recession. As one critic explains, “[i]n the Irish version of noir, a case is not merely a problem, but an opportunity, albeit ultimately a futile one, to root out evil in the corrupt urban world” (Kincaid 126). This take on noir is rooted in an unsuccessful hope that the detective can find a solution to the troubles of modern life. Irish noir takes urban corruption and adds the haunted landscape of a gothic countryside. This genre is effectively a dark walk through gritty cities and a land shaped by hundreds of years of colonization. Although the hope in these dark worlds is scarce, this search for answers does suggest that something can be done. Noir asks why horrible things happen to such seemingly perfect families, and the only answer is that no image is ever as perfect as it seems. These novels embrace the tension between modernity and more traditional familial relationships. Whether the problem is accelerated urban development or outdated gender roles, the presence of the detective suggests that there is the possibility of change.

Detectives represent the search for answers, but they also force the reader to see the traumas that lead to each of these murders. Ultimately, the detective extends the metaphor of home and reminds the readers that no place is safe if the pains of the past are not acknowledged. The backward-looking role of the detective comes up in French’s novel when Mike tells his partner Richie, “[t]hat’s your generation. Never been broke, never seen this country broke, so you couldn’t imagine it...a lot better than my generation: half of us could be rolling in the stuff and we’d still get paranoid about owning two pairs of shoes...” (French 51). Mike sees both the struggles of his own generation and the newer generation’s perilous mentality. The current

recession echoes past issues, and Mike, as the seasoned detective, shows that these pains are still alive in the present. In a sense, the detective takes an individual's suffering and puts it in a broader context by presenting it to the reader for inspection.

However, the grittiness of the novels comes from the fact that these detectives are after-the-fact investigators. These truth-bringing characters deal with the repercussions of these families concealing so much pain. Detectives make sense of horrific acts, but the reader is left to call out the ghosts in each work. In a sense, the reader discovers the mystery right alongside the police, but the reader is far from passive in this process. This genre forces us as readers to question how we are complicit in the insidious traumas that scar the women in these novels. We must then confront the issues that drive these women mad. This brings me to the secondary theme of haunting and the repression of insidious traumas in these novels. If the noir genre brings out the discontent with urbanization, then the gothic elements represent the repressed pains that keep the push for modernization from truly succeeding.

### **When the Monsters Come Home: Gothic Themes and Repressed Trauma**

As a whole, the noir detective genre highlights the overt traumas caused by the recession, but these novels incorporate gothic elements to show how even small strains can build into something terrifying over time. Our understanding of the gothic genre varies depending on whether we are looking at what came from England or America. Many contemporary gothic tales incorporate a little of each tradition. Since the novels in this chapter are also a part of the detective genre, I will work from a general definition of the gothic genre that combines supernatural elements with deep-seated troubles or longings (MacArthur 58). The idea of Irish gothic novels tends to call to mind classic works like Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Charles

Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*. However, the gothic influences in the novels for this chapter are a subtle way for the authors to address the tensions in these recession-era families. Gothic elements are then representations of traumas that have been repressed and linger on the outsides of consciousness. The murders only occur because these families repress their pain until it comes up again in a monstrous and highly symbolic form.

Unlike more traditional gothic stories, these two novels focus on how the traumas of the past come back to haunt any hope for the future. Both the economic inequalities of the boom period and the losses of the deep recession make this a prime period for the strangeness and fear of the gothic tradition.<sup>36</sup> Some of these elements include spooky homes, haunting images and murderous madness, but this look at modern gothic influences should also be expanded to some of the other general horrific elements that make these works stand out. One of these brutal moments comes up in French's novel when the sister Fiona realizes that her sister's family is dead. "[Her scream] was a short, raw, ripped-open shriek, repeating over and over, so regular it sounded mechanical. It spread out across mud and concrete and bounced off unfinished walls till it could have come from anywhere, or everywhere" (French 14). This animalistic moment of grief echoes earlier gothic elements of despair; however, this scene differs from the wild animal motif in the traditional gothic since it centers on Fiona's humanity. Here she is a suffering creature that shakes the walls of the development with her pain. While these moments of creature-like haunting in the texts are certainly crucial to my discussion, the pervasive presence of gothic-inspired ghosts is a central theme that we have yet to touch on here.

Each of these texts incorporates a haunting that alerts the reader to underlying issues in the lives of the characters. These ghosts represent the pains of the past lingering in the present.

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<sup>36</sup> See Jarlath Killeen's book, *The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction: History, Origins, Theories* for a full discussion of the Irish Gothic transition into the modern era.

My discussion of repressed trauma in this dissertation plays on Avery Gordon's concept of a haunting as a reminder of the unacknowledged past.<sup>37</sup> For instance, the uncanny nature of the homes in these works is a haunting that signifies the insidious traumas, like home and job loss, that occurred during the recession. By extension, the recession-era traumas also call up the more established ghosts that are so central to the social pressures that cause these women to snap. These symbolic specters are present in the texts as passive reminders that something important has occurred.

I contend that the common nature of these hauntings makes this more of a socially acceptable manifestation of trauma. Therefore, haunting for this work relies on the idea that it is more socially acceptable to repress one's individual trauma and have it manifest as a seemingly disassociated haunting. The people in these novels might each agree that the homes were strange even before the murders, but no one questions this uncanniness until much later. Instead, the subtle ghosts in these works mirror the monstrous women who stalk through these homes. The important thing to keep in mind with these ghosts is that they do represent real traumas, and they are only dangerous if they are ignored for too long.

Although these works do not necessarily contain the literal and spiritual hauntings of the early Irish Gothic, there is a definite haunting by the traumas of the past that imparts this Gothic air of fear. This combination of gothic elements and the background of the recession means that the gothic is then a way for the authors to express their own environmental influences through the displaced form of a haunting. The repressed strain manifests as a kind of haunting that draws attention to both the underlying trauma and the use of the gothic genre as a socially acceptable

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<sup>37</sup> This chapter will focus on using Gordon's idea that a haunting signals a past event that has not been fully let go by the experiencer has come to manifest itself in the present in a new form. See Avery Gordon's *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* for a full discussion of haunting.

veil for this pain. One critic explains the feel of the recession period by saying that, “[p]roperty developers, who for a decade had been lauded as engineers of a cosmopolitan future, were revealed as new versions of the Rackrent family. Eerily empty houses, malevolent patriarchs, abused innocents . . . we have re-entered Gothic Ireland...” (Killeen 207). This period shows the trauma of the recession through the skeletal remains of the abandon homes. However, an essential part of these ghosts is that they are not acknowledged by the characters, for their existence is built on the repression of a trauma. This eerie feeling of an unacknowledged pain arises from this repression.

We know that a trauma comprises an event so disturbing that it is unconsciously repressed; however, the personal responses to the traumatic event can be *actively* repressed by both the individual and the community. This repression of a personal response is different from the automatic response to the trauma. My claim is that the individual’s repression of secondary responses to a trauma results in either the displaced manifestation of haunting or madness. The most common reason for repressing personal responses to trauma is to appear normative and without significant psychological scars. The individual’s refusal to acknowledge these responses then creates a haunting otherness about the character. However, this play at normativity is also more socially acceptable, much in the same way that haunting is allowed in these texts. Only when the individual decides to stop repressing the response to trauma is she socially considered to be a mad figure, but this is a discussion for much later in this chapter.

The social need to repress any personal responses to trauma is present in the alter ego of Cassie in *Last Kiss*. The division between the appearance of normalcy and the interior trauma of the character is part of what eventually drives this woman to murder. Cassie says of a local playground, “[she sees] the children as if they are asleep. Their eyes are closed. They might be

dreaming. The sky is turning dark, and I'm in the shadows... When I turn to look at the slides, children's bodies lie in a heap at the bottom..." (Philips 95). The outward appearance is of a person walking through a playground, but the interiority of the character is one of darkness and childhood trauma. Cassie/Sandra continues to walk through the playground as if nothing is wrong, but this is because she represses her response to the manifestation of her childhood traumas. The image of a woman watching children on a playground and envisioning death creates a jarring contrast between domesticity and violence for the reader. One might argue that she is a psychopath and these images of death are in keeping with her murderous mind, but this character also explains that she does not harm women or children. Therefore, we can assume that this is instead a moment of horror that she has borrowed from her own childhood. The key to normativity here is that Cassie does not let on to her gruesome thoughts.

The pressure to repress trauma is so great that these women attempt to hide evidence of the "hauntings" that plague them. These women suffer greatly on the inside and then smile for the world to see. In the case of *Broken Harbor*, Jenny maintains the image of the happy family even beyond the bounds of rationality. This division between performance and reality leads to the destruction of this family. As Jenny says of Pat's erratic behavior, "[o]ur lovely house, that we'd worked like crazy to buy and keep nice, that we used to *love*, and now he was smashing it to pieces. I wanted to cry" (French 398). Pat's madness is a long-standing issue in the story. It is only when he makes this instability publicly visible by destroying the house that Jenny is no longer able to cope. These women hide the strange occurrences in their homes, and these hauntings are a manifestation of everything that they cannot say. The fact that both women go mad suggests that this repression of trauma for the sake of appearances is ultimately the most damaging element in these stories. These characters contain their responses to trauma until the

feelings come up in the far more aggressive form of gothic ghosts, witches, and strange animals. These self-created creatures of repression are ultimately the symbolic tools that destroy these families.

This manifestation of the repressed past comes up significantly in the dark figures and evil witches in *Last Kiss*. Cassie/Sandra tells us of her teenage mother, “[s]he died because of abandonment, and because the woman in the shadows wanted it to be that way. . . I still remember [the witch] laughing in my face, telling me about burning my mother’s body, calling her a whore...” (Phillips 81). Cassie/Sandra is haunted by the memory of her mother. A part of this haunting comes from the fact that her mother’s traumatic sexual history mirrors Sandra’s own experiences. Additionally, the evil female figure represents the grandmother who was complicit in both her daughter’s death and Sandra’s sexual abuse. The malevolent witch and Sandra’s dark alter-ego Cassie come out more in the story as Sandra gets closer to her full break with reality. However, this early recollection shows the evolution of the actual grandmother from a terrible person into a gothic witch. This malevolent figure represents every horrible moment that Sandra pushed back in her pursuit of a better life.

In contrast, French uses a menacing mystery animal to personify Pat and Jenny’s economic and personal strains. Here we have a cat-like creature, in parallel with the image of the Celtic Tiger boom, that has turned into something sinister that is taking over the home. As Pat posts prior to his death, “. . . *last 3 days noticed a real uptick in noise when my wife is cooking, specially meat—thing goes mental...Thing was scrabbling + banging like trying to get through ceiling. Right above my sons [sic] bed...*” (French 208). This seems to be a wild animal that only Pat can consistently hear. First, there is the image of cooking meat in this post. The family is barely able to fill their cupboards in the days leading up to the murders. Much like the mystery

animal, Pat and Jenny scabble for what little they can get to feed their family. Not only is Jenny keenly aware of how limited her resources are, but she is also the one trying to hold the family together while her husband sits idle. Jenny's fear and frustration over caring for her family parallels the animal's frantic clawing for meat. These strange creatures and gothic witches are a part of a long tradition of using the supernatural to terrorize the inhabitants of a home. However, these frightening figures serve more as manifestations of both family and community issues than true spectral forms.

There is a long tradition of female authors using the gothic genre to address social issues.<sup>38</sup> Through these tropes, authors call attention to the life of a women in the home by depicting a young heroine trapped in haunted mansion or a dangerous union. This genre makes the familiar uncanny, and this effective method highlights how the seeming protection of the home can turn and entomb an unsuspecting, or unquestioning, woman. The way that this genre calls out the pains of the home is what makes it key for the revision of the gender roles that I discussed in my first chapter. However, to understand this revision we also need to consider the social constraints that these women experience.

### **Madness and the Loss of Social Control**

This brings me to the second central argument in my dissertation, and this is the idea that the prolonged repression of strain leads, for some individuals, to the socially transgressive expression of madness. Madness, as I use the term, does not refer to any specific mental disability; rather, I focus on symbolic literary madness. In this sense, madness is an act that

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The history of Gothic stories written by women is beyond this work. However, many authors have written extensively on the subversive use of the Gothic genre to empower women. See Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith's compilation, *The Female Gothic*, for a discussion of the subversive role of female Gothic fiction writers.

transgresses social expectations for normative behavior. Literary mad acts, much like hauntings, signify that there is some greater issue that is being repressed. Unlike haunting, madness is a socially transgressive way of expressing personal responses to traumatic events. One of the first hints that madness is a transgressive response to trauma is the fact that mad acts of the women in these novels are either covered over or confined by those around them.

First, the initial madness of these women is bounded by the literal and familial confines of the home. Essentially, this madness occurs primarily in the safety of the home. Any strange acts in public are quickly contained by the more normative family members. An extreme account of this family control comes up in Detective Michael Kennedy's own past. He recounts warning his sister Dina about telling anyone of their mother's mental disability by saying, "...*you shut up, you don't ever talk about Mum outside the house or I'll break your arm...*" (French 403). Here the secrets of the mother are bounded by the secrecy of the family. As the center of the home, the mother and her madness are defended and restricted by this familial space.

There is a far subtler form of family observation when Jenny fails to answer a "chat" call with her sister. This failure oddly triggers Fiona's frantic hour-long drive and her eventual discovery of the murders. Jenny even addresses this need to fake happiness to appease the family "guardians." She says of her daily calls with her sister that, "I used to take notes while we talked...And I had to sound so cheerful all the time, even if Pat was conked out on the sofa he'd been sitting there till five in the morning staring at a hole in the bloody wall" (French 407). The notes highlight Jenny's deteriorating mental state, but she still forces herself to perform her normal duties. Jenny's notes also show the performativity of this call and the implied madness in any failure to give a convincing show of normalcy. There is also the fact that Jenny's teenage neighbor Jared points out that the houses in this sad development all share the same locks and

keys (French 238). This cheap building technique extends to encompass the symbolic idea that the business of every home is the concern of everyone else in the neighborhood.

A social censure of madness also comes up in Phillips' character Sandra. Although the husband and friends are unaware of the existence of Cassie, they control Sandra's perceived depression and mental breakdown amongst themselves by closely monitoring her actions. In short, they act as a surrogate family and try to stop her from any mad or harmful expressions of her past trauma by watching her closely. Like a family, these friends keep Sandra from acting strangely in public; however, the fact that they are not *actually* family means that they also function as agents of social control. These women are then friendly reminders that acceptance in society, and in the friend circle, is contingent on normalcy.

The social control of madness also comes through in the performative nature of the mad female characters. A performance implies that someone is watching, and this social control determines some of the actions of the women. The controlling use of the gaze comes up with the character of Jenny. Jenny had attempted to keep up the appearance of normalcy before the murders occurred. As Fiona explains, "She used to be all cheerful—even when the kids were acting up or whatever, she'd this big fake smile on her" (French 323). The juxtaposition of both Jenny's exaggerated smile and her children's misbehavior suggests her underlying tension. This use of the gaze here also enforces social expectations for women, and any failure in gendered performance is then a kind of madness.

The social control of the gaze is also present in Pat's use of the baby monitors to track the creature in his home. As the narrator reveals, "[t]he camera was stuck to the inside of the cupboard door...The cereal boxes and tins of peas had been pushed to the sides of the shelves. Behind them, someone had bashed a plate-sized hole in the wall" (French 70). Baby monitors are

generally tools for parental surveillance or control of the child. Pat, however, repurposes these monitors to track an unwanted presence. Although Pat's goal is to find the animal, the act of placing the cameras in an area where it had not been heard implies that the function of these monitors is to watch for more than just the unseen creature. If we apply the domesticity of the kitchen area to the mother figure Jenny, then Pat's observation begins to be one of the patriarchal male figure using the power of the gaze on the mother and wife. The placement of this observation equipment is especially interesting since Jenny, not the creature in the attic, is the truly monstrous figure in the house.

The transgressive women in these two works do not automatically murder because their lives take a turn; rather, the passage of time and the internal repression of trauma build and become a magnified act of violence. Ultimately, it is an escalation of events and a repression of the resulting pain that leads to the madness of murder. In terms of Phillips' novel, the alter-ego Cassie begins each of her murders by indoctrinating each of her lovers into what she perceives as the joy of sexualized ritual cutting. This is, to a lesser degree, a way for this damaged character to both exert power over men and to make her own presence as Sandra's alter known. Sandra/Cassie's transition into the full-blown madness of killing her husband is a slower process that first entails a series of murdered lovers.

French's novel takes a far stranger turn when first describing the violent signs of Jenny's suffering. As the character of Pat writes before death in a post about his "animal" problem, "...*in one corner were four animal skeletons...Heads were gone. Maddest thing is they were lined up really neatly...*" (French 275). This is a symbolic moment of violence that parallels the fate of the family. Like the headless bodies, Pat's job loss and subsequent depression leave the family of four without a traditional patriarchal "head." Jenny must fulfill both the domestic role that she

wanted and the remainder of the family's affairs. Ultimately, this obligation to "do everything" drives her mad. This foreshadowing of the murders is also suggested in the vaguely human way that the skeletons were organized. We can also make a connection between Jenny's domestic efforts, the constant tidying of the house, and the intentional arrangement of these bodies.

Although it is never confirmed that the "animal" is Jenny, this example shows how it is far more than a creature that can be trapped with Pat's hunting tools. The women in these works are overburdened and traumatized characters who commit truly horrible acts, but this does not mean that they are contextually vilified. Instead, these authors incorporate elements of noir to show the complexity of the women and their madness.

Both detectives are themselves as complex as the women that they hunt, and this same depth in the roles hints at the authors' seeds of sympathy for the murderers. The initial division between the good detectives and the villainous women seems to back this good and evil dichotomy, but the flaws of these detectives only serve to highlight the problems by looking at the world in the terms of right and wrong. The author's suggestion that the detectives are not wholly virtuous implies a need for the revision of these lines between good and bad. Kennedy and his refusal to have children show how his own issues might in some way traumatize children, or, he could pass on a hereditary mental disability to them. As Kennedy explains, "I don't believe in Murder Ds having kids. They turn you soft: you can't take the heat any more, and you end up making a bollix of the job and probably the kids too'" (French 115). It is this same kind of attitude and dedication to the job that also leads to his divorce. The figure of Dr. Kate Pearson in Phillips' novel is equally imperfect, herself being a divorcée with a combative relationship with her ex. That these detectives are imperfect means that we also must consider the complexities in the counterpart figures of the murders. Even if the actions of these women

are deplorable, the women themselves are portrayed very sympathetically. As a primary focus in the novels, we see their pains and how easy it would be to fall into the same horrible trap.

### **Mad Women and the Revision of Antiquated Social Roles**

The detectives are meant to identify the murderer and contain the madness in a socially acceptable way; however, this containment highlights the suffering that drove these women to their desperate acts. The surface appearance of the murderer and the detective implies a world of good and evil that accounts only for a nuance of character in the flawed detectives. Phillips' character Cassie explains this dichotomy when she says that, "Perhaps you don't believe your life can be preordained from birth, that evils exist, or that people are born with it. I have experienced evil first hand. You learn to sink or swim" (Phillips 24). Cassie is a complex character, but she discusses the existence of evil as if it is a part of a binary world. In Cassie's own terms, she kills men who try to dominate her. Therefore, she uses the evil of murder as a means of responding to other evils that she has experienced, like abuse and rape. Furthermore, the fact that we see how Sandra's own abuse in her childhood by her grandparents shows that her murderous streak is rooted in a trauma from her past. The detective's hunt for the killer gives us entry into the private world of Cassie and her victims. Ultimately, the figure of the detective in these novels is more about highlighting the underlying traumas of these women than truly bringing them to justice.

Each of the murders here has a specific message about the expectations and strains that women in this context experience on a regular basis. The murders in both works are a transgressive way for these women to express their own personal responses to strains that they can only partially comprehend. As Dr. Kate Pearson tells us, "The killer has something to say"

(Phillips 17). Murder is a heinously effective way for these women to express long-repressed pain. The women refuse to suffer simply because that is what is expected of the ideal wife and mother in this context. However, this ultimate message is obscured under layers of social assumptions.

The fact that the murdering women in these works are seemingly devoted wives and mothers creates a jarring contradiction in the community's assumptions of what these women *should* be. In French's novel, Jenny initially goes undiscovered because detective Michael Kennedy stubbornly insists that the murderer had to be their male suspect. This resolve that the murderer must be a man, even as the evidence against Jenny begins to mount, points out Kennedy's blind belief in the inherent goodness of the mother figure. That Jenny is the perpetrator of such a heinous murder shows the full range of potential, both good and bad, of a seemingly one-dimensional character like this middleclass housewife.

These characters are an amalgamation of both the traumas of the recession and the toll of the high social expectations placed on wives and mothers. Both of these authors incorporate the idealized notion of women's roles in Irish society to produce characters that are both a reflection of social trauma and a critique of gender roles. French's work takes the hopelessness and betrayal of the recession and turns it into something that is both maternal and predatory. Jenny recalls her daughter saying, "...*the animal*. Mummy...it's laughing at me with its teeth..." (French 388). The juxtaposition of the little girl's reference to the animal and her call for her mother suggests a close relationship between the beast and the woman. We can then apply this to Jenny's internal struggles and her potential for violence against her family. The conflict between social expectations and external strain comes up again in the fact that she smothers Emma with a cat-shaped pillow. It is difficult not to draw a parallel with the betrayal of the

supposed Celtic Tiger economic boom and this death by lovingly chosen cat decor. Jenny, much like the Irish national economy, has betrayed those closest to her, yet it isn't just the economy that Jenny forces us to question.

French's choice to make Jenny the murder forces us to question any assumptions about the role that Jenny initially seemed to play. The idealized depiction of Jenny in the beginning of the book makes her seem tamed like some domesticated creature. This assumption of docility and compliance is both a burden on the poor stressed woman and a gross misjudgment of her capabilities. This conflict between docility and potential violence comes up again when Kennedy shows Jenny a picture that Emma drew of the creature. He says, "[t]hat doesn't look like a cuddly house pet to me. That looks like a wild animal. Something savage. Not something any little girl would want snuggled up on her bed" (French 389). Here we have the division between the domestic pet and the wild animal of Emma's picture. Since Jenny is the most dangerous figure in the household, we see a clear parallel between her and the animal. Therefore, we can say that the ideal wife and mother fulfills the peaceful and domesticated role, while the wild and transgressive woman is someone that has no place in the home. Mike's assumption that Jenny is an innocent housewife nearly enables her to get away with murder. Although it is a bleak lesson that we can't truly trust anyone, French's troubling of the nurturing mother and wife stereotype does have a larger role in revising some of the heavily patriarchal gender roles that have shaped modern Ireland.

The recession appears in many elements in these novels, but French and Phillips use the uncertainty of the period to continue a dialogue about the same gender roles that the murderous women force us to question. These characters are pushed into madness by the need to hide their personal responses to the traumas in their lives. We can agree that the women are damaged by

their past experiences, but they continue to perform the idealized role of wife or mother. In short, they are divided by their internal suffering and the social expectations that are placed on them. The need to continue this charade is ultimately what breaks these women. However, if the goal of the texts were to encourage this repression, then these women would not have been driven to madness by their inability to speak socially of these traumas. Rather, the author's use of the detective novel genre implores the reader to follow along and seek out the reason behind such heinous crimes.

The women in both novels are housewives who chose domesticity over careers, and this choice isolates them and provides little outside of the domestic world. In Jenny's case, we even see how she is effectively ostracized from her PR job during her pregnancy. As Fiona recounts, "...when Jenny was pregnant [the women at work] were calling her *Titanic* and telling her she should be on a *diet*..." (French 39). Here we can see that the workplace is separated from that of the domestic and maternal. This is one that is focused on appearance, and Jenny's pregnancy appears to be something that the women expect her to be either ashamed of or to hide. Furthermore, Jenny's choice to stop work effectively leaves her isolated in her new country home. In Sandra's case, she retreats into her life as an amateur artist who is sheltered by both her husband and her friends. What this means is that the people around her effectively equate her mental disability with a kind of over-all fragility that requires that she be monitored and, in effect, isolated from anything that disturbs her. Although Sandra's husband and friends "handle" her out of pure love, she still has little independence in her housewife persona. Both Jenny and Sandra become effective prisoners of the homes and people that they love, and this, in part, is what they rebel against. Yet these are not the only normative gender roles in question in these novels.

Although the husbands are clearly flawed, their initial idealized appearance underscores the gender roles that these novels call into question. Granted that there are levels of complexity in the gender performances of every family, the normative standard for recent Irish history favors a strong patriarchal household. However, these two novels invert this ideal by showing men whose strengths are balanced by equal weaknesses. In *Broken Harbor*, Pat appeared to be a devoted husband and father who worked hard to make a grand life for his high school sweetheart and their children. The strain of debt and anxiety twisted Pat into an unstable man who spent his nights hunting for an imaginary animal in the attic and his days ignoring his family and sleeping out on the couch. Pat's obsession makes him into a gross parody of the father and protector that forces the reader to question the same social expectations that led Pat to believe that he had to be the sole support and protection for his family. He writes in a post before his death, "*Her + those kids are everything ive got. If I put down poison then the animal could go off somewhere and die...She'll just think I was crazy + then I got better + she'll [sic] always be watching for the next time I go off the rails*" (French 304). The grammatical errors in the emotional post imply that the madness that Pat fears has already started to eat away at him. Pat, in this instance, is a powerless figure whose sole focus is on proving his own sanity and not on the normative role of a father in this patriarchal structure.

In contrast, the husband in Phillip's novel is feminized through his own eager sexual submission to his wife's alter ego Cassie. Although the means are different in this novel, the power still ends up in the hands of the Sandra's seemingly powerless character. The reversal is clear in the way that Cassie slowly indoctrinates him in sadomasochistic sexual play involving her cutting him with knives. Although he resists this early on, he later tells her, "you know...part of me likes a sense of fear" (Phillips 48). Here we see that he willingly gives up his

power in this context. He gives over much of his own personal power to the dominant version of his wife. His character buys into Cassie's games of sexual punishment and torture, and he begins to enjoy her cutting him. Again, the symbolism of blood here is feminized if we link the idea of sex and blood with the reproductive process. Cassie uses controlled violence in a sexual setting to turn her controlling husband into the submissive figure in the relationship. As the counterparts to these aggressive women, the passive male figures highlight the breakdown of binary gender roles in this recession setting. The early recession was a period where homes were lost and lives were changed, and so new parts needed to be assigned and the normative gender roles of this heavily patriarchal culture needed to be considered. Although the recession forced many families to look closely at normative social roles, the way that the women in these novels break expresses a continuing desire for these social revisions.

However, gender reversals are not enough to force readers to question the role of women in this patriarchal system, so the authors of these two works go a step farther by giving these women a malevolent kind of agency. If Sandra is timid and sheltered, then Cassie is her extroverted and calculating self. Cassie breaks free of the nervous and home-bound Sandra to construct her own "art" through twisted sexual power plays and the morbid creation of the tarot card scenes with her murder victims. This authorial imbue ment of agency comes through in the alter-ego of Cassie. She says, "I have reasons for doing what I do. You may not know them yet, because I haven't told you, but that doesn't mean they don't exist. It's too early for judgement calls, far too early for that" (Phillips 7). She has goals that she will not let anyone interfere with, and although the murders are mad acts, they also signify a major social issue. Cassie viciously takes down "bad" men, so we must consider why her character has so little social power in the face of these male characters. The men signify an unequal power structure that forces so many

women into impossible situations. While it would be easy to say that the murderers in these works face very specific strains that cause them to snap, we cannot ignore the fact that many of the issues that these women rebel against are applicable in a much broader sense.

In the symbolic nature of these murders we truly see the social roles against which these female characters rebel. In Jenny's case, she is driven to murder by both the numbing trauma of losing both her economic security and her own image of the perfect husband and family. She is left with the burden of being a "perfect" mother in an impossible situation. Tragically, Jenny's mad act of murder expresses what she was unable to explain with words. Her anger over Pat's own failure to provide for his family comes through in how she brutally stabs him to death. Additionally, Jenny tries to care for her children and believes that in killing them she is sending them to a better place. The fact that her beloved family is the target of her madness illustrates how external pressures eventually wears her down. Jenny clearly feels the need to keep up an idealized standard of motherhood. Her only option in lieu of this model is to exempt herself and her family from the expectations of this social system. Jenny takes her family, in the ultimate sense, to a place where they are beyond social expectations around the roles that she and her husband play.

The murders in these novels are mad acts that defy any familial or social laws, but these rebellions also represent a mad form of personal expression that shows how little agency these women have in their lives. Although they commit crimes that are almost beyond comprehension, the sheer magnitude of these acts means that we can also read them as a form of extreme speech. Jenny kills her family after the pressures of providing for them with no resources crushes her, but this mad expression takes her beyond the point of any kind of redemption. As Kennedy's partner Richie says of Jenny, "She's already gone, man. Let her go" (French 380). Jenny's economic

and familial problems were repressed by her performance of an idealized motherhood, and so the strain from these underlying issues built until she could no longer ignore her pain. This is the point where Jenny snapped. She suffered under the weight of the Celtic Tiger idealism that said that she needed to be the perfect wife and mother and tend the ideal home, and the pain of trying to keep up this façade was more than she could bear. Outdated social ideals and the strains of the recession created an insidious trauma for Jenny. The murders are then a way for her to express an agony that she cannot articulate in any other way. However, Jenny is not the only character who rebels against the social pressures through mad speech.

If Jenny's madness speaks to the superhuman expectations placed on the woman as mother, then Cassie/Sandra is the epitome of what it means to be in a patriarchal culture that, only recently, began to move away from socially ostracizing sexualized women. Whether the sexualization of the woman was willing or not, the social isolation was often the same. Sandra was sexually abused by her grandfather, and her alter ego Cassie came from her own need to take back her power from men that would try to use and abuse her body. Cassie symbolically fights this abuse by asserting her dominance over her lovers and then killing them in a very controlled fashion. As Cassie says before murdering her lover Michele, "I gave him his last kiss, like my stepfather always wanted" (Phillips 261). In the case of the "stepfather," her actual grandfather, the last kiss was him exerting power over Cassie/Sandra by forcing apparent love and consent after sexually abusing her. Cassie's murderous kiss is a way for her to regain power before ritualistically killing the men.

While Cassie's response to her abuses is extreme, the powerlessness and abuse that her counterpart Sandra experiences are not uncommon for many women. Phillips' novel deals with the presence of the past through the parallel traumas of Sandra/Cassie and the mother that she

never knew. She says, “I grew up in the same house. I felt like an outcast too. Society doesn’t look kindly on the fallen” (Phillips 166). Here Cassie connects with her mother through a shared understanding of both the strain of physical abuse and the social stigma of promiscuity. Even though they were victims of rape, Cassie/Sandra and her mother are both ostracized for their promiscuity. These two women had little social power, and the man who repeatedly raped them continued until Cassie became a socially transgressive and madly avenging woman.

Cassie’s blatant retaliation through murder connects her to numerous women who have been similarly abused, but she is still seen as transgressive since she voices her pain. Like her implied namesake, the Trojan princess Cassandra, Cassie is fated to speak the truth and never be heeded. She challenges men that take advantage of their social power, but her wildly transgressive actions are only ever socially understood as madness. The present in each of these texts echoes the past and establishes a cycle of trauma where the pain of the past is doomed to repeat itself. However, Phillips’ acts of establishing Cassie/Sandra as both an object of sympathy and a victim of trauma implies that perhaps, if we pay attention this time, something can change. Although Cassie embodies the mad expression of a wounded woman trying to tell her story, there is another sexual/power dynamic at play in this novel.

One surprising character vying for control of Cassie/Sandra is her own husband, and this far more idealized control over the female body is the other power-play that the author highlights in this novel. In trying to shield her from herself and putting her up on a pedestal, he effectively objectifies Cassie/Sandra and makes her into something that needs to be cared for and protected. This subtle form of dominance is why she kills her husband. Cassie/Sandra’s lack of control in her marriage, no matter how well intentioned her husband may have been, is still a lack of control. Cassie/Sandra is neither wholly the victim or the villain but something complex and real

in between the two. Ultimately, both French and Phillips use the extreme acts of the murderous women to call the readers' attention to the need for a reevaluation of these normative roles for mothers and wives in this social context. Yet this drastic action is not the only way that the women subvert social expectations.

One of the final ways that these women call attention to the social expectations placed on them is through turning the power of the male centered gaze back around onto the male characters. This role reversal forces the reader to question the social expectations that mark these women as domestic fixtures and not as complex characters. The key women in these works base their lives on social parameters require that they uphold an appearance of domestic bliss. As per Laura Mulvey's discussion of the male gaze, the social expectations hold that these women conform to an external standard of near perfect womanhood that is set by the men around them. This is a highly patriarchal notion of what a woman should be, but the fulfillment of these expectations seems to center mostly on the appearance of feminine perfection.

Yet these murderous women take the appearance of docile domesticity and violently turn it to justify their own ends. Perhaps the clearest reversal of the gaze here is in Cassie's obsession with taking photographs of both herself and the arranged bodies of the men that she murders. She says that, "It is important to get the balance right, the intricate mingles with the plain, the light with the dark" (Phillips 47). Here she manipulates both the bodies and herself with the care of an artist. She controls everything around her, including how she is perceived by the men around her. Cassie portrays herself as a fragile but loving wife at home and a seductive and dangerous lover for the men that she stalks. In short, Cassie/Sandra makes herself into something that the men need or expect, and she controls their gazes by keeping each man from truly seeing her. Yet this

manipulation of the masculine perception is not the only way that Cassie/Sandra subverts the expectations of the men around her.

One thing that sets Cassie apart is how she actively makes the men that she stalks into objects in her game. For instance, Cassie's photography takes the traditional application of the male centered gaze and turns it into a symbol of her own power by objectifying her male victims. However, her end goal in the murders is to create tarot card tableaus with her murder victims, but she does this with an elaborate series of mirrors and reflections that enable her to photograph both the disempowered dead men and her own self. Cassie uses the men to stage her idealized image of a future with her in power over abusive and manipulative men. Cassie captures this objectification when she describes one of her victims in terms of an artistic medium. She says, "He was quite extraordinary in his way, that dangerous mix of fulfilment and disaster, beauty and ugliness... 'You're late, slut,' were his first endearing words..." (Phillips 9). Cassie describes this man in terms of the balance of negative personality traits that she is symbolically eliminating. Furthermore, her power comes out in how she mocks his intended insult. Her sense of control here is clear. As Cassie later says of the same man, "I encouraged him, manipulating, teasing, relishing. He lapped it up like a sex-starved dog. The control game is beginning, and he thinks he might be in charge" (Phillips 24). She manipulates these men into desiring her control and the sadistic pain that she provides. Although her motives are different, Jenny also uses an appearance of weakness to subvert the normative role of wife and mother.

Similarly, Jenny plays with appearances by pretending to be a victim for the inspectors. Her manipulation forces the reader to question the one-dimensional image that she disrupts. Perhaps the most disturbing thing about the image on which Jenny capitalizes is that it is blindly accepted by most of the characters in the novel. There is a definite sense that something is off

with this character, but she still manages to keep up an appearance of innocence for much of the novel. Detective Kennedy describes his unease around Jenny when he says, “[i]t’s a strange sensation, being played by the victim” (French 309). The idea that Kennedy still sees her as a victim even as she lies to him suggests the powerful nature of the innocent mother figure. Although her motive is likely to escape observation long enough for suicide, she still uses the power of appearance to manipulate those around her.

The characters in these novels all make assumptions about the capabilities of the two central women. The reader initially sees them through this social lens of domestic innocence and fragility, and this veneer of virtuous woman-hood only changes with the irrefutable proof that the two women are murderers. These women adopt an image that enables them to act out their inner desires. This subtle use of non-traditional power contributes to how the women shake up the normative gender expectations of this heavily patriarchal system. The murderous women force us to question why we believe the model of the devoted wife and mother in the first place.

Ultimately, we need to consider how these novels juxtapose the image of the loving domestic mother and wife with the predatory woman. The mix of these seemingly incompatible depictions highlights the flaws in many of the one-dimensional social roles for women. The authorial act of troubling simplistic female archetypes then forces the reader to also question how, and why, these models are so often applied to women. However, this revision was possible because the uncertainty of the recession created a moment where the traditional models of family no longer seemed viable. This is the space that these characters use to take a stand against the insidious traumas of their lives. Phillips’ character of Cassie/Sandra turns the trope of the meek wife and the philandering husband on its head by making the woman of the house both the victim and the vengeful seductress. In contrast, Jenny rebels against a life of domestic strain and

impossible standards. Jenny and Cassie/Sandra actively rebel against the insidious traumas of their lives, and this refusal to keep smiling makes them compelling characters.

These murderous women show that it is not a woman's place to suffer in silence; instead, they scream with a rage that is both mad and cleansing in the bleakest possible way. This transgressive expression makes these women dramatic figures for the revision of such strict gender roles in the uncertain period following the recession. The murders are horrific, but the magnitude of these events is in correlation with the ingrained nature of the roles that the women challenge. The characters throughout these works default to the assumption that the fragile women could not have been the murders. This social belief in the virtue of the women is part of the assumption of domesticity that is deeply ingrained in many cultures. The implication in these murders is that any change in these ideals would require a drastic reassessment of what family now means.

These women go against the tropes of womanhood that many heavily patriarchal cultures hold dear; they take life instead of giving it, and this shift in the maternal paradigm forces us to consider the motives behind the murder. The women transgress the sanctity of the home, but these are acts of desperation by women that have no other means of expressing themselves. Ultimately, these women are weighed down by both the social expectations placed on them as wives and mothers and the external traumas, like the recession, that make an already difficult job even harder. The homes that these women live in were haunted long before the murders occurred. However, the ghosts that trouble these stories are those of unrealistic expectations and rigid social roles.

The disruptive violence of the murders forces us to reconsider the gender roles that these women are lashing out against. Additionally, the flawed detectives force us to confront the many

issues with a social system that advocates silence about trauma and ignores the influence that this pain has on the individuals who commit such heinous crimes. None of these characters are truly perfect or truly evil, and this humanity forces us to move beyond stereotyped gender roles like the “good” and “bad” woman. If we cannot reduce these women to being only criminals, then we are forced to look at why they act the way that they do. This same introspection forces us to consider the social pressures and assumptions that force these women to feign happiness until they can’t take the lie anymore. Their mad acts bring up the past and shape the future into something that is nearly unrecognizable.

Both novels focus on breaking down the image of the mother and the wife. By challenging the cultural assumptions of what it means to be a woman in this patriarchal context, these authors also make space for the creation of something more nuanced and realistic. The women that emerge from the haunted homes here are both more and less than the idealized images that they have destroyed. Whether the root strain in their lives comes from an event like a recession or something more personal like abuse, these women show that not every seemingly perfect face is nearly as placid underneath. These damaged characters show us that the one-dimensional image of womanhood carried to the extreme is ultimately more detrimental than any one action. Ultimately, the role of women in Irish society and literature is a complex one that deals with both issues of patriarchal social structure and the greater emergence of personal agency.

## Conclusion

The way that contemporary Irish authors deal with the pains of post-colonial nationhood shows both the resilience of this nation's people and how they have changed in the years since British colonial rule ended. Irish literature has changed rapidly since the start of independence, but the years of social change have left their mark in the gothic themes of new works. My intent is to show how the strains of the decades after Ireland's struggle for independence have inspired many of the terrifying images that are prevalent throughout this modern literature. Ultimately, the struggles of nationhood are present in the haunted homes and mad rebellions of each work that I discuss here.

This is a nation re-defining itself, and this process is full of both the inequalities of the old power structure and the insidious traumas that come with trying to dismantle this previous system and establish something new. The traumas of post-colonial nationhood are present in how the literature of the period constantly looks back at the pains of the past. These are each works of memory that, although written often decades after independence, struggle with the issues of nationhood, community, and identity. However, I go beyond just looking at the manifestation of the strains of nation in the literary works of the period. My objective here is to see how these movements of nation can twist and shape both families and individuals. I focus on seemingly small-scale domestic moments that both represent and repeat these national traumas. Each pain shapes the communities and families in these works. The way that individuals respond to each insidious or overt trauma shows both the scope of these historical traumas and the ways that this nation is beginning to change and break free from its colonial past.

As for the terms in this dissertation, I think that it is important to reaffirm a few of the key differences in the way that I am looking at trauma in contemporary Irish literature. First, the key difference in my treatment of trauma is that I am looking predominantly at what Lorraine Cates calls insidious emotional trauma. The standard definition of a trauma refers to a large-scale event that is outside of normative scope of human experience. Therefore, many instances of what we would commonly call trauma are not actually defined as such. However, I focus on Cates's discussion of the long-term effects of common violence or emotional strains. Such strains can accumulate in the psyche until they manifest in physical and mental symptoms that are very similar to a traumatic event. Both overt and insidious traumas can then be absorbed into the culture and reenacted through generations in what is known as a historical trauma. My primary focus is on how insidious traumas and how they become part of the Irish experience of the historical traumas of British colonialism.

I reference repressed and displaced traumas throughout this work, but I am not referring to the traumatic event itself. As per trauma theorists like Cathy Caruth, the traumatic event cannot be actively repressed because it can never be seen consciously enough to be repressed. However, there are many displaced responses to traumatic events, and these symptoms often fall under the scope of trauma as well. Although a traumatic event can never be seen well enough by the individual to be repressed, the physical and mental responses to these events can be actively repressed by both the society and the individual. These responses run the gambit from physical tics to complete mental breakdowns. While these symptoms are related to traumatic events, they are clear moments that transgress the normative behaviors of the non-traumatized members of a given community. Therefore, when I talk about repressing pain, I am predominantly referring to the repression of the personal responses to traumatic events. The response to each moment of

trauma changes based on the event and the individual that experiences it; however, the idea that publicly expressing these moments of pain is socially frowned on comes through readily in each of the texts. The works each center on either a key moment of suffering or a structural component that enables later large-scale traumas to occur.

In this dissertation, I have focused on some of the key moments of insidious or overt traumas in new Irish literature. I begin with the Catholic Church in continuing the oppressive atmosphere established by the British. From this context of independence and trauma I move to looking at the poverty and difficulties that forced so many Irish to emigrate to America in the early 20th century. While Irish emigration was once a constant occurrence, I am interested in the reasons behind *why* so many people left and what kind of conditions they met after emigrating. I focus on this desire to leave a nation that is newly reborn yet does not truly change the situations of so many Irish, except to make it worse in many cases. I look at the difficulties of life in America for these individuals, and I focus on how the common coping method of alcohol can also be a tool for expressing trauma. I then move on to my discussion of how extreme traumatic periods, like the Troubles, shaped the childhoods of many individuals. The “children” in these works are each representations of the long-term repercussions of violence and social strain.

Finally, I look at the recent recession in Ireland as a traumatic moment where the old social confines of institutions like the Church are brutally ripped apart by the symbolic destruction of both the image of the mother and the sanctity of the family. Each of these traumatic moments in modern Irish history is tied to the difficulties of both coping with a colonial past and developing a national identity in the absence of this controlling, and long-present, social system. These are the traumas of establishing a new national identity, and this results in many trauma-related manifestations for the individual. The communities in these works

often try to ignore, or gloss over, the personal reactions to these moments of historical trauma, but this is ultimately ineffective. Whether it is haunting or madness, the personal responses to trauma are never repressed for long.

A part of the fascinating manifestation of trauma in these post-independence works is the social atmosphere that encourages the repression of both morally transgressive behavior and the personal responses to traumatic events. These repressive tendencies come, in some degree, from the influential legacy of the Catholic Church and the role of the clergy in many Irish homes. This tendency towards repression ensures that few people speak of the lingering strains from a traumatic event, thus the displaced manifestation of haunting becomes essential to seeing trauma in these texts. As I discuss in my first chapter, “A Mad Silence: Trauma and Alternative Voice in Peter Mullan’s Film *The Magdalene Sisters* and John McGahern’s Novel *Amongst Women*,” this repressive environment is related to the rigid patriarchal influence of the Church. Behaviors that go against this moral code are discouraged by the society. This repression breeds a kind of antagonism towards non-conforming individuals, much like the sexually active women that I discuss in the chapter, and this hostility perpetuates new insidious traumas. While the cultural strains are not limited to the clergy, this social institution plays a large part in discouraging the expression of transgressive behavior. Another of the repressed behaviors that I discuss are the personal responses to trauma that color the communities in each of these works.

While a traumatic event cannot, by its nature, be absorbed by the individual, the ways that a person unconsciously manifests her or his reactions to a traumatic event are often tangible moments like mad outbursts and nervous tics. These manifestations of trauma are frequently socially transgressive in their visibility. As overt expressions of an underlying trauma, these are moments that are viable for the same kind of repression as moral transgressions. Individuals in

this context are socially discouraged from voicing the strain that they experience. These expressions of pain are then socially repressed and create their own traumas again. However, this does not mean that the traumatic responses every truly go away. Instead, these moments are displaced by both the society and the individuals until the responses to trauma come up again in what is often a more malevolent form.

This concept of displacement can be a difficult one, but it is central to the alternate forms of traumatic expression in new Irish literature. To sum up, displacement, in its base form, is to signify the movement of power from one area to another. This power ranges from how the Church redirects the traditional social powers of women to the social inequalities that force many individuals and families to literally displace themselves through emigration. The movement of bodies and power then triggers more traumatic events. Therefore, displacement is a kind of catalyst for traumatic events and a means of dealing with the personal responses to these same events. The social inequalities that I discuss in this dissertation are primarily caused by the displacement of some form of power, and the resulting traumas that come from this imbalanced system are then further displaced through the act of repression.

A central assumption that I make in this dissertation is the idea that a strain or personal response to a traumatic event can only be repressed for so long before it is displaced into another form that enables some form of expression. However, the way that these repressed moments are first displaced and then reappear as a haunting reminder on the edges of the text. These “ghosts” are not always literal hauntings in the texts; rather, these are subtle hints in the texts that there are unspoken traumatic moments that influence a given text. My use of haunting relies on Avery Gordon’s discussion of haunting as the presence of the unacknowledged other. To be haunted in these modern Irish works is to be reminded that something lurks under the surface. You can

never truly understand who you are without calling out these ghosts first. However, I look at Gordon's concept of haunting in the larger social context of what is and is not a socially acceptable expression of the personal, or even communal, responses to a traumatic event.

Haunting is a constant theme in most of these texts, but this is also a more socially acceptable reminder of the unacknowledged past or the personal responses to these moments. A haunting represents a traumatic event that lingers on the edges of a text. Thus, I treat haunting as a tolerated expression of repressed trauma. Haunting ranges from a ghost figure to the way that a community avoids talking about a shameful or distressing event, these moments exist around the edges of the communities and the stories in each work. Although the event is not embraced, *per se*, it does mean that these hauntings exist in conjunction with the traumatized communities. These literary specters are accepted social presences because they are never fully rejected by the society.

Therefore, I assert that a haunting is socially acceptable way for a community or an individual to express an underlying trauma. Ghosts linger on the edges of these texts with a tolerance that suggests the community's begrudging acceptance of the phantoms and the half-spoken traumas that they represent. The hauntings are often subtle moments that only hint at the traumas that come with developing a new national identity. The individuals that comply with the social injunction for repression frequently, and unknowingly, displace their traumas into the form of a haunting. However, this begrudging acceptance of haunting also implies that there is another socially transgressive way that an individual might try to express the personal response to traumatic events. While authors like Avery Gordon have established haunting as a clear representation of trauma, I feel that madness has been under-looked as the counterpart to this gothic manifestation of trauma.

The alternative to the traumatic presence of haunting is the socially transgressive presence of symbolic madness in the texts, and this form of traumatic expression is where we see the outlying individuals that highlight the social inequalities that still linger in this society. To summarize, the madness that I have discussed here is symbolic and intended more to signify an issue in the text than to represent any actual mental disability. I argue in this dissertation that these depictions of madness are the transgressive personal expression of both traumatic events and the personal responses to these events. Unlike a haunting, these mad acts go against the culture of repression that social institutions like the Church have established in Irish culture. The mad characters in these works rage and shout about their pains, and this expression of personal responses to traumatic events is what ultimately labels these characters as socially mad. These mad figures refuse to repress their pains, so they are not haunted in the sense that many of the other normative characters are. Instead, they actively live out their pain on a daily basis. However, this madness is also a part of the Irish modernist tradition that also comes through in each of the works in this dissertation.

While I have made some effort to connect the works in this dissertation to the modernist traditions, I do not believe that this view of the literature wholly encompasses everything that I am trying to do with the post-independence and modernist inspired literature that I focus on here. British and American modernism shares some general traits, yet the discussion about modernism doesn't take the post-colonial position of Irish modernism into account. This movement's attempt to break with the old traditions is in-keeping with the Irish break from British colonial rule and the attempt to make sense of the nation in the wake of this brutal transition. Therefore, although I discuss some modernist tendencies in these works, my primary concern is how these literary elements, like fragmented narratives, loss, and social ills are adapted to mimic the

struggle for independence. I look at elements of trauma theory, modernism, and literary madness and haunting as a way for these postcolonial authors to negotiate agency in a nation that was still trying to find itself. This is the madness of a people who are trying to find themselves in a rapidly changing world that is colored by the struggles of nationhood.

My intent in this dissertation is not to make an intervention in disability or for those that live with traumatic experiences; rather, I am making a literary intervention centered on how the trauma of establishing post-colonial nationhood comes through in seemingly unrelated elements in the texts. If we understand how real-life historical traumas can creep into a period or a nation's literature, then we begin to see some of the ways that literature can help individuals to cope with these nearly unnamable experiences. In understanding both what is and is not a socially acceptable means of expressing the individual's response to trauma, we are better able to understand the social tools that are in place for expressing both personal and communal suffering. Through understanding the manifestations of trauma in contemporary Irish literature, we can see how such a large-scale experience like independence is indelibly imprinted on the literature of the period.

I have focused this dissertation on gothic hauntings that range from literal manifestations of ghosts to the subtler haunting of historic traumas that these communities are fully unable to let go. Haunting is a shared social experience that calls attention, whether deliberate or not, to the historical tensions of modern Irish history. The repressed personal response to trauma manifests in these texts as hauntings. Whether these hauntings manifest as an actual ghost or a constant haunting reminder in the text, the point is that these moments come up without the conscious consent of the individual or community that produce them. In contrast, symbolic depictions of madness are often a character's displaced, and very personal, response to trauma that the author

coopts as signifier of rebellion against an unequal social system. The mad individuals in these works are frequently the only ones who can fully speak out against the oppression of these distressing historical moment. However, both madness and haunting are ultimately necessary components in understanding the cultural expression of trauma in contemporary Irish literature.

In the end, the gothic-inspired works in this dissertation represent the national traumas and strains that have shaped both Irish families and communities in the decades since independence. These works come from a cultural history of both colonial and Church sanctioned repression of personal responses to traumatic events. The long-dominating powers of social organization created a cultural tendency to repress personal strains. This refusal, or inability, to discuss the pains of the past results in the displaced responses to trauma that I focus on here. The mad and haunted families in each work highlight the personal cost of the traumas of post-colonial nationhood. These insidious national strains affect every element of Irish society, from the community, to the family and every individual in-between.

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